A NEW APPROACH TO
JOURNALISM

Alexandra Kitty

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To the Truth

The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is.
—Winston Churchill

An investigator needs facts and not legends or rumors.
—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, from the *Hound of the Baskervilles*

However much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing.
—George Orwell

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PREFACE

The book you are about to read took thirty years to create. I became a journalist to study journalism: to see its flaws and to see what needed to be done to resurrect a profession that once thrived in authority, but then collapsed in the anarchy of social media. As I was writing stories as a traditional journalist, I was also collecting information about the profession by conducting quiet studies and I dubbed what I did "method research." I used empirical methods and experiments to see what worked in journalism, what didn't and what could work, but wasn't being tried.

The results of my foray became fodder for my numerous books, including a 2005 consumer manual for spotting hoaxes and propaganda, a post-mortem of journalism's collapse in 2018, a book on how to spot war propaganda in 2020 and now the actual alternative to journalism is the book you are reading now.

The scenarios that I discuss in this book are not hypothetical fictions: these are the hidden factors that I found while working as a journalist over the years. My novel methods helped me uncover information before a problem exploded out of control, but often, the pitches were rejected as traditional journalism did not train news producers to develop a proactive eye for trouble.

When I was a university student, I would quote something from a news report, but then the professor or marker would chastise me for using such an unreliable source, even if I was using it to show its deficiencies. The alternative to journalism must be such that anyone—from an average citizen to a professor—can and should be able to use it without reservation. The journalist's word must be a bond; otherwise, the journalist has nothing.

There are many exercises for you to try to reorient your perceptions for your chosen career: and rest assured, I was my own test subject in every single one. As a psychology student, I would try out the various experiments I studied in the real world: I am happy to report that most of them worked just as well in the real world as they did in a laboratory, with some minor modifications. When I decided to go into journalism to study it, I had been

inspired by my own hobby of verifying information I learned in my psychology classes.

I also encourage you to do the same with this book, as well as all your other classes. You will learn about the real world when you actively experiment in it. When you see the world as a stage, laboratory and classroom woven in together as one, it will also become your playground. That is the way to connect to this world to embrace it, care for it, understand it, love it and many times, even *forgive* it to leave it in a better condition when you pass than it was when you arrived. Good luck.

SECTION ONE:

WHY TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM FAILED

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAILURE OF TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM

Journalism was an industry that was a staple of democracies for decades. It was in existence in various forms for centuries and with the advent of the printing press in the 1600s in Europe, it started without the benefit of academic study, empiricism, or basic protocols. It was amateur in its beginnings, but as time went on, it became more than just a staple of democracy; it became a profitable industry with financial, political and social clout. It could be a king-maker or deal-breaker: it could show where scandals were slumbering, as it could turn average citizens into heroes, villains or victims in the eyes of the world. It could show trends, fads, celebrity and give fame and fortune to those who sought it and infamy to those who didn't. Its support and activism could determine which candidates would be elected to the highest offices in the world, which were to be ridiculed and which were to be shamed away.

Its power was wide and vast: it determined what issues were debated in the public and which transgressions they would respond to were greatly influenced by the gate-keepers in the press. How events and people were interpreted was also largely influenced by the news media's reportage. They were seen as a window to the world and for decades, what they decided was newsworthy (called a "newspeg" in its jargon) was taken for granted by the public.

If an issue, event or person did not get coverage, the slight meant that the entity was not seen as being newsworthy, as it did not meet the "standard" set by the profession, whether it was hard news or soft news. The press gave the world access to snippets, with explanations of who were the heroes, winners, victims, oddballs and villains. Watergate took down an American president. CNN's The Boys of Baghdad relayed the start of the Gulf War as it happened. The public had been dependent on the press for important information and much had been taken for granted.

The discipline thrived in print, radio and television, with the peculiar rig of being a *one-way* form of communications where an audience did not have

the same access to the medium as those who owned it or worked for those who did. Journalism did not evolve as a profession because there was no need to alter the methods and models that seemed to work. However, with the beginnings of the mainstream use of the Internet and with the rise of social media, the press found itself in a freefall. No longer did their methods work as audience erosion increased rapidly in the short span of twenty years.

So how and why did traditional journalism fail?

In an Internet Age, the old rigs and rules that allowed the profession to originally prosper were no longer there. Punditry and opinions became devalued as anyone, regardless of knowledge, experience, morals, comprehension, or background could proffer their untested beliefs to billions. Advertisers and public relations were no longer dependent on media to disseminate messages and could go directly to audiences, as social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook could replace classified and traditional advertising with customized audiences. Traditionally ignored demographics could be emboldened to challenge journalistic narratives and the public could blog, vlog, podcast and stream, finding their own audiences as they bypassed the traditional press completely. Audiences fragmented into micro-clusters and the old business models could not account for the change in psychographical shifts that came when people had the means of posting their own information and opinions in a public platform.

The public's new habit opened up what was seen by the world: more kinds of people, places, events, issues and opinions than what were once presented before. The public saw diversity as it had never been able to do so in the history of humanity and the press began to pale in the comparison as it fell behind. No longer did they have exclusive interviews as newsmakers could use social media to give their accounts without an interviewer's hostility or editor's censoring. Scoops were no longer the news media's domain as smartphones allowed people to send pictures and videos of news events, from natural disasters to the execution of world leaders.

But the redundancy did not end there. Its traditional narrative, patriarchal structures and lack of empirical methods contributed to its collapse as those people and groups who were once labeled victims or villains could use social media to counter the narrative and show their side to the world. Political divides made the public distrustful of the press and its narratives often proved to be partisan and ideologically-based, rather than objective or

factual in nature. Worse, journalistic objectivity had never been defined or empirically tested, refined, or even operationalized, meaning the concept never had universal application, making the methods of the concept vulnerable to criticism. It would be a devastating blow to a profession whose very mandate is to present the landscape of reality to a general, mass audience.

Traditional journalism has collapsed with outlet closures to massive job losses. McClatchy newspapers, for instance, the second largest newspaper chain in the US, filed for bankruptcy in 2020, while in January 2019, over one thousand journalists in the US lost their jobs in a single day alone. Outlets closed as others in the US, UK, Australia and Canada saw the loss of thousands of positions in the profession. Online outlets fared no better, with many ceasing operations when they could not sustain their models through advertising or even through donations or public funding.

Yet why did the profession fail to see their own troubles and take proactive steps to stop the collapse?

The old methods had been accepted as truisms, without considering the changing landscape and the evolution of a medium that was significantly different than the previous three, all that were not interactive by design. When much of journalism became redundant and outsourced to the general public via social media and its scaffolding became antiquated and the public began to look elsewhere for information as they also began to put out their own information on their own.

Yet without relevant, reliable, valid and useful current information, a public remains uninformed, as they base decisions on flawed theories and sophistry at the best of times, lies, opinion and outright propaganda at the worst. However, the way information is gathered, vetted, analyzed, tested and disseminated must not be the same way it has been done in the past when most citizens had no tools to communicate with the world and to do so without filters, gate-keepers, or authorities. People do not need to be told how to think or to feel: free will and freedom of thought is essential to finding facts and solutions. Ideological diversity needs to be respected as we inform those who do not think the way we do, but how does a news producer do so in an age where anyone can broadcast to the world?

The answer is to provide empirical and narrative-free information that is free of political or ideological bias or unrealistic narrative that deifies

supporters, but villainizes detractors. Propaganda and fear-mongering are tools for manipulators who cause damage to societies. Information that a general public requires to make informed decisions is essential for survival, yet we require a different way of seeing the profession of information dissemination, one that informs with facts that have been vetted and gathered empirically and presented without a contrived narrative. When information is presented in a more precise way, then it is reliable, valid, useful and most importantly *trusted.* When there is respect for audiences as well as an understanding that different people will use the same information differently, a forum in a mosaic is possible and can thrive on its own.

A new form of journalism can be done and this manual is your guide on how to do it regardless of medium.

This book will guide you from the last days of the traditional model, but then introduce you to an alternative and empirical new model that takes account the cultural significance that liberated the lines of global communication, but left a void in how information is to be expertly vetted and presented. People may have the ability to post opinions, but they do not conduct primary research to ensure what they give to others is empirically sound information. It is in this area where a new model of journalism is needed.

But the form needed is vastly different than the one that was created in different times with more primitive technology and less evolved and enlightened perspectives. This book will show techniques and considerations to create useable information for not just a general audience, but an academic one as well. From diverse experiences, to uncovering deceptions and propaganda, to even empirical interviewing techniques, this book will explain the ways of modern information gathering, verification and dissemination. From how to conduct interviews to verifying and disseminating factual information, you will learn how to visual information, find hidden connections, immerse in a subject matter without becoming an apologist or advocate and present narrative-free information in a compelling form. You will learn to create dossiers that can show how a single fact has multiple implications and how to conduct empirically sound experiments as a journalist. The world is your laboratory, classroom and stage and you will learn how to use applied psychology to make the most of your resources and time to inform others of what is happening and what needs to be done.

But first, let us look at the traditional business model as begin to redefine a profession whose core essence is to inform the public of the world in which they live in.

CHAPTER TWO

BAD BUSINESS

Traditional journalism was never a public service. It is a business whose product is information, but not pure information or raw data. It is processed information embedded in narratives. It directs audiences how to *feel*.

For example, take the following *Los Angeles Times'* headline from February 20, 2020:

Op-Ed: Jurors saw Weinstein for the monster he is. Here's why that's a crucial breakthrough

The word "monster" clearly signals to the reader that the writer is discussing a designated villain. It would be sufficient to state that Weinstein was convicted of sexual assault to inform a public of his deeds; however, the Times did not think their readers could grasp what the conviction meant and implied that the jury's verdict was not enough.

More telling, however, is the second sentence, particularly the phrase "Here's why." The article talks down to the audience, giving them a directive on how to interpret and perceive the conviction. *This is why labelling him a monster is important,* yet the case itself was a not an average one: the trial took place in the entertainment industry amid upper-class people. The accused was not a poor, working class, or middle-class man, nor were his victims people working in a typical venue. The article gives an average person a false impression based on a *single* high-profile jury trial. It is not about the relaying of information, but is a talking points memo instructing readers how to interpret a single event.

But "man convicted of committing a criminal sex act in the first degree and rape in the third degree" is fact; whereas "monster" is narrative. The word is not an empirically-defined term and it is one that ignores all those individuals who enabled him for decades inside an industry whose rigs and system rewarded him with both money and power. He becomes a convicted

felon and scapegoat as society is no better prepared for the next predator who comes along, as we are oversold on the notion that the system has now been permanently enlightened and repaired without concrete proof.

Even in an "opinion piece", we expect facts and logic. *The New York Times* had various "counters" of how many days had passed since the last mass killing in the US, with the express theory that gun control was to blame in a November 6, 2017 editorial:

> Still, Republican leaders in Congress do nothing. Or, really, so far they've done the same thing they have always done: offered thoughts and prayers. Soon, they will surely offer warnings not to "politicize" a tragedy by debating gun controls that might prevent such mass killings from happening again.

> "We are not going to talk about that today," President Trump told reporters in the days that followed the Las Vegas shooting, where 58 people were killed.

> "I think it's premature to be discussing legislative solutions if there are any," the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell, said.

> If now is too soon to debate gun control, how long must Americans wait?

The piece created a false world where citizens had to "wait" and were helpless from taking any action of their own. They could not lobby or implement their own remedies. They were labelled as infantilized victims who were inferior to authorities.

The article did more than create a false world where no one but a handful of elected officials had any freedom to think and to act. *Violence* control was not considered, nor that statistically speaking, people are far more likely to be murdered by a spouse in their own home than a stranger in a mass shooting. It did not consider that guns were just as easily obtained illegally, could be manufactured in a simple shop, or with a 3D printer. It did not consider that other countries with gun control, such as Canada, France and the UK, also had seen violent outbursts, with mass killers using guns, bombs, machetes, knives and even trucks (Canada saw its worst mass murder spree in April 2020 when a gunman wearing an RCMP uniformed murdered 22 people).

The article did not look at the number of mass killers who were on psychiatric medication and were seeing mental health professionals before

their deadly outbursts. It did not consider that many killers informed their therapists or wrote online manifestos of their intentions prior to their act. It instructed readers that the only solution was "gun control" and shut out other factors that refuted their simplistic hypothesis. It was a confirmation bias with no factual basis.

What compelled these individuals to kill? Were there any previous warning signs? Why is there continued violence and no systems in place to deal with it proactively? How realistic is it to expect 536 people (1 president, 100 senators and 435 members of Congress) to control the behaviours of over 331 million citizens? If people are willing to break the law to commit mass murder, then how realistic is it to expect them to obey the law of not acquiring an illegal firearm or look to other methods, such as bombs or trucks to do what they wish?

This typical piece of traditional journalism provides no *utility*. Audiences who read it are no wiser or more informed than if they ignored it entirely. The article provides no examination of the process of governance, nor is there an attempt to rationally analyze facts. There is no insight into how tragedy occurs. There is nothing a reader can use to help themselves, others, or use as part of their professional research.

And it is here where we can begin to see why traditional journalism has faltered: it seeks to blame a single person or item, not to inform or provide the big picture. That is patriarchal narrative: there is a single Chosen One and right answer and anyone who is not in full agreement or has a conflicting interest is a villain. It is Us versus Them. It does not see the nuances of reality to show us where we need to actively fix a problem, but to be confined by the hypothetical constructs dictated by narrative. We have no role to play in the world; we are passive conduits of the whims of institutions, corporations, evil-doers and fate.

The inherent narrative assumptions of the news product also reflect the business model of the profession. The product it is supposed to represent reality as it happens, not shade or interpret it. When there was little ability for regular citizens to be exposed to diverse and global perspectives or express their own views, the business model did not matter as much: people would pay to subscribe to a newspaper or magazine and advertisers wishing for an audience would pay to be showcased in print and on radio and television. The audience demographics and psychographics were imprecise but useful enough for advertisers who were looking for either a local pool

of potential customers, or those based on gender, age, education, occupation, hobby, or socioeconomic status.

For other outlets based on a public service model, they relied on hybrid methods of funding (taxpayer funding with advertising revenue, paid subscription and donations from the public or large philanthropic support). There will also be fees for database use of old articles and reprints.

When audience erosion began in the late 1990s, some newspaper companies began to lobby for laxer standards as to what constituted as a "paid subscription." For example, the Newspaper Audience Databank (NADbank) had allowed papers sold as little as one penny to be counted as part of paid circulation in Canada, which usually meant bulk stacks of unread newspapers in diners and college campuses were counted as paid, even if no one read them.

The gambit did not work as companies preferred the more precise and immediate feedback they could get by advertising on social media and Internet sites such as Facebook, Google, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, who all had global audiences with coveted demographics, precise intelligence on potential audience and simpler and more effective ways of reaching them. The traditional news media could not compete or keep up and the industry lost significant revenue without devising alternative business models to replace their antiquated static ones. Interestingly enough, online news sites fared no better in the bargain.

In 1999, Canadian newspapers were using NADBank to dubiously define what paid circulation meant; by 2017, they were lobbying their federal government to outright fund them. The Public Policy Forum's paper entitled *The Shattered Mirror* decided the only way to save newspapers was for taxpayers to foot the bill for a product they did not wish to buy. Many in the business used the pages of their own newspapers to openly lobby for public funding. Newspapers, such as the *Toronto Star* had used their news vehicles to demand their government fund them, in their January 26, 2018 edition:

> To make matters worse, in announcing her government's decisions, Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly emphasized her government wasn't interested in bailing out "industry models that are no longer viable."
>
> Left starkly unclear was where quality journalism would then originate. And newspaper executives, myself included, were left asking: if this is what the

> Trudeau government really thinks, then why did we go through this lengthy
> process?

The demand that the government solve the problems of the industry was
curious as it was a de facto admission that the old guard, who were expected
to challenge their governments, not ask them to become benefactors, were
no longer capable of functioning. This misuse of the medium all while they
had completed questionable mergers that the Competition Bureau found it
necessary to investigate them and seize their files. Even despite receiving
government subsidies, Postmedia still scuttled 15 newspapers in February
2020.

In the US, the situation was not any better. "News deserts", defined as towns
without a newspaper, began to grow as "asset-squeezing" owners bought
newspapers to sell their assets, such as real estate holdings before reducing
staffing levels and even print frequency before selling those properties once
again. Some larger companies, such as Gannett and GateHouse (owned by
New Media Investment Group) merged, while McClatchy declared
bankruptcy. TorStar sold its *Hamilton Spectator* building in 2019 in a
secretive deal for over $25 million to McMaster University, meaning
taxpayers had been forced to bail out the newspaper through questionably
ethical means. The backdoor bailout made the newspaper company seem far
less credible in the bargain, as they already had a quiet deal with the federal
government previously, but when the deal was made public, it was quickly
terminated.

The old models no longer worked for the same reasons why the model of
journalism itself faltered: the Internet—the *fourth* medium after print, radio
and television, made the old ways redundant. People had a choice and were
now exposed to new worlds. With a free marketplace, businesses had new
worlds of potential customers open up to them with detailed feedback and
interaction, fostering relationships directly with customers through
Facebook pages and the like. The middle man of journalism was cut out and
replaced with a new conduit of social media and one which allowed direct
contact between companies and citizens.

Social media also allowed direct contact between newsmakers and citizens.
When a world leader can bypass the mainstream press to relay messages via
Twitter, he is no longer beholden to the press, meaning neither are
advertisers. Facebook, for instance, allows companies to tell potential
customers which one friends "like" their product. The customized and
personalized endorsements can be as effective as the ones of high-profile

celebrities. With social media "influencers" touting products, the need to pay media outlets for the privilege of exposure was no longer necessary. A superior method has been in play for over a decade.

The public service model is equally problematic: traditional publications that attempted a non-profit model folded and could not find their footing. When media outlets had the revenue, they were still losing viewers and readers, meaning any kind of bailout will not translate to restoring a base of any sort and of those outlets that do rely on government funding, such as the CBC in Canada and the BBC in the UK, they are still losing audiences, with the BBC News forced to cut 450 jobs in January 2020, while the according to their own annual reports, the CBC saw a nearly 30% decline in their local news programs and a drop of ad revenue by over 50% in 2019. For those looking for a risk-free shortcut with guarantees and simplistic answers, the public-funding model is as antiquated as the private sector one.

From 2004 to 2019, over 2000 US newspapers ceased publication, many over a century and a half old, translating to roughly one in five newspapers. The grim pace accelerated in 2020 during the COVID-19 panic. The newspaper industry had once been one of the largest employers in the country and suddenly, it could not stem the changes social media brought in. In Canada, the number stood at 250 closures in a decade while in the UK 245 papers had ceased operations in the same decade. With thousands of closures in a short span of time and tens of thousands of jobs lost, the old models of traditional journalism have failed to work. Journalism thrived during wars and depression and now it collapsed as it shattered regardless of circumstances.

Journalism boxed itself in with its obsolete model along with its archaic business practice. It could not connect to the reality of the world to see how to update their methods, always falling back on what worked before the advent of social media, whether the model was a private sector one or a public-funding model, but it was also the lack of innovation from the traditional models that served as a barrier as the following chapter discusses.

CHAPTER THREE

BAD EDUCATION

Universities are designed to be the cradles for new and innovative ideas. The institution is the incubator for novel approaches in thoughts and actions for the express purpose of evolution, improvements and ground-breaking novelties. For many disciplines, their financial success can be thanked by academia's various methods of inquiry and discovery, from the Polio vaccine to the Internet. If there is any one place where untested ideas have a chance to be refined until they become reality, it is in academic halls.

Yet traditional journalism did not take advantage of those halls and floundered without recovery.

The popularity of journalism programs exploded after the release of the 1976 movie *All the President's Men,* a film based on the book from Watergate reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Some journalism schools opened after the film, such as Concordia University's journalism department. Other university-based publications started after it such as the now defunct *American Journalism Review* a publication from the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland. Both the book and the film captured the imaginations of a generation and inspired many to go to study the profession to be the next Woodward and Bernstein.

The initial promise slowly eroded as the profession began to falter, yet the educational system did not foresee or remedy those problems. Journalism education began quietly as a *fin de siècle* undertaking, but it was in the 1970s when it became a popular degree to pursue. Unfortunately, the educational aspect had not been one that was on the vanguard of the profession; it merely followed the lead of the industry. This subtle submissiveness would cause problems for the profession later on.

Traditional journalism had been fraught with problems in both the private and public arenas. It was not as if one had better fortunes or bigger audiences than the other. There is a reason for it: the rules, rotes and rigs they were

taught in their early days were not questioned or challenged. You are reading this textbook as part of your class and are in a course that is teaching you a *different* system. This method is an alternative to the traditional model, meaning your educational institution has broken away from the system that no longer works. You are now part of an innovative program, yet this turn has not always been the case.

Journalism schools or "j-schools" did not conduct experiments to see how to best gather information, interview sources, analyze information, disseminate data, or present what they gathered to the public. It did not come up with innovative or novel approaches, or even conduct market research to see what the public needed or wanted. It did not create various structures of business models or schools of journalism. It was not scientific in its approach and when it did attempt to look inward, the results were wanting.

For example, Ryerson University of Toronto had put out a report entitled Toward 2020: New Directions in Journalism Education in 2014 in an attempt to explain the rapid erosion of the profession, without empirical study. It came to various conclusions such as this musing:

> Social media are now the primary carriers of breaking news. Online news sites, blogs and social media are far more often willing to publicly shame elites than legacy media. The locations of opinion and debate have moved to digital media. All of this has reduced the need for and influence of news organizations.

That passage isn't quite true, nor is it the entire picture. Traditional journalists have shamed people for decades. Social media is unfiltered and unverified. Debate and opinion have always been filler. Had the profession had more discipline and more focus, they could have easily kept up with the times and been viable.

There is another questionable truism: "Journalism isn't an art, nor is it a science."

It was neither art nor science because of a collective willful choice to neglect the profession. It is a profession that chose to be feral and uneducated. There are more excuses than reasons in the report, claiming that journalism schools were co-opted by industry. This was not the case as the industry wasn't keen on education for decades. Having a journalism degree to get into the profession isn't required.

One paper mused of "A Foucauldian Foray into How Power Operates When Journalists and Public Relations Officers Meet", a philosophical interpretation, not an empirical one with actual data and facts as no one conducted studies or provided primary sources and research. STEM-based disciplines had no such problems, yet traditional journalism never grasped the difference.

There were those who thought journalism students should learn anti-overdose training, but not how to save their own profession. When Columbia University chose Nicholas Lemann to be their dean for the Graduate School of Journalism in 2003, he did not look to empirical reinvention as he told the *New York Times:*

> But [Lemann] said he sometimes wished he had had more schooling beyond his undergraduate years. "I have gone through life wishing I had three months to read Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli and to discuss the master ideas that are most likely to be of use in journalism and then linking them to the practice of journalism," he said yesterday. "That is a different process from any old undergraduate education, because it is more specific."

It was a critical juncture in the profession and it was an opportunity squandered. J-schools failed to see the changing landscape and update and revolutionize the profession. Its overseers did not take advantage of academia to provide research in audience engagement, interviewing and dissemination. How does asking loaded questions alter responses and memories? J-schools did not look for the answer the way their colleagues in the Psychology Department did repeatedly. Journalism is a form of applied psychology, yet there wasn't any collaboration with any discipline that could have provided valuable insights to help rejuvenate the profession.

The fear of change stifled debate on how to best transform journalism. It was not allowed to re-invent itself; it continued to refine the craft, not building a new model based on global shifts in communications. How do we inform children of newsworthy events? How do we inform people in a culturally diverse world? How do we remove narrative to paint a picture of reality? How do psychological disorders impact perceptions and interpretations of reality? How do we spot war propaganda? How do we conduct *experiments* to find information? How do we avoid the confirmation bias? How do we interview people who are traumatized, but willing to speak with us? What are the differences between truth, reality, perception and interpretation and why should it matter to journalists? How do we present information in a world where anyone can broadcast on YouTube, Vimeo, Periscope or Twitch? With WordPress or Square Space,

anyone can have their own publication; so how does journalism become relevant to the public once again?

These questions were not considered for many years. Part pride, part fear, part adherence to old traditions without question had stymied the natural progress of a once vital profession. Even the most basic concepts such as journalistic objectivity had never been empirically defined or tested, nor were troublesome habits such as journalistic appeal to authority been addressed. It was a fatal error and it prevented the evolution of the discipline to allow it to keep up with the times.

With an empirical alternative, the beginnings are in this very place where journalism faltered: new generations of would-be reporters did not begin with the notion of starting fresh from scratch. However, education is not about memorizing static rules in a vacuum: it is about learning to innovate and negotiate with the world around you. It is to help those apprentices learn to find new solutions and methods as they work in their chosen profession. With an empirical and experimental mindset, a new method of chronicling the world emerges. As you progress throughout this book, you will learn new methods the old guard did not.

But before we can do that, let us examine the underlying ideological barriers that had prevented an industry's rejuvenation in the first place.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROTTEN CORE

The base assumption of traditional journalism has always been that the reporter has access to information a regular citizen does not. It is also assumed that the job, by its very nature, is a noble and important one, regardless of what celebrity gossip and soft news it presented from a publicist or press release without empirical standards or vigorous testing. The film *All the President's Men* romanticized the discipline, while the actual real-life version was soon forgotten. Had *All the President's Men* been a documentary and not a Hollywood film, the trajectory of the profession would have gone a radically different way.

But the failure to see that the one-time gate-keepers no longer had any gates to keep when then tsunami of social media tore those gates down, had its price. When the President of the United States could bypass the press by using the simplest of all social media platforms known as Twitter, there was a permanent shift in what information streams could be used most effectively. Those who worked in the traditional model became reactionary in trying to reclaim something permanently lost with negative coverage of those who broadcast to a global stage through modern means, but it did not to impede technological progress in communications.

There have been many casualties as a result of following the antiquated script. The Australian Associated Press, the nation's main wire service could not function and had to cease operations in early 2020:

> AAP chief executive Bruce Davidson said the decision to drop the axe was due to the decline in the number of media companies subscribing to its services in recent years.

> …AAP's press release distribution business Medianet and its media intelligence business Mediaverse will be put up for sale.

> "AAP has been a critical part of journalism in Australia since 1935 and it is tragic that it will come to an end," Mr Davidson said.

Traditional journalism had always focussed on content of thought: they looked at the immediate. It was always about reaction, not reflection. Every rough draft of history was scrutinized with the penchant to look for flaw, or to dismiss without knowledge, experience, or even rudimentary testing. Who was offended? Who was scandalized? In a world of 7.7 billion people, there will always be offended and scandalized individuals who will also be seen as heroes, victims and martyrs to others. Controversy is often nothing more than an illusion as mass consensus is impossible and even when it seems to be consensus, it is often that voices are censored or people choose a more passive route.

As we will examine in later chapters, Solomon Asch's famous conformity experiments demonstrated that mass compliance happens through mere peer pressure from an in-group. It is meaningless as a measurement of reality or truth and people will often support causes or information that they know is wrong, but do so to appease others, yet traditional journalism appealed to both mob and authority as proof of everything from fact to morality. Personal beliefs are often shallow, fleeting and not aligned with an individual's actions. Traditional journalism has focussed on content and presenting it in certain ways: with colour (i.e., flowery language describing trivial details, such as someone's dress), authoritative prose and in television newsmagazines, with musical accompaniment.

But there is a difference between structure and content of thought: the latter is overt and is expressed belief, while the former is the subtext based on action. For example, political or religious divides occur when people differ on *content* of thought: one believes in freeing people in one way, while the other group believes in restriction; however, if both groups use disrespectful insults, shaming, strawman arguments and bullying to gain compliance, then they are no different in *structure.* Both use the same methods to achieve their consensus of content.

Before the Penny Press Era, journalists had been openly partisan in the hopes a reporter, editor, or newspaper owner could receive lucrative patronage appointments from politicians and had written stories firmly taking one political party's side over the other. When wire services began to provide neutral stories to ensure a larger pool of willing newspapers ready to purchase their stories, then newspapers saw the economic benefits and followed suit; hence, the birth of journalistic objectivity. US President Andrew Jackson cultivated press relations that way and during his first term in office, one out of every ten appointments of Postmaster went to a reporter.

But the concept wasn't defined or tested in academic halls. It wasn't debated or questioned. When partisan reportage found its ways back in news products, the information had become tainted once again. As objectivity was a capitalistic, not ideological or scientific concept, it was not tested, nor had anyone in j-schools tested the concept to find ways of making it a concept of utility. What was left was a profession that failed to operationalize its core concepts and ignore its own understanding of reality and scaffolding. It did not examine its own structure of connecting to both those they were reporting on or news consumers. It treated both groups as if they were separate entities, as it saw its own as separate from the other two groups and yet the reality is far more complicated.

What is the structure of journalism? It was not an area where those who worked in the field or studied it truly understood. It did not consider the role of public relations, for instance. It did not question its penchant for celebrity gossip. It did not question the use of colour or narrative, let alone its lack of empirical rigours. Without a solid core to guide the profession, it collapsed when citizens were given an alternative medium where they could actively participate and which they could use themselves.

The race to be "first" and catch attention also contributed to the distortion of what was considered news. Fearmongering had often been employed in reports with doomsday predictions for outbreaks from Ebola to SARS to the Coronavirus. When the year 2000 arrived, the press had written countless stories of a Y2K disaster that never happened. As *Current Events* warned in a 1999 cover story:

> Beginning December 23, 18 Russian military officers will arrive at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo., to begin training with U.S. military officers. On December 31, they will sit side by side with U.S. officers to monitor U.S. and Russian missile systems. Their job: to make sure that a Y2K computer mix-up does not mistakenly launch nuclear missiles.

> U.S. and Russian leaders stress that the change of such a horrible accident happening is extremely remote. Yet the leaders stress that both countries have to plan for every possible Y2K problem, no matter how unlikely to arise.

> "I'm very confident we won't have any major problems," said John Hamre, U.S. deputy secretary of defense.

> But then again, as a character in Y2K: The Movie says on December 31, "If anyone says they know what's going to happen tomorrow, they're lying."

It was not the only case of hyperbole. Murder trials involving people of note were dubbed the next "trial of the century" when the cases were no worse or outré than those of the Middle Class. The build up of the stories rarely aligned with the reality. The purpose was lure audiences more than inform them of the reality around them.

Many hoaxes were reported as truth as they had sensationalist elements; worse, many journalists engaged in outright deceptions to lure in audiences. Reporters such as Stephen Glass, Jack Kelley, Claas Relotius and Janet Cooke concocted stories from whole cloth. They had relied on colour and sensationalism, but had anyone scrutinized their work, they would have seen there was not a single factual element in it. Many, such as Glass, Kelley and Relotius, were considered "star journalists" at their publications. The fact that hoaxes and fabrications have tainted the profession for decades is a sign of the profession's own non-existent empirical standards, that journalists did not grasp. *The Atlantic* failed to see it when discussing *Der Spiegel*'s Relotius scandal of 2018:

> The Relotius incident has prompted self-reflection among German journalists: *Spiegel* is considered the gold standard among media organizations here, with a prestige that extends far beyond Germany and a supposedly airtight fact-checking department. One of Europe's leading news magazines and known for its investigative journalism, *Spiegel* also translates many of its articles into English to reach a broader international audience.
>
> So if a scandal like this can happen at *Spiegel*, many have wondered, what does that mean for everyone else? And what kinds of questions does Relotius—whose evocative prose was so admired that *Spiegel* editors called it the "Relotius sound"—raise about the merits and pitfalls of narrative journalism and foreign correspondence more broadly?

What made it "air tight"? Why was it considered a "gold standard"? As there were no universal standards for information verification, the assertion is as puzzling as it is naïve. Relotius relied on colour and flowery narrative details, not actual factual reportage. It would be this blind spot that accelerated the loss of credibility between journalism and the public, but also between journalism and newsmakers.

One of the other problems had been its reliance on the mere relaying of information without true vetting or systems of information verification that

is the hallmark of STEM-based disciplines. Traditional journalism has too many times reduced itself to being stenographers or apologists and their credulity has disseminated war propaganda as truth, as we will see in later chapters. What they were supposed to be is a window to reality that we cannot see as it is beyond our view: too high, too low, too small, too big, too close, or too far away.

But it did not turn out that way. Social media became that conduit, though its limitations allow for the creation of in-groups who could shut out information and people who prove their theories wanting. Its inability to counter a simple confirmation bias has divided people more than unite them, yet traditional journalism did not provide any viable counter to it. Journalists saw themselves as being superior to social media and its *de haut en bas* inclinations alienated the profession from the public. The Internet has no vetting mechanism and so-called "fact-checking" sites such as Snopes have no empirical standards and experience and are often partisan with a penchant to point out alleged errors of political rivals. It is the Pre-Penny Press Era all over again.

Traditional reportage did not just support partisan causes: it also built up con men who ran dubious businesses, such as Enron's Kenneth Lay as they made him seem as if he were a Great Man and visionary, but rarely did the profession see its own sexist leanings. When the #MeToo movement took hold, a large number of men accused of workplace abuses held powerful positions in journalism. These were the gate-keepers who decided what was news and how to portray people in their work.

There had also been a culture of racism that went back decades. Susan Watson, an African-American reporter who worked at the *Detroit Free Press* in the 1960s, discovered that her editors referred to black murder victims as a "cheap murder." Newsrooms have struggled with diversity and sexual harassment for decades and various attempts to address the issue have always had mixed to poor results. Arguably, the biggest problem stems from the fact that the profession began as a segregated enterprise and always had to rely on fixes that often conflicted with the rote methods that were always entrenched. It was a problem of content clashing with the established structure that was never meant to be flexible in terms of diversity. Had the profession been all-encompassing from the start, it would not have been an ongoing struggle. In 2020, attempts for diversification have still failed, despite numerous attempts to rectify it.

Journalism did not reflect the times in terms of diversity or presentation. It always lagged behind and when the Internet, particularly social media, freed audiences to broadcast their opinions and news to a global audience as diverse audiences all could use Twitter and YouTube with ease, the profession found itself exiled. Its core became corrupted with its own scandals in honesty and narrative and people went elsewhere to be informed and to inform others themselves. Yet its core was not the only fatal aspect of the traditional model as the following chapter discusses.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROTTEN IDEOLOGY

Traditional journalism failed to define its core concepts, such as objectivity and it contributed to its ill-defined mandates that became murkier as its clout eroded. The profession fell behind as their staples of opinion and amateur critique could easily be co-opted by the public. The importance of opinion became devaluated: anyone can have an opinion, regardless of exposure, knowledge, or expertise, but few have reliable and valid information that gives a layout of reality.

Because journalism benefitted from old technology that was one-way by design, it amassed power. Citizens, if they wished to stay informed, were dependent on the press for their information. Journalism was a near monopoly of information and holding that monopoly allowed them to influence public opinion: who was an A-list celebrity? Who was a has-been? Who was now a pariah? Who was the scapegoat? It was those in the communications industries decrees could make or break careers and shade how people, places and events were to be interpreted. In the US, for example, presidential contenders were dependent on the press and required their blessing. President Richard Nixon was brought down with the reportage of the *Washington Post* during the Watergate scandal. Presidential contender Gary Hart saw his campaign derailed when his personal escapades were exposed in the press. A single photograph would be enough to make a candidate win or lose.

By the time Donald Trump ran for US President in 2016, the press no longer had sway with the public. Though all but three newspapers endorsed his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton (this number includes the questionable celebrity tabloid *The National Enquirer*) and the strong negative partisan coverage was clearly skewed against him, he strategically targeted swing states, handily winning the presidency. The press was not used to being defied by the millions and opined that he won through various nefarious means, which had not occurred.

By the time the 2020 Democratic primary began, only then did it finally dawn on traditional journalists that they no longer held court. *Reason* magazine noticed the apathy in a March 3, 2020 article:

> [I]t's worth reflecting on just how poorly the media's preferred candidates performed in the 2020 race.
>
> In the end, The New York Times' dual Democratic presidential endorsements—bestowed upon both Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D–Mass.) and Amy Klobuchar (D–Minn.)—were like the points on Whose Line Is It Anyway?: They just didn't matter.
>
> Nor did the media's fawning over South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, early flirtation with Beto O'Rourke and absolute worship of Sen. Kamala Harris (D–Calif.) resonate with the millions of Americans living outside the Acela corridor.

The spell was broken and many in the profession could not understand what went wrong, without considering what went right: the monopoly on the interpretation of reality was finally broken. The marketplace of ideas was suddenly expanded, and hence, *unpredictable*. The old rigs used to confine people who did not play to the journalistic narrative script were emancipated.

It was the drive to tell stories and use narrative that held the profession in a holding pattern. Its sole dependence on a patriarchal narrative of binary antagonistic conflict of good versus evil confined it: there had to be a single correct answer, some moral justification and blame heaped on those who did not agree with this arrangement. The use of rote rules and narrative rigs created artificial lines in the sand of Us Versus Them. It can only be Us Versus Us. More interestingly, the penchant to always blame problems on scapegoats while expecting authority to shelter the public from all possible harm and inconvenience, made it seem as citizens were helpless and had no say or civic responsibilities. They could pin all of their failings to some nebulous *Them*, as they expected an equally nebulous *They* to sweep away the problems without inconveniencing Us.

The subtext had an infantilizing and polarizing effect on citizens who did not know the basics of governance: who pays for social services? How much does it cost? Where does the money go? How much is being wasted? What is the trade-off? As the use of narrative increased, the number of useful facts decreased with many citizens ignorant of which level of government is responsible for certain civic responsibilities. Journalists failed to answer the

most basic of questions, but instead chose to imply that their audiences had no responsibilities of their own. It was a form of pandering, but to do so required to construct a narrative world any form of struggle or setback was a sign of injustice.

With that subtext came peculiar sensationalism: every illness, from SARS, H1N1, to the Coronavirus was a global threat and where the smallest snowfall was dubbed a "Snowmageddon." There were always excuses, never explanations. There were judgements, not understandings. There was blame, but never an outline of what needed to be done. Journalism could have been cartography of reality; instead, it chose scripts that did not reflect reality or could ever play out in the real world. There was no quest to understand either reality or truth; merely directives of who to judge and how to see the world.

Those directives were literal. The Fox News Channel used them as reporters were given memos that told them how to report on events and people before they went out in the field to do it.

It is not just in the realm of hard news where traditional journalism pressed for their own narrative assumptions. Even with arts reviews, they were never "reviews", but judgements. Instead of giving a roadmap of a play, film, album, concert, exhibit, or book to allow their audiences to decide for themselves what they wished to see or skip, reviews were reduced to giving stars or a thumb's up or down. It did not allow audiences to learn artistic literacy to understand an artist, singer, author, or actor's message: the piece was reduced to a commodity to be used or exploited as a status symbol of how posh or learned someone wanted to portray themselves to be in front of peers. It did not expand thought or understanding, respecting the tastes of audiences; reviews were designed to instruct people what to see and how to discuss them at cocktail parties to fit in with the crowd.

Traditional journalists could offer narratives as their selling point. The *New York Times* had dubbed itself "the paper of record," even if they had fabulist reporters such as Christopher Jones, Michael Finkel and Jayson Blair, had numerous times presented businessmen as legitimate titans of industry, even though they would all be convicted of various frauds and had, over the years, had reporters with questionable ethics such as Laura Foreman and Ali Watkins who mixed business with pleasure before they were hired by the *Times,* but those transgressions tainted their work.

The antics of Foreman were particularly noteworthy, as the August 28, 1977 edition of the *Times* confessed:

> A former political writer for The Philadelphia Inquirer became romantically involved with a State Senator and accepted about $10,000 worth of gifts from him, including a fur coat, The Inquirer reported today.
>
> The reporter, Laura Foreman, 34 years old, was questioned recently by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a potential witness in a tax evasion case that the United States Attorney's office is attempting to bring against the Senator, the paper said.
>
> Miss Foreman worked for The Inquirer from September 1973 to January 1977 and was the newspaper's political reporter from August 1974 until November 1975. She is now a reporter in the Washington bureau of The New York Times.

The *Times* later dismissed her, but with Watkins, she was merely demoted, but kept her job with the newspaper. As the July 3, 2018 edition of the *Washington Post* explained:

> New York Times reporter Ali Watkins will no longer be covering federal law enforcement from the New York Times's Washington bureau, the paper announced on Wednesday. "After careful examination and discussion, I have decided to reassign her to a position in New York for a fresh start, where she will be closely supervised and have a senior mentor," noted Dean Baquet, the Times's executive editor, in a memo.
>
> Watkins is caught up in a federal leak investigation that came to light last month with the arrest of James Wolfe, the long-serving director of security for the Senate Intelligence Committee. An indictment charged Wolfe with lying to authorities about contacts with reporters — one of them being Watkins, who covered the committee for several news outlets. Also included in the indictment: An allegation that Watkins and Wolfe carried on a four-year relationship (The Times reports that it lasted three years).

With increasing tolerance for ethical breaches, the journalistic ideological core is problematic for its survival. It is difficult for an outlet to give information when how they gather it and why they are in such a position are dubious. With numerous ethical lapses, the profession lost credibility and more importantly, public goodwill, but when they use narratives, colour and pass judgement as they have ill-defined concepts guiding them, traditional journalism lost its mandate and purpose, alienating far too many citizens in the process. The erosion of trust translated to declining audiences and

without critical goodwill, the profession collapsed as it found itself being judged negatively in the bargain. The truth is that the traditional journalistic model is more than just antiquated: it is a monolithic monopoly of thought and structure; hence, it can no longer function in the present day.

It would be easy to believe that with social media and the problems of the traditional model of journalism, an information-based industry is unnecessary or would prove to be unpopular. However, people need information for their daily lives to function. They are being frightened by hoaxes, distortions and outright propaganda and cannot find workable solutions to their problems. When young, educated women die of curable cancers because they have been misinformed about medical procedures, lives are lost. When people are frightened or become offended by truths, they are not in a rational frame of mind, yet problems spiral out of control when society and individuals are not given the facts.

With the Internet came an anarchy of void: people are less informed now as there are no standardized or empirical methods to give usable information to a public. It is a pastiche of snippets that are diluted with spin, advertising, opinion, narrative and even propaganda. There is no context and there is an illusion of information. There is information in the academic realm, but it has its own jargon and requires expertise to decipher. What is missing is the same kind of information for a general public that has the same rigors as academia, but a more mundane approach to its presentation and dissemination.

The problem has been that journalists often had a disrespect for not only their audiences who appeared silent to them and therefore ignorant as communications was a one-way flow, but also of those they covered as they themselves had not gone through the same ordeals and mastery and hence, had no deep knowledge of their subjects' travails. Failure or missteps were ridiculed without those covering the stories understanding the true significance of what actually happened.

That is the reality an alternative to traditional journalism faces: if it is to inform, it cannot present data with narrative, giving simplistic and unrealistic rules for an audience to memorize. It cannot judge and distort the truth. It must emphasize information verification and be vigilant of public relations ruses and feints. It must understand human nature as it explains the world to the world to inform with the intent of giving information to allow people and groups to solve their own problems.

Now that we have looked at the past of an antiquated model, let us begin the next section by focusing on a different method of journalism: one that is empirical, experimental, factual and is designed to reflect reality without narrative.

SECTION TWO:

THE CASE FOR AN ALTERNATIVE

CHAPTER SIX

CHRONICLING THE WORLD IS APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

If the old system of journalism collapsed, then how do we begin to rebuild a system of mass information where the lines of communication are open to all as they are thanks to the Internet? What can the alterative approach offer that the traditional model—and social media-type rival systems—cannot?

First, an alternative system needs to focus on the realm of reality and not narrative. The facts make the environment, situation, problem and even the solution self-evident. A map is not created from narrative, but we can easily comprehend its information. Information that we present should show the lines of cause and effect clearly as it shows how those lines intersect and interact with one another—as it also separates irrelevant information from the issue being presented. Traditional academic studies do not require a narrative to explain the subject being examined and it is worth noting that it is not necessary to present information through narrative conventions. There is chaos and randomness in reality, however. Those realities must be represented through the presentation of facts.

Second, the alternative must clearly and accurately describe resources and quantities. For example, there is a penchant to inaccurately describe taxpayer-funded resources as "free", such as "free healthcare" and "free education." It is taxpayer-funded or funded through governments borrowing money from international banks. Those who benefit from those programs still paid for them. Some governments label taxed resources, such as pensions as "benefits", which implies the recipients did not pay into a program. Similarly, when businesses offer "free gifts" or graft, it is paid for by their customers or through tax write-offs. If someone places a label on themselves or others, the label must be defined and verified. Too often, people who deceive gain trust through feints of labels and titles, as we will see in later chapters. Elements must be quantified and verified. Information cannot be properly vetted or verified unless they are accurately defined.

Third, it requires information to be tested and use experimentation. What are the physical limits? What are the psychological ones? What are the cost differences? Is a certain timeline given actually possible? We often do not see the plights of others for two reasons: either we reach a threshold that they do not and our reality is different from theirs, or their plight is their own fabrication. If there is discrimination and we do not fall within a targeted group, we take our reality as mundane and the norm, missing the obvious deviations. In other cases, someone proclaims something has occurred when it has not. They may be lying, mistaken, or have psychological filters that distort their perceptions of reality. We cannot take anything for granted as we seek facts that both confirm and refute accounts and then test facts as we investigate.

For example, someone claims to be a victim of a mugging and they give an account that they were attacked at a certain intersection at night. We can speak to witnesses, look for video footage—and we can go to the actual area and observe what would be likely and what isn't possible.

Fourth, we cannot take information at face value. If we are presented with a "grassroots movement", we cannot assume it is what it proclaims to be: we need to discover who are the people and groups fund and organize it. Do they have media training? Have their hired a public relations firm? If the group is a front to influence public opinion and is used a ruse for one interest to sabotage a rival, then this feint must be established from the onset.

If, on the other hand, a so-called "child genius," "influencer," or "overnight sensation" is seeking publicity, it is important to see how genuine their claims happen to be. Are their social media followers bots or legitimate? What stunts and tricks are they using? How have they achieved notoriety? These people or groups may use narratives and hyperbole to beguile a credulous audience, but it is not up to news producers to indulge in their parlour tricks. From those who proclaim to be heroes to those who insist they have supernatural abilities or business acumen; it is critical to question every aspect of their presentation by finding facts.

Then there are those who, out of fear, self-interest, or shame, deceive or hide crucial information. They may have been robbed en route to committing an illegal or at least, reckless activity and wish to obscure their narratives as a result of the Halo Effect. As we will see throughout this book, removing emotional triggers and narrative to find the facts will allow you to assess information neutrally and rationally. In a world where there are countless

outlets to share opinions and narratives, there needs to be a venue to exchange actual facts and information. People can be charming, sympathetic and even exude confidence, but if what they are telling you is a fabrication, then their personality quirks are no guarantee to the quality of information they give. Their gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, beliefs, politics, ideology, causes, education, profession, or prestige are not values which can determine whether they are telling you the truth or a lie.

Finally, we need to use empirical methods to not only verify information, but also find new and better ways of gathering, analyzing and disseminating it. People change with the times and it is imperative that we find the best and most accurate ways of interviewing people, gathering information and verifying it. Those who wish to hijack the message will not sit idly by: they will find counter-measures to bypass the process at every stage. Advertisers and PR firms spend millions of dollars in market research and focus groups to ensure their client's message is effective and their reputation remains unsullied. Governments have their own methods to do the same. It is the reason why news producers must not rest on old methods but study the methods of others as they evolve their own techniques.

In other words, empirical and experimental methods are necessary to make judgements in the real world. We need to focus on how we can turn any environment into a laboratory. A new model of journalism is, in fact, applied experimental psychology. Journalism is the study of people in their element. Sometimes the element is natural to them as it is mundane and other times, it is an extraordinary one where they have no prior exposure or experience. While the world reacts to events, there are those whose job it is to reflect. Academics are the group who are tasked to do this with their work for a highly trained and specialized audience, but news producers do the same for a general audience.

If journalism studies people, then what we require is *journalistic psychology*. How do we make sense of people who commit mass murder, or those who become afraid of the threat? How do we understand the police, the courts, the press, healthcare, social services and the government in those situations in a *factual* manner? How do we comprehend without the narrative shading? How do we go beyond the attempts to sell policy, ideology, or perceived superiority? It is the facts that make the reality of the situation self-evident. While we may have our own personal beliefs about situations, we often lack the deep knowledge or expertise to know what the

truth of the solution could be. Often, there are *multiple* solutions, but none of them will be perfect.

Shading with narrative too often prevents us from seeing the big picture: cherry-picking facts and then presenting them in a rigged narrative is not reportage: it is advertising at best, propaganda at worst. If we find information from every vital aspect of a given situation, then we can understand the dynamics of play, the factors which influence and we can begin to remove partisan wrangling to see reality without narrative filters.

The more facts we are given, the better we see and understand the factors at play. Too often, misdirections in the form of feints and ruses skew our understanding. As Sun Tzu noted in *The Art of War,* for instance, war is deception. The 36 Stratagems of War was a guide on how to psyche out enemies and rivals to dominate them. Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* was also a manual of underhanded ways of gaining power and control over people. If war is deception, then truth is the liberator and peacemaker. The job of the news producer is to make certain that they liberate truth from lies, but that cannot be done unless they present an accurate picture of reality in real-time.

Journalism is applied psychology, yet the lack of literacy of the discipline marred traditional journalism. The alternative is empirical and inquisitive in its approach: it is impossible to know everything or to have the answers and it is the reason we have to test our theories. When we use the Scientific Method and conduct empirically sound research, we are focussed, looking for facts that not only confirm our hypothesis, but also refute it.

An introduction to Method Research

Professional actors immerse themselves in their roles and have for decades under various acting schools. In Russia there were both the Stanislavsky and Chekhov Techniques and later in the US came Method Acting. All have one thing in common: immersing oneself in the character, situation and environment to convincingly channel the character to connect to audiences. One does not merely guess how a character in a situation would feel: one tries to live for a short while in that situation.

There is much to be said about the practice of *empathy* and *emotional literacy:* to convey the truth, one must familiarize oneself with the reality. Actors who work using Method Acting do not immerse themselves on a

stage: they experiment in the real world, discover the reality and then go to the stage to translate the *truths* gleaned to an audience.

The alternative method to journalism can learn much from this method, but its goals are different: it is not about becoming a character, but about walking among those you are studying and observing. You become a baseline subject and your own internal point of reference. It cannot always be done, but in many cases, going through the same stressors, challenges, problems, rotes, rigs and rules as those who you are studying can give context. It is not done to become an advocate or to judge, but to be able to better analyze and understand what information you receive through your research, including interviews. It can help you better gauge the truthfulness or accuracy of information, make complex ideas simpler to understand and allow for hidden lines of inquiry as you gain expertise in the subject.

It is Method Research: going through the same steps and environment as the subject you are studying. It reminds news producers that they are reporting about human beings. It allows a news producer to see how simple it is to become desensitized, ritualized and even apologetic to troublesome environments. We do not do this to over-identify with others as we begin to justify and make excuses for the misbehaviour of others: we do it to learn how outside stimuli impact human behaviour and thought. We are not merely going through the same motions, however: we come with a set list of *empirical experiments* to test various hypotheses.

You are studying interactions and processes within an environment, for instance. You are using facts, not narrative to paint a picture of reality. In order to give context to facts and understand their place, you must expose yourself to that environment. To attempt to recreate from a distance requires a constructive hypothesis and often, our unrealistic expectations or fantasies move us away from the reality and hence the truth of the situation.

To demonstrate the difference for yourself, try to imagine a highly uncomfortable situation of being forced to sleep on the floor for a week. Look up descriptions of others as part of your research.

Now sleep on the floor for a week yourself and repeat the exercise.

Or we can try something a little less dramatic. Write about the process of trying to write a five-question survey as you are laying on the ground and rolling down a hallway using pen and paper.

Now roll down the hallway while answering these five questions with a pencil and paper. Be certain that you have someone observing you or recording you as you answer the following:

1. When was the last time you walked outside in the rain without an umbrella?
2. What was the last nutritious meal you ate?
3. What colour makes you the happiest?
4. Are you bothered by the smell of perfume?
5. What song is the best representation of your feelings about life?

When you are finished, write down your experience of doing this most unusual exercise as you ask your observer to write about watch the event.

Now compare the three papers: what did your original account miss? Were there unforeseen problems or events that you could not account for by pure imagination alone? Were some questions more difficult to answer than others? What did the observer notice and what did they miss?

If there is a recording, watch yourself: what do you now notice about yourself that you were not aware of as you were going through the motions of something you most likely never have done in your life? Many times, people find themselves in strange situations and are so taken by trying to fit in and agree to do unnatural things that they lose sight of subtle signs. They lose their focus.

But Method Research keeps the focus by use of empirical experiments: going into the environment with questions that require answers allows the reporter to go in prepared and see how the environment functions. Our attention is not snatched away by those in power, nor do we begin to become consumed by those wishing to overthrow it. We do not demonize, deify, nor romanticize reality. We reflect it. Ours is to find the facts, not the narratives. When we have enough information, audiences can judge for themselves what the big picture means to them.

When we are presented with the reality of a situation, the truth becomes self-evident: injustice becomes apparent, for instance. Lies become obvious. We do not need to meddle and disrespect an audience by imposing a narrative that may miss something more important at play. Our mandate is to inform as completely as is possible and describe the facts as we map them.

So how do we incorporate Method Research (i.e., empirical research by being active in the environment you are chronicling) as an alternative to conventional journalism?

First, if we are writing about a profession, it is helpful to understand the mundane reality of it. It is not as if traditional journalism had never undertaken such tasks, but they were few and far between. For example, Nellie Bly had done research by experiencing the same reality as those she was covering. She had herself committed in an asylum for ten days to see the conditions of it.

We can experience events firsthand as we compare and contrast our behaviours in that element, for instance. If there is a protest, for instance, we can ask different kinds of questions to different people to see what their responses are and then compare and contrast replies. Do the protestors know what is happening? Have they been bussed in from other places? We can march along with them and test various theories. To build up numbers, there have been cases where people who are not familiar with the cause are brought in to imply there is a larger public outrage then there is in reality.

Other times, rivals bring in agitators to deliberately cause a scandal to malign those who are protesting. It is meant to make protestors look dangerous, violent and even insane. It is a choreographed ruse. By walking among those you are covering, you observe unobtrusively, not in the role of traditional journalist, but as an applied psychologist taking a survey of the scene Sometimes *both* kinds of participants are involved at the same time and your role is to see what is genuine and what is contrived. When you relay this information to the public, you do not "choose" one side over the other: you merely state your findings, showing the complexity of the gameboard or battleground.

Often, you will not find all of the answers that you seek, but it is not necessary to fill in every gap. By asking questions of all the facts that are still missing, you are still painting a portrait of reality. You have reached a point in the journey where there are places still unknown and that is the crux of the piece. It is not by giving answers where people gain mastery: it is by asking questions: if a news producer asks questions of unknown elements to an audience, it can make a powerful statement to them. By showing the lapses in society, audiences understand that they also have a responsibility in filling in those gaps as well. We do not talk down to our audiences: we

encourage them to participate along with us. As social media has made such a dynamic possible, we can make the best of it.

Using Gestalt psychology in Method Research

Gestalt theories centre around the human inclinations to see and work within *patterns.* While much of our physical lives is random; human nature seeks to impose order: it is the psychological reason why traditional journalism heavily relied on narrative: it was the drive to explain and compartmentalize people and situations with labels that made the old way of presenting information that made it desirable. The problem was that the method was the path of least resistance and those in the profession not only did not question their tendencies, but they mistook their ways as being proper.

But it is not just traditional journalism that lapses into relying on patterns. When you are gathering information, it is important to be aware of your own inclinations as well as those who you are studying. For instance, magic acts and optical illusions hinge on presenting patterns as a *misdirection*: we look at the patterns, not pull away to see what those very patterns are hiding.

How we perceive the world around us is crucial to examine and this textbook's very purpose to draw attention to perceptual illusions and limitations. When we rely on narrative, for example, we do so at the expense of shutting out variables that disprove the narrative and hence, the thesis that the narrative tries to prove as correct. This tendency means that if we rely on narrative, then by default, all of our perceptions distort our understanding of reality. If our mandate is to reflect reality, then narrative becomes incompatible with reporting.

We do not omit facts. We do not add facts. We do not downplay or exaggerate facts. We do not become intimidated by the information we uncover. It is a unit of reality, nothing more.

But it is crucial to see how we group information and perceptions. As a journalist, you will be able to understand how a group or individual acted, but it also frees you from pulling away from those tendencies to see what lurks beneath them.

As it helps to know the six principles of Gestalt theory, let us look at each in turn:

1. **The law of proximity:** Objects close together are grouped together and seen as a single entity. This often explains bigotry and stereotypes. People tend to cluster groups together, while failing to see the diversity within the group. This also explains political or ideological bigotry as well: with people on one side of a political dividing line looking down on those on the opposite side. People sparring within a nation see those on the other side as being inferior and less enlightened, but to those outside the country, they see the entire nation as a single unit.

2. **The law of closure:** People fill in gaps, even if the closure is illusionary. When you are listening to information given in an interview, people will often "wrap up" a narrative or imply things have been resolved and solved, when, in fact, it has not. Traditional journalism has relied on this law: the designated villains always got their comeuppance and the story is over, but only when we look at the players years later, do we realize that the issue was not resolved, or who was seen as a villain may have been, in many court cases, wrongfully convicted.

3. **The law of continuity:** We often believe that things that are close together are related and form some sort of continuity, even when those elements are separate and independent. Traditional journalism had often proclaimed there were "trends" and "fads" when none existed: in a world of billions, we can expect many people to behave in a similar fashion on their own volition. It does not mean they are following one another.

4. **The law of similarity:** When elements are similar in appearance, we tend to group them together. We may hold stereotypes and assume that similar-looking people are a group, when they may have nothing to do with one another. When people group others based on socioeconomic status or educational level, they make sweeping generalizations even if they have had no direct contact or experience with their designated villains and scapegoats. When someone begins describing people in an out-group in the same way, it is a sign they are forming a pattern to fit a narrative.

5. **The law of precision (prägnanz):** People look for the simplest salient elements of an item to label it. We tend to categorize elements and not revisit our theories of those elements later on, even if we have a distorted or misaligned idea of what the element truly contains.

6. **Figure and ground relationship:** We look for contrast when we look at elements: what we perceive as dominant becomes the figure

and what is not as bold is seen as the background. We often confuse bold personalities with dominant ones when it is those players who hide in the background who require our actual focus.

When taken together, we see that we can be naïve in our understanding of reality: we become so consumed by looking for patterns, that we fail to grasp the real mechanics at play. Strategists often take advantage of these passive *heuristics* and then turn those artificial patterns into a *narrative.* It is the reason why we must be aware of our tendencies to group things at a superficial level to find the facts that will give us the big picture and the solution of what needs to be done.

What we must avoid is gullibility. We do not accept what we see or are told at face value. Some grifters excel at presenting themselves as either brilliant winners or piteous victims. Psychopaths can be fun and charming. Gaslighters know how to manipulate others to attack them in public to play the victim as they demand submission. When people wear masks and play roles in the real world, they have practiced their scripts for years or even decades. You are not to be advocate, social worker, or superhero championing a cause. You are the fact-finder. If a subject tells you a tale of woe with practiced facial expressions, you are to then verify everything that is part of the narrative as you remove the narrative to present information. Often times, people will keep critical information from you to bolster their narrative.

For example, there are parents of teenagers who disregard repeated warnings from mobile carriers when they travel abroad and parents are met with large bills. They may try to make themselves seem faultless and fail to disclose crucial information to create a false narrative of being gouged by a company. When you look with scepticism on each side of the story, you will see the narrative is not aligned with reality. Your role is not to be a pawn in a bill dispute: it is to merely present all the key facts or not report a contrived narrative at all. Other times, people in dispute with one another will downplay or omit their actions that led up to the dispute: it is not a tale of good and evil; it is a case of two sides whose conflict has yet to be resolved. Both may be jockeying for public support to resolve the matter to their benefit, regardless of what happens to the other side and wish to use you as a proxy. If one side is more at fault than the other, the facts alone will reflect it.

The mechanisms of critical thinking, insight and intuition

A news producer requires many intellectual tools to find information. You may be the very first person to vet and verify a crucial piece of information that can alter history on a global scale. Other times, you may be debunking a common myth and still other times, you are merely verifying a mundane piece of local gossip. In all cases, use critical thinking when approaching assignments.

We gain mastery by asking questions. We teach others by asking them questions far more than giving them the answers. Answers imply finality. Questions reflect reality. We can deftly use questions to paint a portrait of the unknown.

In fact, so important are questions, that your initial report should be strictly *all questions*. Create a map of the unknown. Where will you find information? What is the problem? What defences or traps are meant to keep prying eyes away? What are the rigs, rules and rotes participants have memorized and have accepted as truth? What is the power structure? What is at stake? What is the history? What are the excuses?

This will be your primary report and your guide as you find the facts that reflect reality. You will create a list of empirical experiments and exercises that you will need to do to answer your questions. You will need to avoid committing a confirmation bias and try to find those who can confirm and refute your various working theories. You will be making numerous adjustments to your theories as you continue to research, revising what you theorized incorrectly and then conducting research to test the revised hypothesis. It is not a poor reflection on you if your theories are wrong: in fact, expect more wrong theories than right ones.

Whatever you are told, imagine the motives for presenting information in a certain way. Think in contrarian terms as you ponder the possibilities:

1. The person is correct and is honest with you.
2. The person is correct but is hiding their vested reasons for divulging it to you.
3. The person is incorrect but is honest with you as they have been told a lie that they now believe.
4. The person is incorrect and has an ulterior motive to deceiving you.

There is another set of crucial patterns to consider:

1. The person is passive and blames others for any system breakdowns.
2. The person is passive but blames themselves for any system breakdowns.
3. The person is active but blames others for any system breakdowns.
4. The person is active and blames himself for any system breakdowns.

While it is also possible for either the passive or active person to see the situation realistically (i.e., that it is not all-or-none), what we are looking for are any signs of narrative tendencies: if the individual has a penchant to always blame others as they expect other people to solve the problems, the information you are being given will be *problematic* from the onset. If someone is active and is engaged, but then overvalues their importance, it is again, a tainted interpretation of reality. This is not to say that what they say has no value or is deceitful, but it means you will have to test what is said and square it with other sources of information as well as other information you have on the event in question.

Once we have noticed a pattern of facts and motives, we can begin to analyze our data. We gain insight from not just facts, but by noticing patterns and interactions. We can compare and contrast within the environment, but also to similar cases from the past and the present to gain insight from them. Once we have enough information, we can use our insight to make predictions of where we need to investigate next.

We begin at the lowest levels and work our way up. Each layer is to be examined separately, but also compared to see the interactions with one another. We may notice that a certain group, whether it be a workplace or industry, attracts a certain kind of person: one who adheres to certain rules and excels at overcoming certain rigs. The system breakdowns may be a simple result of cultivating an environment that shuns new ideas or those who think differently than the in-group. We can compare other groups who have overcome the same obstacles to show precisely where the problems began and why they have not been resolved.

Once we understand how we use scepticism, we can begin to gain insights, but once we understand how we gain insights, we can begin to use intuition to focus on finding the core of the issue or problem. As you gain mastery,

you will be able to focus on the heart of the problem directly. By studying the subject, you will begin to know the most likely places where troubles fester. You will see the weakest areas, but you will require the same diligence and the same thoroughness as you go in with empirical tests and questions to answer. No matter how proficient you are, you are always starting at the beginning: the difference is which level you need to begin.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUTH, PERCEPTION AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

Chronicling reality seems as if it is a mundane task. Just report what you see and hear and that's all there is to it. We just follow our senses before analyzing it with our logic and we have everything we need.

The above scenario makes a single intriguing assumption: can we trust that what we perceive and interpret are reasonable facsimiles of reality?

Both our senses and our reasoning abilities are qualities we take for granted. More interestingly, we have very little in the ways of formal education to improve upon them. We assume experience is enough, but when we do not question our perceptions and interpretations of reality, we are doomed to make the same mistakes repeatedly without ever knowing why our solutions are off, or why not everyone agrees with our assessments.

There are two basic questions we must answer:

1. Is our perceptions and interpretation of reality an accurate representation of it?
2. Is everyone's perceptions and interpretations of reality the same?

To answer both questions, we can conduct simple experiments on ourselves. One of the simplest is to sit in a completely dark room or closet for an hour and then enter a brightly lit room. The light will hurt your eyes before you adjust and looking is no longer painful. Then after you have spent an hour in a well-lighted room, run into one where there is no light and then make your way around.

You will not be able to see anything until once again your eyes adjust.

We do these two actions all the time without ever thinking about the deeper implications of it. Why is the light too bright? Is it really so bright?

No. Our initial perceptions of it are vastly different from when we have no adjustment to make. Our perceptions are distorted.

The same problem happens in the second scenario: is the room so dark that you cannot see a thing? Eventually, you can see, but not until your senses can refocus with the new environment, meaning your perceptions of reality are strikingly *different* with no outside factors accounting for the differences.

We can take testing even further than that. Cover your ears for a day or two and then take off the ear plugs. You will not hear sound the same way: it will sound staccato, with tinny echoes bouncing off the walls—at least until your brain remembers how to process sound and the fluidity returns without the echoes.

Did the environment change? Did you change?

The only difference was that your subconscious mind forgot how to deceive you by suppressing all the irrelevant noises.

A glass of water seems tasteless, unless you have swallowed salt first, then suddenly, the same glass of water tastes *sweet.* A hand in lukewarm water has a different sensation than if the hand was first immersed in hot or cold water before being placed in the same jar of tepid water: it will feel cold if the previous jar contained hot water, but it will feel hot if the previous jar had ice water.

Finally, we can watch a magician on a stage performing magic tricks. Is the assistant really cut in half or floating above? Or has the magician managed to misdirect our senses to distract us as his sleight of hand obscure our perceptions and interpretations of reality?

These facts are part of our experience and happen frequently enough to most of us, yet we don't reflect upon them to realize that our perceptions of reality don't line up to actual reality by experience or default.

To add to the evidence, experimental psychologists have conducted thousands of studies over the decades to demonstrate how easily our perceptions can be manipulated. If what we see is not aligned with what we

hear, often we make errors in our assessments. Our perceptions can become tainted by fatigue, drugs, alcohol, dementia, or other physical or mental illnesses.

But most striking of all, psychologists have shown our perceptions of sounds, smells and visuals differ from person to person. Subjects who were asked to adjust one color swatch on a computer screen to match a static color had vastly different colors. It was not a uniform answer, meaning even our most basic of perceptions are relative, not universal.

The case that our perceptions are misaligned with reality is more than just solid: it is a reality itself.

If our perceptions of reality can be mistaken or manipulated, then our interpretations of reality are equally vulnerable. We often misjudge what we perceive. We see an argument between a man and a woman and whose side we support may depend on our previous assumptions and experiences. Or, we have a spouse who is unfaithful and though others with no emotional investment or pride on the line can see the obvious, as we repeatedly misinterpret the same actions to assure us the opposite is happening.

Sometimes the misinterpretations come from individuals, but just as often, they come from collectives. We see this in the political realm where two partisan sides interpret the same actions in vastly different ways: one side sees the positive, moral, rational and beneficial qualities of a certain law, while the other side sees the negative, immoral, irrational and detrimental qualities. Wars are waged based on factions' interpretations of the same reality.

It is only after we consider the most basic of questions that we realize that chronicling reality takes more care and training than merely assuming we know what we see or hear. Those who suffer from depression, phobia, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress may react strongly or even irrationally to a harmless stimulus in the environment, such a friendly rabbit, depending on what significance the animal brings. Those who are narcissists will interpret a banal remark as praise and proof of their greatness, while someone with low esteem or paranoia will take those same remarks as slights. From the differences between the religious and atheists to optimists and pessimists, what we have is a fragmented and fractured world that has diversity of perceptions and interpretations based on a myriad of factors, from age, gender, physical state, experience and beliefs.

We also need to consider how manipulation, deception, connotation, loaded language, pressure, stress, trauma, or even cognitive dissonance and emotional factors such as guilt or shame impact how we interpret and perceive our world.

Once we grasp that our perceptions of the environment do not always align with raw reality, we can find ways to adjust and learn how we can be deceived or deceive ourselves. We learn the importance of comparing and contrasting environments and situations. Does education alter how we perceive friendships? Does poverty prevent the poor from seeing opportunities to become prosperous? Does marriage change the way we see ourselves? Does isolation change the way we see authority? How do hormones and adrenaline impact our perceptions, if at all?

Cults alter human behaviors', for instance, often by providing a small gift or offer. Salesmen understand the importance of the "foot-in-the-door" techniques just as military experts know how to make themselves seem more powerful to enemy forces than they actually are. Children become more violent when they see adults behaving violently as they are biologically primed to mimic and model others to learn how to assimilate into a group.

Perhaps the most striking of perceptual misinterpretations comes from the phenomenon known as *folie a deux:* when a mentally healthy person become isolated with someone with an organic mental disorder such as schizophrenia. Both will belief the same delusions, but only until they are separated and they are in the company of other mentally healthy individuals. The individual with schizophrenia will still believe and perceive the same delusions, but suddenly, the mentally "stronger" of the two will no longer be influenced and the delusions vanish.

A primer on truth, reality, perception, interpretation and illusion

To study reality, it is a good idea to be able to differentiate it from other concepts that are entangled in various forms to reality. Mistaken beliefs are a part of reality, even if the actual belief is not.

If we are interviewing someone who is schizophrenic, for instance, we go into the interview knowing that without medication, this will be a person with delusions; however, just because someone's grasp on reality is tenuous,

if we understand their filters, we can *still glean valuable and essential important facts from this individual.*

This person is not to be dismissed, but we still need to understand that their perceptions may be impeded by mental illness, or perhaps it is their *interpretations* of reality that are inherently flawed in some way; however, flawed does not mean useless or unimportant.

So, let us look at the various facets of our mundane existence:

1.   **Truth:** It is facts that are universally correct. Truths are immutable and apply regardless of technology, race, era, or place. It is unalterable and can involve specific cases in the past, concepts, or consequences.

For example: *He hurt her feelings when he called her stupid.*

This may be a truth about a father and daughter. The father lost his temper and hurled an insult and his daughter felt ashamed and slighted. There is no debate: he was the actor and his actions brought her emotional distress.

If the father denies it, he is ignoring the truth. The daughter may get over the slight and no longer have hurt feelings and may even laugh at the incident, but at that moment in time, she felt emotionally wounded and there was no other influencing factor that was as salient as her father's cutting words.

That is not a relative truth. That is an absolute one. If we were to graph the incident on a timeline, her feelings before or after are irrelevant: what matters is that point in time.

Truth has no deceptions. It has no consideration of what is trendy, kind, gentle, politically correct, or diplomatic. Reflection does not alter the truth as those thoughts occurred *after* that point in time. We may mull an incident after the fact, but that act is graphed down the line.

Truth may also be more abstract and may not involve living beings. How we obtain truth and verify it depends on whether it is a concrete truth (her father hurt her feelings), or an abstract one (if you believe lies, you cannot find a solution where you need to know the truth).

2. **Reality:** It is facts that are relative to various circumstances. Reality is not a dream. It is tangible and is dependent on nature, time and place. When you are female, your reality differs than if you are male. If you are wealthy, you are able to afford things that the poor cannot. However, you may be poor today and that is your circumstance, but you may get out of poverty, meaning your reality has changed. It aligned with truth, but they are not synonymous. Medical and technological advances altered our reality, but should they vanish, our reality could revert to a more unstable one. We evolve and change, meaning we have the power to alter our reality to a large degree.

3. **Perception:** How our minds process reality, and represents it to us. We cannot actually perceive reality as it is: we have variations in how we see colour, for instance. We do not hear sound the way it actually sounds. We take much for granted here, and assume what we see is a perfect representation. Magicians and artists know how to alter our perceptions of reality. Pictures and film can be doctored or altered. But we can account for the differences as we understand that what we perceive is not what is.

4. **Interpretation:** What conclusions we draw from our perceptions of reality and truth. It is more than how we process information, but how we analyze and make sense of it. We can see someone frown and interpret they are displeased with us, for instance, even if they are not thinking about us at all. We may believe everyone is staring at us because they are smitten with us—or disgusted with us, even if people may be looking at us because we are a rare stranger who has entered their space. We may hear a siren and interpret it as a sign of danger, but it is our beliefs, experience and logic that give meaning to what our perceptions of reality mean.

5. **Illusion:** When our perceptions are so misaligned from reality that we perceive stimuli that are not present, but we sense them all the same, it is an illusion. We may hear noises that do not exist or see things that are not there. The more extreme is the delusion, when our thought processes interpret truths that are not present, such as our own modest abilities that we believe are extraordinary. Whenever our thoughts superimpose themselves on our perceptions and/or interpretations, we are experiencing an illusion, that may range from a mistaken belief, or a real sensory hallucination brought by organic malfunction, some outside agent's deliberate manipulation of reality by means of deception or substance ingestion.

Our list of definitions hint that our relationship with reality is a complex one filled with hits, but also misses. We take our perceptions as a direct and perfectly aligned representation of reality, yet they are not. With AI images becoming increasingly harder to differentiate from authentic reality, we often forget how easily our biological hardware can fail us.

How do we judge or measure reality?

Experimental psychologists have their methods of seeing how everyone, from the exceptionally intelligent to the mundane, process information and not surprisingly, we see differences and yet we have similarities: our minds suppress our conscious perceptions of "white noise" to process the most important and salient features of a stimulus, but even then, what is considered "salient"? Is it always the same elements? Is it always the same perceptions? Are we completely unaware of those redundant ones that we seemingly ignore?

Claparède was a Swiss psychiatrist in the late 1800s who worked with amnesiacs. He had conducted a simple experiment with them: he would secretly hold a pin as he shook hands with them, causing a painful prick. When he would see them again, they would not remember him—but they refused to shake hands, citing that sometimes people held pins.

Experiments in Process Dissociation (separating conscious from subconscious memories) also indicate that suppressed elements are recalled, just as people can subconsciously process each note in a three-chord melody, before they find the note they use to judge other notes, all instantaneously without the listener being aware of what their brain is doing. The Stroop Effect showed that we can become confused when a printed word for a colour clashes with the colour of ink used, and left-right brain dominance is exploitable.

Reality remains unexplored, meaning the truth has been left undiscovered and it is up to us to explore it. We do in our everyday lives, but we can also take a more empirical approach to it by training ourselves to study reality and not merely take it for granted.

As a chronicler of that world, it is important to be in tune with your surroundings. For example, is a social media mass outrage an organic or spontaneous outburst—or is it a coordinated attack orchestrated by a rival? Who made the placards for the protest? Were they made by the ones marching—or were they issued by a particular group? Is an interviewee

trained by an image consultant? What public relations firm is behind a media stunt?

It is imperative that a given environment be broken down and each component cleared of staging. If there is staging, then it is important to find the source of the staging to discover what facts are being distorted, enhanced, downplayed, or suppressed. If information is missing, why is it being hidden? By looking for facts and asking sceptical questions, we can begin to orient ourselves and not waste valuable time investing in mirages. We look for the reality to find the truth.

For example, suppose you are covering a war. Are you fluent in the region's language? If not, you are most likely paired with an interpreter. Is this person a disinterested party? Do they understand the nuances and the Shibboleths of the region? Do they have a vested interest in presenting biases to you?

If they are objective, but not in tune with a region's subtle signs, you are vulnerable to falling for various feints and ruses. Do you know what are the actual symbols of the warring sides? Would you be able to distinguish between a genuine symbol and a doctored one that has errors?

Would your interpreter know each side's colloquialisms, for instance? Would you be able to tell the differences in regional dialects?

If neither of you are fluent in the subtle signs of being able to differentiate one warring faction with the other, you will be at a clear disadvantage if one side wishes to pin the blame for various war crimes on the other.

But let us get away from war zones and look at the corporate world. Would you know how someone behaves if they achieved their success based on their achievements as opposed to those swindlers who use Ponzi schemes and embezzling to line their coffers? Would you be able to see the differences, especially if the dishonest executive had media training? Do you understand that those in business are always "selling" their products and abilities and will see you as a conduit to sell to an audience?

Could you resist the persuasion to see the facts? Could you not feel inferior, envious, impressed, or inadequate finding facts on billionaires, inhibiting and tainting your perceptions of their reality?

And if you were to profile a corporate executive, how much do you understand about his or her baseline behavior in comparison to other corporate executives past and present? Are there certain traits they are expected to present to the outside world? Are there certain qualities they must emphasize to their rivals and charges? Do they follow a certain script: wearing certain designer labels, buy homes in particular neighborhoods, going to certain universities and sending their children to a select circle of private schools?

And how likely is it that their incomes can support their lifestyle expenses?

Perhaps they have the financial means with plenty to spare, but what if their façade outstrips their income? How vulnerable are they to outside influences?

That is how we break down the components of reality: by stripping away the layers of polish to find the raw truth lurking underneath the press releases. However, it is not just about gathering facts in a vacuum: we must explore the facts we find empirically so that we can find the essential truths without becoming obsessed over irrelevant minutiae.

Exploring reality empirically

To explore reality, one must prime herself to be able to explore it. We take our surroundings for granted, but when your job is to report on a certain set of surroundings, you can no longer take it for granted. You may be in the middle of a genuine riot, or you may be on a covert stage manipulated by a murderer who wishes to hide his true nature to preserve the illusion of innocence by pleading to nonexistent kidnappers to return his child to him and his wife.

Whenever we are about to explore a certain environment, whether it be a courtroom or a crime scene, we must begin to tackle the task by remembering we are there to gather facts found in reality to find the truths and that we are doing it empirically.

That is not as difficult or as unnatural as it sounds. A hunter looking for food does it: the hunter knows there is game hidden amid the trees that are faster than he is and have keener senses. He cannot take his surroundings for granted, especially if there are predatory games amid the prey who will attack him. To survive, he must know the various animal tracks in front of

him. He must be able to locate sound. He must know how to keep dangerous predators at bay, while luring prey to him.

His senses are trained to look for signs of whether there is game to be had, if they are healthy or diseased and if there are any barriers that will impede his quest for survival.

A chronicler is part hunter and part gatherer. She must be able to see her surroundings in a similar way as the hunter: always on the lookout for subtle and overt signs that give clues of where the facts are being hidden.

But she is also a scientist, finding facts and then comparing those facts to see if they are mundane—or hint at something extraordinary. If she is being deceived by proxy, for instance, the person she is getting information from may believe they are telling the truth—but if they are given the information from a deceptive source who has a vested interest in manipulating public opinion, the chronicler must look for signs that the information is not direct or primary. A secondary source is inferior to a primary one, but it is not always presented as processed and secondary information.

For example, we may believe we are speaking to a witness of an event, but the person may be a mere snippet witness: someone who saw the tail end of an event and does not know he is a proxy: a scene was set up to look like an attack, for instance, when the reality is it is a staged scene. The witness did not see the actual attack nor attacker, only the person who is seemingly injured and now wishes to proclaim he was attacked by a street gang to insight others into supporting discriminatory measures.

To find the truth, the chronicler must take each fact presented from the witness and look for gaps: in this case, that the actual attack was not witnessed by anyone. The next leg of the search is to ask if there is surveillance data available to confirm or refute the attacker theory. We do not automatically dismiss claims because we do not have all the information, but we do begin to know that there is a hierarchy of probabilities and we can begin to form various hypotheses of what transpired.

For example, in 2018, a young girl in Toronto claimed an Asian man cut her hijab as she was walking her brother to school. There had been no witnesses as she claimed she was alone and away from the other children and her

sibling. There was no surveillance footage to back up her claim and she herself had not been injured.

She had been the one to cut her headwear, but the press had released her name and face as they reported the story as if it were true, yet it had not been verified. A chronicler must ask basic questions to look whether or not the scenario actually took place and if it did, did it take place as it was described. Video footage can be doctored and misrepresent what had actually happened. We must compare what we know to similar cases to see similarities, shifts in behavior, patterns that change or stay the same and any other salient features that give us clues to the truth.

In other words, we must know the differences between perceptions and reality.

Which brings us to the simple question: what are the differences between perceptions and reality and how do they apply to information gathering?

Perceptions versus Reality

Reality exists within us and outside us. Our disdain or disapproval is irrelevant to the actual reality we live in. Some reality can be changed by our own actions. For example, reality may be that our house is messy, but we can clean up the room to alter the reality of the situation; however, we have no control over the fact that once the house was messy. The past is set in stone. It is our actions in the present that has influence on the reality of the future.

It is perceptions that are dependent on other factors, such as our beliefs, education, experience, physical and biological limitations, sensory input, staging from others and priming based on cultural influences, societal mores and personal expectations.

Reality is not beholden to those societal mores or our physical color blindness. It operates independently of our beliefs, values and expectations and will continue when we are no longer alive to sense it. They are external and static and present whether we are there to witness it or not.

Perceptions are internal and dynamic. A painting may have many subtle and intricate details. That is reality, but our perceptions may miss all or most of them for years and may have to be brought to our attention by others and

even then, we may not see it or disagree that they exist. Our ears may always mishear a certain lyric. Our taste buds can be affected by anesthesia for months. Hallucinogenic drugs may make us see our hand turning into a snake. Our phobias may enhance the perceived size of a dog. But the actual dimensions and elements of these entities do not depend on our beliefs of them to exist.

To chronicle your surroundings, you must take an inventory of your own limitations and then challenge them. If you believe a 2400 square foot house is "huge", then it is important to expand your experiences by looking at buildings with more and less square footage of various configurations. We begin by comparing and contrasting various perceptions: we can dress up to one job interview and then dress down for a comparable interview and see how we are perceived by others, all while giving the same responses and presenting the same qualifications. Once we learn the differences between reality and various perceptions, we can begin to devise ways to separate the two to find the truth.

Process dissociation is a method for psychologists to separate conscious from subconscious memories. We may not be able to recall certain events consciously, even if they are influencing us on a *subconscious* level. If reality is the static baseline and our perceptions as well as the perceptions of others is the variable, then we must learn to account for the differences. We may make excuses that reality and truth are relative, but that is a lie and an excuse to prevent others and us from discovering various realities and truth.

If we can separate conscious and unconscious influences swimming inside our minds, then there is no excuse for us not to be able to separate external from internal stimuli as well. If we can learn to see multiple images in an optical illusion, we can begin to see reality, despite our own sensory limitations.

We can use the same methods of process dissociation to separate perceptions from reality. For example, at the most basic level, we can compare how different people perceive color or hear different levels of sounds. We can look at the variances of perceptions, which we can then apply to the methods of gathering information: if we know that certain levels of sounds certain age groups can hear, then it gives us a benchmark to work from: if an older individual claims to have heard a certain sound level that is not likely, we can begin to flag the information and then try to confirm or

refute the claim. While we don't dismiss it outright (perhaps the person did hear it because they have healthy hearing or were wearing a hearing aid), we need to take discrepancies into account. The person may not be lying, but if they were told by a younger person that the sound existed, they may have a false memory, are trying to bolster the claim or are followers by nature.

Learning to separate perceptions from reality

We often place value on qualities without our realizing it. The first step to focus on reality is by learning to describe things with precision, rather than make judgments. Note the differences between descriptions:

Reality: House is 2400 square feet.
Perception: The house is huge.

Reality: The man raised his voice as he drove his car over his lawn within one foot of seven teenagers.
Perception: The irate man confronted teenagers in a dangerous way.

Reality: The city is spending $500,000 to hold an event targeting immigrants on July 7.
Perception: The city is fulfilling its moral obligation by planning a big welcome for its newcomers.

Reality: The woman jumped in and pulled a drowning child from the swimming pool.
Perception: The woman is a hero.

We avoid adding values and labels. We stick to facts. What is quantifiable? What is verifiable? What information can be independently verified?

We do not know the thoughts of others. We do not know their motives, even if most of the signs point to an obvious conclusion. We may think we are demonstrating our Sherlockian abilities by making leaps in logic, but we often skip crucial steps and miss valuable signs in the bargain.

When Charles Stewart, a young husband and father-to-be was shot in the abdomen as his pregnant wife Carole was killed by a shot to the head, the police and the press had jumped to conclusions, believing Stewart was not the culprit because he too had been injured by gunfire. Had they merely

begun to look for facts before forming a theory, they would have seen the obvious signs of staging. When we place value on facts, the words spark certain connotations and hence, nudge a narrative in a certain direction that may not represent the reality of what transpired.

We know from psychological research that subjects viewing the same video of a car accident will offer widely different speeds depending if they are asked how fast cars were going when the "collided" as opposed to "crashed." If we refrain from using value-laden language, we prevent a narrative from forming prematurely. If we settle on an angle, we become overly selective of finding information that supports the narrative and ignore the crucial facts that refute it.

Seeing reality requires the chronicler to purify the language used. It also requires asking more precise questions to gain more information. For example, memories of events are often dependent on the questions asked after the fact. Subjects in one experiment remembered seeing a nonexistent gun when asked, "Did you see *the* gun," than those who were asked, "Did you see *a* gun."

We must refrain from thanking or praising newsmakers: calling actions "heroic", particularly actions that are a part of a person's job is filler. It prevents chroniclers and the public from considering the darker actions some in the field engage in, hoping the heroic label will prevent people from seeing those individuals from misusing their positions. If the public wishes to thank people for their actions, that is their right, but as a journalist, your job is to provide the raw data so that people can make decisions based on verified information, not provide a cover for con men and abusers to hide beneath the accolades, nor demonize people to make them targets of injustice and hate crimes.

Inoculating against narrative accounting and statistics

Statistics and accounting have one thing in common: their methods are subject to interpretation, meaning they are, in fact, *narrative.* Corporations have used creative accounting to seem as if they are in financial health, when they are heavily in debt and rely on a Ponzi scheme. Statistics themselves are not an infallible form of mathematics as they are easily manipulated and can be misused. Polling has been rife with inaccurate predictions in election campaigns and when we are being presented with

official looking "statistics" or accounting, we must resist the urge to take these numbers at face value.

When we are given either quantity, we must first ask *what is the narrative these figures are portraying*? A danger? An economic juggernaut? What is the story these numbers are supposed to be telling us?

Second, we must determine their *provenance*: who *funded* these figures? What is this person or group's gain? What could they be hiding and how are they hiding it? For instance, corporations have often used shell companies to siphon money from the company's coffers into individual pockets. Sometimes a group or institution is lobbying for money or laws and will bandy about official-looking numbers to create a façade of invincibility as if the facts were on their side. Who paid for these figures? What is the gain?

Next, look for the methodology: what tests are used in the case of statistics? What is the sample size? What is the reliability, validity and utility of those measures? What is the Gold Standard? What is the statistical test being used and why is that best used in the first place? What will the answers be if *another* test was used instead? In the case of accounting, what are the methods used? Why was it used? Is there an alternative system that gives a different answer and why?

Then we look at vulnerabilities with the methods and testing. We look for inconsistencies, as we also look for *tangible* evidence that can confirm or refute the numbers. For instance, corporations have often opened new stores to increase their profit margins as year-to-year sales in established stores *decline.* Where are the upticks? Where are the downturns? Who is included in the sample size? How realistic and fair is their membership? Are there those who have been excluded, but should have been included?

Once we find inconsistencies, we have opened avenues of inquiry. For instance, there are times when companies have product in various retail chains, but will purchase their own stock from one store to send to another to boost their sales in one store as they provide goodwill product to another. Do we know *where* the sales are coming from, or does the accounting hide possible sleight of hand fudging?

Once we understand that numbers are used in lieu of words to paint a narrative, we free ourselves to explore the veracity of those numbers. Do not confuse narrative figures with actual hard data: learn to spot the

differences, clarify how measures are defined and where there are flaws in the methodology.

Inoculating against propaganda, ruses and lies

A chronicler of any sort has one basic mission: to liberate truth from lies. You cannot do that if you do not know the reality of any given situation. Knowing the differences between lies and truths alters our perspective and inoculates our perceptions against propaganda and lies. If we understand baselines, for instance, we have a yardstick to measure variations in behavior.

For example, a person who is suicidal may hide this fact from others and repeatedly insist their symptoms are mere individualistic behaviors, not signs of a psychological disease. We may indulge an egalitarian stance, but it is one built on a lie of denial. If we continue to dismiss the signs as mere case of "different strokes for different folks", we do the individual harm, not good.

If we face the reality that this cluster of behaviors signals psychological distress, we are in a better position to know how to handle someone who is attempting to hide their pain of living from others. The lie will create a free path for someone to take their own lives in misery. The truth can begin to give the individual a chance at life with an intervention that will alleviate much of the suffering. We do not need to dictate or make decisions for the person by meddling with an air of patronizing arrogance, but we do not have to be ruled by fear and abandon them, or worse, enable the very thoughts and actions that will ultimately lead to the person's premature death.

Yet many times, the lies are not organically based: they are choreographed and malicious deceits used to swindle people of their life savings or subjugate people by means of bloodshed and war.

This is the place where many journalists of the past served as vectors, polluting the information stream. They did not understand the reality of their surroundings and then spread lies, aiding and abetting terrorists, warlords and criminals in their enterprises.

When we look for facts and evidence to support them, we stop looking for "stories": we are not spinning a fable or fairytale to provide morals or teachable lessons: we are looking for the facts to tell the story on their own

merits. If one warring side claims that they are the only victims, we must not only confirm and refute their claims, but we must also see if their claim of not causing death and harm to the other side is true or false.

When we look for facts independent of stories, we can see attempts at narrative shepherding; that is, rigs that force us to follow a certain path of a story that sweep us away from facts that actually challenge the narrative and hint that the story is not aligned with reality.

If the family of a mass murderer claim the killer suffered from mental defect, we must look for evidence and confirms and refutes their claims and mental illness may not be the reason for the killings. A family may merely wish to protect the legacy of an uncontrollable relative; it is not insensitive to debunk the claims, but there is no need to demonize them in the process.

Because deifying and demonizing real people is a propagandistic shortcut in trying to influence an audience to draw the same conclusions that you wish them to draw. Like a magician who surreptitiously forces an audience member to pick a certain card, narrative shading of people serves the same purpose: by bringing deception into the information stream.

How so? By giving the *illusion* that the reader or viewer came that the value judgement on their own.

To chronicle reality does not require forcing opinions on others. If a person willfully harms another person by kidnapping, torture, rape, confinement, or murder, the facts convict the abuser of the charges. The facts warn others that this is an individual who threatens them and cannot be trusted. There is no need to push the narrative. The facts themselves bring out the story of this person's deeds.

To be a chronicler means to have respect for an audience.

But it also means to trust your own instincts by not falling for the same ruses of narrative shepherding yourself.

When someone enhances their own good deeds, it is a red flag that information must not only be corroborated and verified, but that the halo is meant to blind the chronicler from seeing unflattering facts that call the narrative into question.

When someone downplays a rival's benevolence, we must make certain that we verify the information independently.

We look for possible places of deception and narrative sleight of hand: for instance, during a war, one side may claim they lost twenty thousand civilians in a town. We must first find census information to verify that at least that many people lived in the region right before hostilities broke out. Often, casualties are inflated or down played for various strategic reasons.

If there is a land dispute, we must again, look to confirm and refute by looking at land registries and other supporting documents.

Often, to provoke international sympathy, a warring side may employ a public relations firm to use over the top claims of cannibalism or some other triggering act of barbarity. The chronicler may be horrified at the claims, but there must evidence to go along with the outrage. Without facts, the story is theory.

Only when we have verified or disputed information is our theory proven right or wrong.

It takes an empirical method to draw conclusions. A weeping teenager may recount the horrors of enemy soldiers to a foreign government, but the teenager may be lying all the same. Her story is not fact. It is a theory she is proffering. It is up to the chronicler to find out if the theory is true (reality), or false (propaganda).

The fact that she is a teenager is not relevant. The fact that she is crying is not relevant. The fact that she is recounting it in front of foreign politicians when cameras are rolling is not relevant.

What is relevant is the claim. We must find out if she has media training. We must determine how she came to this place: was she merely plucked from obscurity by some independent organization, or did a public relations firm push her through?

We must then deal with the claims of her narrative. We must first determine if her story is plausible and if we break down the story and find inconsistencies, then we have red flags that her story is misaligned with reality.

But even if her tale passes the test, we still have to verify her claims through a variety of means, from finding other witnesses, especially those who are not affiliated to her (if the same organization is behind every witness, it is a cause for concern), to looking tangible evidence. We are looking for survivors, for instance. We are looking for any tangible proof that proves the story true or false.

Once we weigh the facts and verify them, we present them as they are. Sometimes the facts are not the theories offered by people claiming to be a witness, but the proof that the witness's narrative is not reality with our own proof why it is a lie, distortion or exaggeration.

When it comes to stories of life and death where the fate of people depends on truth, we must take care that we are not being manipulated by narrative shepherding. There are tricks and techniques at the propagandist's disposal, from using emotional triggers that appeal to our biological drives to presenting the information with a sympathetic narrator who seems honest.

Often, the person believes what they are recounting is true, hinting that the person may be a *proxy* for someone who is doing the actual deceiving. If someone claims to have been held hostage and chained and shackled, we need to at the very least look for physical signs, such as chafing in the places where the shackles were supposed to have been placed. It is not the only verification, but we start with the basics and work our way from there, with the single goal of fact-finding, not narrative-building.

Break down and analyze. Compare and contrast. Theorize and test. Confirm and refute. Find and verify. Once we understand the rhythms of navigating through reality, despite the limitations of our own perceptions, we can finally discern lies from truths and illusions from reality, even during wars.

But propaganda does not exclusively reside in war. Financial chicanery is also ripe with ruses. False business leaders will engage in puffing: making it seem as they are without peer with their financial wizardry. They present themselves as winners and heroes who are beyond reproach and work hard on their salesmanship.

The chronicler does not buy the narrative shepherding. Glowing testimonials from pigeons who do not realize they are being fleeced is not corroborating evidence. One must look for facts and signs that confirm or refute the abilities and honesty of the tycoon in question.

Many times, the titan of industry in question may be wealthy by other dubious means, such as not paying a livable wage to employees. Their wealth comes by theft: in this case, building up profit at the expense of others. He may overuse the court system to sue competitors into bankruptcy. We must ascertain facts to see how this individual became wealthy. Do they use illegal means or take shortcuts? If so, their wealth does not come from ability, but deception.

They may spin narratives to hide the true method of their success, but it is propaganda and the chronicler must look for facts that both confirm, but also refute the theory. Weighing both paints a more accurate picture of reality without resorting to demonization or deification.

We must understand the battlefield: there are illusions obscuring reality. We need to find reality knowing full well what we sense is our perceptions of reality as well as our interpretations of it. Once we learn to refrain from interpreting reality, we can focus on adjusting our perceptions. We are looking for facts in reality and amid those truths there will be various kinds of lies. We must verify each fact to separate truths from lies.

Once we know what makes an event or environment newsworthy, we present the fact of it to the public. We produce dossiers that are simple and written in plain language. These are more than mere informational files: these are maps of reality for others to use in their daily lives. We write them with the intent to provide an archive that can explain the present to those in the future, but to those receiving it in the present, the information can enhance their lives or even save it. There must be utility to the dossier with information that is both reliable and valid.

We are shedding light on reality and truth. We are providing the tools for others to know what the reality and truth of their surroundings happens to be, so that their own perceptions and interpretations can be better aligned and thus, be better prepared.

It is not about creating converts, worshippers, heroes, or villains. It is not about creating a pecking order. It is not about offering excuses or justifications. It is not about fear-mongering, rage-making, or putting a sunny spin on rot. It is not about appeasing authority or mobs.

It is about the facts of reality that will find us the truth. Nothing more and nothing less.

Knowing the differences alters our perspective and understanding of our environment and inoculates us against propaganda and lies. We can compare reality to the interpretation of it from various sources, understanding that each interpretation is flawed and incomplete by default. For instance, during times of civil unrest, there will be at least two sides vying for power and control. Both will present a narrative where they cast their side as morally superior to their rival in power. Traditional reportage would report on each side's narrative, often taking one side over the other; usually based on which side had media training and a public relations firm advocating its cause.

However, narrative is not factual information. It is not raw reality, but an interpretation of events. The purpose of the chronicler is not to indulge or validate any side, but to present enough factual evidence for an audience—regardless of on what side, if any, they fall—to understand the situation. One way to present information is to create an image with vetted facts.

Artistic perspective and the visualization of events

Perspective in art is the way painters and illustrators translate reality on to a canvas: they understand that to visual angles, there are ways to represent them, or, more precisely, *translate* them artistically. Far away objects are represented as being *smaller* than objects up close. A low viewpoint makes it seems as if the audience is looking up as it is not aligned with the path, just as a high viewpoint makes viewers seem as if they are looking down.

A mosaic of facts creates a map and a portrait of any given event: the point of a report is to give a complete picture of an issue from various *perspectives*, but not various narratives or opinions: for example, what are the consequences of a city's employment level on the local government? How much more do they need to spend versus how much tax money do they lose? What are the consequences for white-collar workers, versus the homeless? What does it mean for migration to and from the city in question? Does the city see an increase in loans and remortgages? Do more students drop out of high school or university?

While it may not seem as if the chronicler is also an artist, presenting factual evidence paints an accurate picture of the environment without need to use color or narrative to shade the facts as they speak for themselves when they

are in context. Translating reality requires an understanding of various levels of information and how they interact with one another. It requires the reporter to look at seemingly unrelated elements to find new connections. For example, when there has been a crime committed, from robbery to domestic violence, what are the costs for policing, courts, healthcare and the legal burdens of all sides of the event? How does each function and what is the process? What is the conviction rate? What is the average sentence and how long do those convicted serve out those sentences? Like an artist who shows distance by size, the reporter does the same with facts: what is up the road in this series of events? What happens to the children of victims of crimes and those whose parents are incarcerated? What is the cost to the system and the families?

Once we are presented a chain of facts, we begin to understand social rituals, assumptions and see where the system works and where it fails, without having our understanding distorted or artificially confined by narratives with designated heroes, victims and villains. The facts make the reality of the situation self-evident and different facts have different ramifications for different people and groups. We do not impose a narrative on others; we have respect for their own wants and needs to allow them to find the facts they require to make an informed decision. A reporter paints a picture with facts as others interpret the landscape for themselves.

Understanding time and space

Events do not happen in a vacuum. They do not happen in a simple, clean, or linear order, either. There is an intersecting of lives that occurs and when you are gathering information; you are finding information in a chaotic and cacophonic environment. You will be dealing with a variety of sources: some have vested interests, media training, psychological problems and publicists spinning a narrative to best suit their clients. You will be given press releases and often, be pressured to sign nondisclosure agreements in exchange for access to an individual. Other times, someone's attorney will advise them not to speak to the press, yet you will still have to find the facts regarding their situation, whether or not you interview them. You will be dealing with unequal sides of a conflict where one side has hired a pricey public relations firm and has given hundreds of interviews and a side with no media training and who has never given an interview before. All of these factors must be accounted for when you are relaying information to the public.

We are reconstructing reality from the information we obtain. We are not telling a story, advocating issues, ideologies or people. We are not dictating how people and events should be interpreted. We are not judging, shaming, ridiculing or cheerleading. We are describing reality to reveal the truth. We need to establish, from the chaos of reality, what has transpired, who is involved, why it happened, how it happened and most importantly, what are the consequences so that we know what needs to be done.

We are mindful of time and space: we clarify a timeline of what happened, when and where. We do not look to blame or villainize; we seek to establish what are the facts of a situation. If crime is occurring in a particular neighborhood at a specific time with regularity, we present the environment to the public: is there poverty, poor lighting and weak security? Perhaps it is in a wealthy area and gangs of art thieves are targeting specific homes. When we are given facts about an area, the public can begin to orient themselves.

It is often helpful to graph out the time and the space to find hidden correlations and then compare and contrast clusters of events so that we do not assume certain problems only happen to a certain group of people or make faulty assumptions based on not establishing a pattern. For instance, many parents are confronted with a high mobile bill when their children travel out of the country and rack up excessive fees, despite warning texts from providers. Many plead their case to a media outlet in hopes the company will reduce the charges. It is not up to an outlet to take sides, but gather information to show what happened. When others are informed, they can take the information to make proactive decisions to ensure they do not find themselves in the same predicament, by asking questions of the company prior to using their services, by asking for certain failsafe measures to be part of their package and by educating their children on their mobile usage.

When a reporter establishes the facts in time and space, the picture becomes clear. In cases of civil unrest, for example, they can understand how past events brought the unrest to the present as they can plan for the future. This is the way an audience can grasp reality: by understanding how close or far away the problems are and how much time it took for the past to catch up to the present, meaning they can allot how much time is need to deal with the issue in the future. The reportage serves as a graph and a planner: facts are given in context and not in a vacuum in the presents.

If, for instance, there are calls for more or less social programs, then we can start to bring far away events up close: what happened to those who received benefits decades ago? Do their children or grandchildren become upwardly mobile, also become dependent on welfare, become destitute, or migrate to another region or country? We compare and contrast various factors, in a chart or graph, taking various scenarios into account. We do not shade facts or explain them with spin: we look at facts and then report them.

When we present a narrative, we are presenting packaged spin. When we present vetted raw facts, we paint a picture of reality. If we do not question where an alleged "grassroots" movement gets funded to get attention, we are enabling misinformation and contaminating the information stream. If we accept a murderer's story of how he or she is searching for the very spouse they killed, we are impeding a solution from remedying the problem. When we present information to the public, we show the precise chaos of reality, what information is still *missing* and orient a public into giving us feedback. Narratives infantilize and placate an audience, priming them for unrealistic expectations; facts mature and compel them to think sceptically and plan a course of action. We engage the news consumer: we gain information and then use what they know and witness to give them a more accurate picture of reality. It is not a one-way form of communications, but a method of connecting to audiences and give them the information they need.

To prevent collective historical or cultural illiteracy, we must give context and show the interactions of the past, present and future. It is important to show how time shifts and evolves to bring changes and the consequences of past actions. We do this in an empirical manner so that other reporters, researchers and academics can use the information in their work. As we will see in Chapter 20, creating empirically sound reports allows both the public and academics to be able to see facts eye to eye and both can connect in a meaningful way.

But when we present a picture of reality, we must be emotionally, structurally and strategically literate. We must understand human emotions and how those emotions conflict and interact. If there are disputes and clashes, how much jealousy is in the equation? How much manipulation? We must also understand how structures of thought work: how does mass compliance work? How do in-groups ensure harmony? Finally, we must also understand strategy: how to successful people and groups in power maintain dominance? Facts are not just numbers; they are emotions,

structures of thought and strategic undertakings. When we begin to explain the why and the how of human interactions, we lift a veil as we hold up a mirror to society. We show the inner workings as we become the curator of the world that we are covering. Our world is limited to our towns, jobs and families: journalism expands that world through facts. People can see similarities and differences and find solutions from different times and places in the process.

Void, One and Infinity

It is not just the past, future and present that offer a news consumer elements to compare and contrast, but also quantity. We can show them the results when certain groups do not have certain elements, when they have one for many (i.e., scarcity) and when they have a glut (i.e., abundance). What is reality for the have-nots? How is it different from the reality of others? What are the patterns of similarities or differences? Often, people attribute ails to scarcity, but if those who have too much are suffering as those who have none, then abundance is not the answer.

We do not assume the reality for one group is the same as the others. For years, pharmacological research treated men and women the same, and used dosages that worked for men the same way they did for women; however, research showed this was not an ideal strategy. The same can go for journalism: the reality, perceptions and interpretations may be different for others. People may perceive bias when none exists. They may have different realities but assume the realities of others are the same. If there are differences, then the facts should paint the picture. We can compare and contrast groups as we quantify the differences. It is a way to allow a nuanced and textured picture to emerge. The goal is to construct reality as we challenge perceptions and interpretations. We should present differences between groups, times and places.

So, how do news producers become a compass and a clock at the same time? By creating measurements through factual reporting so that audiences can understand the zeitgeist and ortgeist. What is the spirit of the times? What is the spirit of the place? Reporting becomes the voice of rationality where people can understand their surroundings as much as their own habits and mindsets. We do not get sucked into our society's sanctioned insanity: we do not foster fear panic, anger, or hatred, but we do not become complacent apologists. We seek facts so that the picture of a solution emerges. We look

beyond our habits and content of thought to see the soundness of the structure of our thought as we note the soundness of society's structure.

Reporters need to thoroughly understand the zeitgeist and ortgeist. They need to be aware of cultural habits and rotes, as they can analyze them and question the truisms that leave society vulnerable to lingering problems. The next chapter explains how to see the systemic problems without becoming acclimatized to them.

Chapter Eight

Method Research

So far, we have been looking at various ways to gather information of breaking events; however, there are times when we wish to understand a situation, event, place, or person more deeply and intimately than mere observation would allow. How does homelessness change a person's psyche? Why are there problems in a certain organization? What is wrong with an industry?

We can interview people, find reports and studies and pick the minds of experts.

Or we can experience it firsthand by going into the eye of the storm as one of those who live the experience.

Many whistleblowers expose corruption in books and articles and are vital sources; however, what they are doing is not empirical: they did not know of the corruption when they joined a group, for instance, such as a cult. They sought employment in a company, only to discover later it was a front for illegal activities. They merely gather what they can and then give the information to an outside party to remedy the problem. This method is a post hoc one where observation is an unexpected part of the plan. Fact-gathering is based more on *survival* than science and the point is to expose wrongdoing and relies strictly on hindsight.

But what if someone went into a company knowing of its ways? They can do more than fly by the seat of their pants: they can form testable *theories* and even conduct empirical experiments to study the nature of the problem at its core. The information here would be invaluable and we can compare and contrast various factors to confirm and refute theories. Once we have left to analyze our findings, we can compare *other* venues to create models of understanding and even manuals of the kinds of problems, issues and breakdowns are common to that element.

Psychology has the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* while law enforcement has the *Crime Classification Manual.* Both these books came about by those in the profession studying various elements to find common threads and discernable patterns.

We can do the same for any other kind of problem or crisis, but only if we go in with a purpose and a plan.

While many undercover police officers immerse themselves in a more dramatic fashion, they do so to find evidence to secure a criminal conviction; however, they are not part of the actual criminal element. Their paycheck comes from the government, not organized crime if they are being above board. There is a safety net and they are still one step removed from the actual world they have been dispatched to explore.

But what if the investigator's livelihood primarily depended on the industry they were investigating? What if they needed to vie for promotions? Would they be removed? Or would they begin to feel the same way those who work in earnest do?

Here, we are in a different kind of element. We are actors living a real-life role and we are doing research. In acting, when a performer lives the role, it is called Method Acting. When we are gathering facts, we can call this version Method Research. The person investigating an issue is doing so by walking among those she is studying for the express purpose of gathering truths in an unfamiliar world.

Method Research and its mandate

Method Research is the way to genuinely and fully immerse oneself in a story as an experimenter turns anyplace into a laboratory to conduct empirically sound experiments. If we are studying the problems in a factory and wish to understand what is happening, we find employment in that factory to see why there are problems and understand its psychological mechanisms as much as the clinical conditions. While there may be financial problems, that in and of itself may not give us a full explanation: perhaps there were numerous opportunities and solutions that presented themselves to those who worked there and yet no one took advantage of any of them.

But perhaps management thought they would receive a government bailout and chose to wait it out. Perhaps the workforce had an antagonistic relationship with management and made demands that exceeded what the company could realistically offer. Perhaps there was an embezzler within the company who drove in an expensive car and employees became envious and did not believe the state of affairs because of it.

If we are outsiders, we can only speculate. If we are immersed in that environment everyday while we are cognizant of our mandate, we can test each theory carefully to get the full account. We can eliminate certain theories, taking away excuses those within the company—and the speculating public—are proffering to find easy solutions instead of the right ones.

It is the way we can humanize individuals as we interact with them. These are not characters in a movie or comic book: these are people with hopes, dreams, flaws and feelings. We are forced to see people as they are, not as artificial constructs who we deify or demonize for the sake of a compelling narrative.

Our mandate is to find the reality of a situation. It is a simple and elegant, yet complicated and overwhelming directive. We see an environment as a clock that needs repair and we are looking at how the parts work or don't, what each gear is made to do and how the pieces fit together, or are beginning to fall apart. We make no assumptions; we test theories that we devise based on our initial research as an outsider. We plan various experiments that can be falsifiable. We are looking to confirm or refute each theory as we go along while we avoid bad experimental design as we do so.

When the real world is your laboratory, but one where you are both the experimenter and test subject, you are also part of the experimental design. *Your* reactions must be recorded. Your behaviors and changes in them are crucial to your research. If you are afraid of a supervisor who has been accused of sexual harassment and workplace bullying, that is an interaction to explore. If you are living on the streets to see how homelessness affects self-esteem, your dejection gives you the roadmap to see how those around you are also feeling.

You are not apart from the others. You are a part of the environment. Emotionality is not to be suppressed, but acknowledged and *studied* rationally. Why are you feeling depressed? Is there a saboteur working on

their colleague's feelings? Have they gotten to you? How? Why? When did it begin? Did anyone warn you? Were they aware? Were they playing their own games? Is this the environment by saboteur or design?

How to work empirically

Before you begin to enter an environment as part of its machine, it is crucial to devise a map and a plan. Who are the central players you are investigating? Who are the leaders? Who are the support staff? Who would likely know the inner workings and gossip? Who keeps the group united? Who is trying to tear them apart?

Making a visual map helps keep focus, but it is also imperative to have enough information to have a series of experiments to conduct, starting from a job interview to the resignation. If you are studying cult recruitment at a campus, it would not be advisable to join the cult, but if you register as a student, you may find that the action is near the dorms or the local pub. You need to find yourself as close to the nucleus as you can get.

But making theories and making assumptions are two different things. We need to avoid deferring to irrelevant factors and focus on finding facts. We avoid appeals to authority; that is, taking the word of an expert as gospel—or over identifying with the authorities in the place that we are researching. We need to find facts ourselves and interpret them based on our observations—but also feelings. Method Research does more than investigate the facts: it explores the mindsets and emotional states of those within a certain confine. It goes beyond the intellectual; it dives into the emotional aspects to see how problems that seemingly are within reach are persistently tossed aside.

Before Method Acting, there was the Stanislavsky Technique—but an offshoot rival known as the Chekov Technique, which had in its beginnings, a more mystical ritual. Actors would perform incantations to "summon" the characters they were set to play and then "enter" the figment to immerse themselves in the thoughts and feelings if the character. These days, that aspect is gone, but a we can be inspired by the original method, not through otherworldly rituals, but by becoming part of the environment we are studying. We are Subject Zero and we can compare and contrast our emotional state to others within the environment, but also with those outside of it. We find our baseline and then record our own changes. We can

measure how we are merging with a system to discover how collective apathy or arrogance has become an issue.

Method Research takes care of the confirmation bias as well: we do not just look for evidence that confirms our theories, but also facts that can refute it—and we are going into knowing full well that we cannot possibly know everything. We compare our emotional state with others, and we may discover that not everyone feels the same way: perhaps management and employees have different emotional states and our job is to find out why.

Before we begin any study, we must ensure that any logical fallacies and assumptions are considered and removed. Just as experimental psychology ensures that they account for the placebo effect and use double blinds, our version must also make certain that we do not make binary assumptions, such as sink or swim or good guys versus bad guys. We look for facts and then see what significance do those facts play in the environment.

There are many variables we may need to study: it this environment one that takes gambles or risks? What is the difference? A gamble relies on chance and the environment aligning to our expectations. A risk involves assessing our internal abilities, studying the environment and then making a plan and actively executing it with a specific goal in mind. A gamble is hoping pouring your life savings at the casino will win you the jackpot. A risk is creating a new invention based on your research that will fill a need that competes directly with an established rival with more financial resources than you have.

When we look at others who take gambles and risks, we must make certain when we are conducting our own method research, that we also take risks and not gambles. We are not hoping to stumble into some desk drawer finding all the information we are looking for; we are looking to make connections with others and assess what they know and what role they play within the dynamic. We may offer suggestions in the workplace and pitch ideas to management. We may even ask for a raise or a promotion. Those are risks, but the more roles we play in a given environment, the more information and feedback we get. We may begin as an entry-level employee and begin to identify with others, but if we are promoted to a managerial position within a few months, we may begin to identify with the other group. We compare and contrast our feelings and experiences and may see that the problem is not just with one group—or perhaps it is neither.

The Game of Go and navigating though ideological battlegrounds

When we are investigating a complex environment, we are working on multiple levels. It is not a simple story; it is one with nuances and multiple levels. We are dealing with both the mundane and the extraordinary. We are investigating the powers above and the followers below. We are exploring the parts, but also the whole.

It should be clear that we are not playing a game of chess, even if we see ourselves as pawns with the goal of getting a promotion. We are not completely like the others and we are not on the same gameboard. We are playing a different game, but it is one waged against reality: it is the game of Go.

It is still a game of strategy, but one where the point is to surround your opponent with its version of pawns (known as stones) until your opponent can no longer make any moves. The stones have no titles. They all work as one toward the same goal of cornering your rival until they cannot move in any direction.

Method Research is the process of surrounding reality until it cannot move and be elusive to us any longer. We are using our experiments to find the truth and fixate it in place until we run out of alternative explanations to fit the facts.

We are looking for the objective reality that explains why and how something is transpiring. This may sound like an impossible task, but it isn't. If we are trying to ascertain why a once powerful company cannot recover despite government assistance and an otherwise strong economy, we can make any excuses and in the realm of opinion, we can proffer infinite number of reasons.

However, most of those reasons are incorrect. There has to be at least one that is the biggest and most salient reason for its downward spiral.

When we enter the lair to study it, we should have a workable theory of no more than eight reasons for it. We test each one: bad workers, bad management, bad relations, poor technology, outsider meddling, bad product, bad image and inferiority to rivals, but we may find that there is a

reason more responsible than the others, and perhaps the other reasons are as a result of the *main* reason.

As we test each theory, we are surrounding reality. If we go in assuming the workers are not up to snuff, but they are hard-working, dedicated and are upgrading their skills with relevant and effective education. We may go through the same training and soon realize the workers are not a factor. We are down to seven reasons and we may find out the ultimate reason is outsider meddling, for instance: the company is the target of activists who are more concerned with their issue than the well-being of a business and have spun a narrative with misinformation. We may further discover that an activist is getting information form someone in the company who works on contract. Once we understand the dynamics, we can proceed with our reports. We know the company has not been diligent in considering the effect of outside agents and we can investigate how the situation came to be in the first place.

But we have surrounded reality by testing our theories one by one—or even concurrently—until at least one reason proved to be the most important one. We can see how it impacted those within the in-group and how their reactions added to the problems or unsuccessful solutions. We are also *witness* to these dynamics: we know first-hand as a trained observer who has gone through the same highs and lows and understands how those emotions drove thoughts and behaviors in certain directions rather than other ones.

How to use Method Research

When you decide on investigating a certain business or industry, it is a good idea to see where possible breakdowns and manipulations can occur and work in a position which gives you access and a bird's eye view of the mundane reality of the environment. For example, working as an assistant in Human Resources or Accounting can show you how people are hired, or how finances are handled. Does the company advertise for positions that do not exist? Does the company borrow heavily as sales have declined? Does a luxury-brand company use the same contracted factory as a low-end one? Do they use lead or cadmium? Often, to discover the truth would take months of building confidences and finding documents as you miss other, more important failings as you are not familiar with the operations of the industry as an outsider.

But as an insider, you *practice* how to function in the environment. You are not looking to stand out: you are looking to blend in beneath notice. What does a grocery store do with unsold vegetables and meat? How does an accounting firm deal with clients with questionable sources of income? How does a private clinic hire its staff? How vulnerable is private information?

Method Research allows you to connect the dots and see hidden connections by observing the environment you are investigating. Where are the rigs? What truths are being hidden and why?

The process of Creative Science

We are social scientists when we are gathering information, but we are not traditional experimental psychologists. We are trained as applied psychologists, but we are not working in the life sciences, but the *creative sciences.* We have a makeshift laboratory and it is the real world. If all the world is a stage, then the Method Researcher's stage is also the laboratory where a show is unfolding in front of him and his job is to interact with the set, props and actors directly to see their reactions, and record them.

This form of research needs planning, but no script. It requires thinking, but also feeling. What is required is not a set of memorized rules committed to memory by rote, but an ability to think actively and quickly, seizing opportunities as they arise, negotiating within a crisis and improvising as you are problem-solving. This kind of research takes practice and it is advisable to begin with micro-experiments as a student. For example, the next occasion when someone asks you for the time, tell them as you are looking at your watch or phone, "I think it is 3 o'clock." Note their reaction, then note the reaction the next time when you look at your watch and say, "It is 3 o'clock" without the qualifier—and then try again telling the time without looking at any device.

Find ways to conduct experiments in your natural environment to record and gain facts on human behavior. The experiments rarely require props or a script. Saying hello with a smile or with a neutral expression will produce very different reactions from people, for instance. Write down the results and then ponder what they mean.

As you manage the art and science of improvisational empirical research, it will be easier and more natural to do it professionally: just as a busker begins on the street corner before he or she turns into a professional performer on

a stage, you must begin your scientific busking as soon as you can: the more versatile and quick-thinking you become as you gain mastery and confidence, the better researcher you will be when you make your official debut.

But research is only one part of the equation; there are others, such as presenting your findings as the next chapter explains.

CHAPTER NINE

MATRIARCHAL AND EPISTOLARY STORYTELLING

True factual information is narrative-free. It does not contain adjectives, persuasion, spin, or a story. We may wish to embellish information, but it is not necessary to do it in a professional setting where an audience is looking for a bottom-line answer to do with the information what they need to do.

Let us ask a simple question:

What is the temperature outside?

If we are factual, we need very little in our reply:

32 ° F/ 0 °C

We can give one, the other, or both, depending on the circumstances, but we offer nothing more than a concrete answer that is relevant, useful, truthful, accurate and timely. Why the person needs to know may be for countless reasons, but they will now be informed that it is freezing temperatures. They may need to dress warmly or take in the plants, but whatever the outcome, they know the weather. A simple and direct question with a simple and direct answer is sufficient. It follows Grice's Four Rules for effective communication, and the job is done.

But many people mistake a verbose and flowery answer with a superior one. They feel the need to meddle and offer more than is needed, making assumptions without evidence. They begin to offer opinions, push their various agendas, or merely try to show off their literary skills and offer superfluous details:

1. *It is so cold that your tongue could get stuck to a flagpole.*
2. *Although it is freezing, it is still a sign of climate change.*

3. *It is too cold to keep your pets out.*
4. *This cold weather should give us all pause as we consider the plight of those less fortunate; and we must demand our governments do something about it.*
5. *There are more important questions to ask other than the temperature outside.*
6. *It is chilly out there today. Wear your woollies.*
7. *It is a sign of a snowstorm. The temperatures are just plunging.*
8. *It is colder in Siberia/It is hotter in Hawaii.*
9. *This cold weather reminds me of the time when I saw a child shivering outside so I gave them my jacket and called the police who said if it weren't for people like me, more children would die of hypothermia.*

None of the above answers deal directly with the question. Each has an irrelevant tangent that attempts to *bridge* the question to a different topic—one that serves the interest of the one who is proclaiming to answer the original question, but in each case, there reply is a "sell" answer, not a "tell" one and each has an underlying reason for it:

1. The responder wishes to show off their literary skills.
2. The responder has a political stance they wish to impose on the person asking the question.
3. The responder is virtue-signaling.
4. Another case of virtue-signaling.
5. The responder is dodging the question as he establishes himself as being morally superior to the one asking the question.
6. The responder has decided to give patronizing advice rather than have respect for the person asking the question and has made assumptions as to the reasons the person asked the question.
7. The responder doesn't know the exact answer and gives vague responses rather than admit they do not know the answer.
8. The responder is dodging the question and is giving irrelevant, if obvious information as a form of deflection.
9. The responder is interjecting a narrative to cast himself in a hero role who is superior to others.

It is the last response that is critical to understanding how to find facts amid *narratives:* you will rarely be given an objective, informative account of events. There is a very good chance the person being interviewed will give

a narrative scaffolding where there will be a pre-packaged *story* about their role in events.

This scaffolding is present in every facet of our lives, and it begins in the bedtime stories we hear as children, the fictional books we read and the shows, plays and movies that we watch. There is nothing wrong with storytelling, but its place is in fiction. When we need to find facts; however, narrative can prove to be a distortion, or worse, part of a scam or propagandistic tool to manipulate others.

We often do not ponder the elements of narrative and yet when we are gathering facts to disseminate to the public, we need to consider them carefully to deconstruct the narrative, break down the elements and then find objective information. An eyewitness may spend an hour or more telling us a detailed account of events, but when we go back to analyze our information, we can discover what we have is not information, but narrative, meaning we have no facts or understanding of what has transpired, only someone's skewed interpretation of it.

The elements of narrative

For narrative to be effective, it must have several emotional elements for it to be effectual; that means that certain facts or events that contradict the narrative will either be ignored, dismissed, downplayed, or distorted to make the story "work."

But how is this even possible?

Simple: narratives are confined structures that allow for very little information, but are heavy on interpretation of the few facts given. In fiction, this kind of structure is not problematic as we suspend our disbelief to immerse ourselves in an author's world. But when we are dealing with real events, these elements distort the view and hide critical information that is essential to understanding both the reality of the situation and its multiple truths.

Narrative standards are simple, while reality is complex and contradictory. Narrative is patriarchal in design, meaning we have a single protagonist unit of a "hero" who is good and right, a supporting cast who are inferior and less interesting than the hero who often needs his meddling and rescuing to

survive and, of course, an evil and wrong antagonist who is the polar opposite of the hero.

In storytelling, this brings plot twists and turns, builds suspense and gives the author fodder to weave a moral along with the action where there is one definable right answer to a problem, several inferior wrong answers shown by the bumbling of the supporting cast and the very evil and one wrong answer pushed by the villain.

When we hear an account of a real-life event, we may often find various sources jockeying for the position of hero—and all too quick to dismiss any opposition as being villainous. We see this artificial division in politics: one side of the equation positions themselves as the champion of the people as their rival is a villain, and vice versa.

We can also see how this narrative structure reinforces racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry: our in-group are heroes as we hold certain beliefs; ergo, out-groups who have a different way of seeing the world must be villains by default.

The narrative structure forces us to interpret events in a specific way: we have slots to fill. The first person or group to come to us will be seen as the heroes. That means that by the conventions of patriarchal narrative, the opposition must be villains for disagreeing with them.

Many hoaxes and war propaganda hinged on narrative assumptions. For example, one December 18, 1990 wire service article about atrocities committed by Iraqi soldiers on Kuwaiti civilians began with this narrative:

> It was a slaughter of the innocents.
>
> In the days that followed their August 2 invasion of Kuwait, Iraqi forces killed more than 300 premature babies by removing them from hospital incubators, Amnesty International reported Tuesday.
>
> The living-giving machines were then looted and shipped to Iraq.

The article went on to describe the source of the peculiar atrocity:

> On October 10, one fifteen-year-old Kuwaiti girl testified before a US congressional committee in Washington that she had seen Iraqi soldiers come into Kuwaiti's al-Addan Hospital and go into a room where 15 babies were in incubators.

> "They took the babies out of the incubators, took the incubators and left the babies on the cold floor to die," she said.

As one Associated Press article on November 28, 1990, recounted:

> An infant's head crushed under a soldier's boot, a retarded girl gang-raped by soldiers, babies torn from incubators and from their mothers' arms and mass graves for babies were stark images in the testimony delivered by four men and two women.

The atrocities were allegedly witnessed by one teenaged girl who testified in front of a US Congress Human Rights Caucus. It seemed as if her account had been verified by credible institutions, but that would later be proven to be untrue. The story was exposed as a hoax. The "witness" was a member of the Kuwaiti royal family who was coached by Hill and Knowlton, a public relations firm hired to gain *military* support form various nations. The gambit worked and her ruse was discovered only after an international coalition of countries sent troops based on the piece of war propaganda.

The hoax was entrenched in narrative: we had a victim who identified villains, with the expectation that "heroes" would come and rescue the victims. Had journalists doubled-checked the FARA registry, they would have discovered that Kuwait had fired US firms to make their case for war; however, the international press relied on narrative, not facts, and certainly had no verifiable proof that any of the claims were true. It was on a single unsubstantiated accusation that thousands of troops were sent to a foreign country to intervene.

We cannot underestimate the persuasive and manipulative power of narrative and how much it can skew and distort our understanding of what we see or hear. We can witness a fight and believe someone was an aggressor when they were defending themselves. We can believe someone who claims to have cancer, but is a con artist trying to fleece people of their money. We can condemn innocent people to prison. We can demonize an entire group of people.

But only if we stick to literary conventions and use them as filters. If we choose to look at the facts and take out the narrative, we free ourselves to see information in other ways. We seek timelines and verified information instead of literary roles, meaning how we gather information changes. We are not looking to confirm theories; we are looking to establish facts. How

those facts are processed by others is up to them: what we are looking to do is to remove narrative bias and provide information.

How patriarchal narrative distorts information

When we are presented with a narrative from a source, we must separate the narrative from the facts if any, that are given to us. We need to see the chain of events, not who is the hero and who is the villain.

In a patriarchal narrative (patriarchal as there is just one hero or heroic group that is the focus of a story), there is a single hero, multiple supporting cast, one or more victims and at least one villain who is creating obstacles for the hero. The focus will be on either the hero, the victim, or the villain. The hero may have endearing flaws, but the villain will be seen as not having *any* redeeming qualities, lest an audience begins to relate to and sympathize, humanizing the villain and giving people a chance to decide the villain isn't a villain, after all.

Many hoaxers and con artists choose to play the victim: this brings sympathy, protection as sceptics are shamed for their doubts and a target audience to fleece are primed into a pity scam where they give funds or resources to a false victim and then feel superior in helping a weaker individual, taking on the unspoken role of the hero.

For example, in 1999, Kristen Clougherty, a 26-year-old South Boston woman claimed she was dying of ovarian cancer and there were fundraisers for her, netting her $40,000. Her fundraiser had been mentioned in *South Boston Online and* it had been uncritical, but filled with narrative of her heroes helping their "great friend." Had anyone covering the event asked to speak with her oncologist, they would have had some clue that what she was presenting was not the truth. Those who fake cancer, such as Burlington, Ontario woman Ashley Anne Kirilow, went so far as to pluck her eyebrows, shave her head and lose weight. One newspaper columnist, Kim Stacy, wrote about her non-existent cancer with gripping narrative. One of the most important red flags is the use of narrative conventions instead of facts in a source's account of events: the more story-like the narrative, the more the account needs scrutiny. Why is it so important for the source to establish a pecking order where they must be seen as a hero or victim? Why aren't the facts enough to establish what has transpired?

Patriarchal narrative tries to force roles: we cannot debate the decrees of a narrative in a story. The hero is the hero because the author has established this role. That is the way of fiction. In reality, it is an entirely different matter. A man who punches another may claim he is a hero for doing so, while the one who is punched insists that he is a villain—and while his family, sensing he is about to be charged for his actions, may begin to insist he was duped or confused, hence trying to establish him as a victim. The patriarchal narrative discourages the blending of roles, while reality has no logical or physical confines to establish that there are even roles in the first place.

What we need are facts. We need to know the relationship between people, how they interact with each other, what other elements were at play, what was said, what transpired and the consequences of their actions. We do not require narrative to investigate or relay information. If, for instance, a man pushes a woman he doesn't know onto an ongoing subway where she is killed, the actions paint the picture. We do not need to enhance any elements, nor try to present the woman as a saint. She may have been on the way to rob a bank for all we know; the point is that a man has caused the death of another. How society chooses to deal with it is another matter. We give a complete account of the facts and make them part of the record: the more relevant facts we give, the clearer the solution becomes.

The problem arises when we focus too much on the content of a message, rather than the structure in which we disseminate the message, but what is the difference?

Structure Versus Content of a Message

Narrative relies on the structure of disseminating information. Factual information relies on the *content* of the message. When we rely on a narrative, we are trying to shade meaning, persuade, argue for acceptance of morals and gain agreement. Factual presentation requires none of these elements. Either twenty people were killed in a train wreck or not. Either the Republican presidential candidate won or the Democratic rival in a two-candidate US presidential race. Either a cult is recruiting on a university campus, or it isn't. Either there is more employment in a city, it is steady, or people are losing their jobs and we can further look at the kinds of employment there is in a region (full-time, part-time, contract, benefits, white collar, unionized, executive, etc.). The more information we have, the

better picture we can see without superfluous flourishes, such as color or narrative.

How much disposable income do citizens have? What is the difference in the salary between a company's highest-paid employee or lowest-paid? How many people died of cancer in a given month compared to last month, last year and last decade? How many people were born in a neighborhood this year? How many people are visually-impaired? How many women earn the same as men in the same job? These are facts. Taken together, they tell a narrative-free story on their own. They are the content-based and can be disseminated directly. An audience can cross-reference information to find connections, patterns and new information on their own: information that would not have been obvious if they had been guided by narrative.

But narrative requires a structure or scaffolding. It uses conventions and trope to immerse an audience and follow its logic. We must root for the hero and be reviled by the villain in a patriarchal structure. How the story is told and why it is told dictates how the narrative will be presented. For instance, a horror movie will have several morally-questionable youth partake in their vices, only to be slaughtered by an emotionally-damaged psychopath. The morals of the horror genre are that those who engage in drinking, drugs and sex will meet a grisly end by someone with greater physical strength than their own. The Final Girl is the one who defeats the villain, but unlike her fallen comrades, she has not indulged in their hedonistic ways.

The structure of the story is presented in such a way to make this moral work: we are presented with the motley crew of young, lively groups of victims and as they are separated from each other, the killer slaughters each one by one, but not before we witness these wayward youth making the fatal error of having done something their parents would have lectured them against, but in the real world, the serial killer's actions would be reviled by the public and few would think to blame those youth for their deaths, even if it is an absolute certainty that in the fictional world of cinema, they have signed their own death warrants.

And it is for this reason why narrative elements are not needed to disseminate information: we do not need structure to guide us; we need facts. If a group of young adults went missing in the woods, we would not waste time pondering whether they were drinking or smoking and hence attracted a killer: there is real danger and time is of the essence to discover their whereabouts.

Facts do not need shading. They need context. They are enhanced by comparing and contrasting them to other facts. For example, if you went for a medical test, it would be helpful to know what is the test and what the doctor is trying to find. If you are given the diagnosis of cancer, you know very little: the type of cancer, its stage, treatment and prognosis give you a more useful picture than if the doctor were to look at you seriously and dramatically tell you that you are very sick and that this revelation is very sad, but you are still a hero. Whenever we are presenting new information, it would be wise to remember that content is more important than structure.

But there are times when we wish to relay different recollections of an event or individual. If we are reporting on various personal accounts, we can use a structure to place those accounts into perspective so that others can compare and contrast those accounts. We have two ways we can handle the information by employing structure: we have the matriarchal structure and the epistolary one. Matriarchal and epistolary methods diversify and broaden perspectives. We will look at each in turn.

Matriarchal Structures

Unlike a patriarchal structure, the matriarchal one treats all players equally: they are all given equal time and the emphasis is on how these players interact with one another. When we wish to outline alliances and rivalries, we may wish to present interviews in such a way that we see how people interact with each other, or in many cases, *avoid* each other. If we are reporting on an estranged family, we can present each side without imposing a pecking order of who people should root for and who they should detest. We are not looking to assign blame, but understand how various actors form alliances or clash. Are they close or far apart? What is each person's recollection of events? When did they meet? What were the circumstances? Instead of pulling small quotes from each person to form a story, we give a larger platform to multiple players about the same event or person and show how each person interacted with the central figure.

For example, if we are chronicling a trial for someone accused of swindling investors with a Ponzi scheme, we would interview the alleged victims, the accused, his associates, employers, employees and investigators and then piece together how these various actors interpreted their surroundings. We may learn that the accused is a *minor* player and there were other factors at play. We may discover a non-obvious *accomplice* or another pattern that was previously undetected. While data journalism looks for big patterns, it

often overlooks the minute details that pull seemingly disparate threads together.

We are not trying to have too many facts or overload an audience: we are mindful of Grice's system of giving as much as is needed, but not more so, or else we miss patterns and are blind to nuances. We are looking at answering many questions traditional journalism did, but the emphasis is on the *how* and the *why*. We are searching for the most salient and simple chain of events that was the impetus for an event, such as a crisis. While there may be several candidates, there will be one or two that are more relevant than the others. With the matriarchal structure, we can see the emotional and psychological "chemistry" that brought the biggest reaction. We are creating a recipe of sorts and by allowing subjects to speak at length in context, we can allow the audience to *feel* those connections as much as they can *think* about them.

Epistolary Structures

The alternate method is using an epistolary style that is without any overt storytelling. We simply present various materials and ephemera relevant to the issue, but present them in an order that is chronological. We do not process information for an audience: we give them the information we have received. Traditional journalism gathered documents and interviews, but then would *process* the information to present a *story* to the audience. We do not have to bother with the narrative aspect at all and can easily forego it: if we could piece together the story with various sources, then so can the audience.

For example, if we are chronicling the bankruptcy of a company, we can do so with interviews, but also court transcripts, stock performances, press releases denying insolvency troubles, PR interviews to outlets as we compare them to internal memos, emails and voice mail. We can compare complaint letters to the façade the company presented, allowing the audience to compare the outside appearances to the internal reality to see how the company faltered, all without the use of a narrative. We give a look inside an event as the audience can explore it on their own: they may wish to look at the outside before looking inside, or compare and contrast them side by side. We respect the audience as we inform them. We verify our information and ensure that we give a textured account of events as they unfolded.

In the old model of journalism, it was up to the reporter to synthesize the facts, allowing for only a few to emerge. The new model breaks the old rules to inform and be timely, but in such a way that the audience can *experience* the events at once. Often, an audience who is given very little information become judgmental and obtuse to emotional nuances: *how could they not know?* is a common question, but the alternative method anticipates the questions that wish to pass instant judgment to demonstrate the pressure and complexities of a series of events. Everyday mundane happenings that we become acclimatized to suddenly become extraordinary ones that are beyond our ability to control. With the empirical alternative, an audience can experience the situation and see through the eyes of those who walked in the same situation.

We are retracing footsteps as detectives, but we are doing so to reconstruct events as closely as we can to the original reality: we are not editorializing or trying to push anyone's agenda. We answer the questions with facts. We present the reality to the audience. We surround them with a recreation of the event and then allow them to walk through it themselves.

No narrative structure is as flexible. The audience may decide there are no heroes, villains or victims. There is no Us Versus Them, merely Us Versus Us. They may see the misunderstandings or the conniving games or they may look for the simple facts for them to know whether to take a risk or keep away.

What we are offer is enough information for them to begin to orient themselves. We can use data from primary sources in many ways, but we can also use interviews to add perspective from other people as they lived through it. The following chapter shows how we can effectively use interviews to achieve those ends.

CHAPTER TEN

HYBRIDMENTAL INTERVIEWING

Traditional journalistic interviewing has never been empirical in design: it was always about getting a "scoop" or a "gotcha". Whether the questions were loaded and could potentially have negative long-term consequences was never considered, nor has the first version of the discipline did not conduct studies to test which questions should be asked, in what order and if there were different or new approaches to questioning that would be superior to the present Gold Standard.

It was a peculiar omission: various other research-gatherers, such as police, attorneys, investigators, profilers and psychologists interview subjects and have developed their own ways of inquiry. Psychologists, for instance, know how loaded language can, in fact, *alter* memories of past events. For example, if two groups of people witness the *same* car accident and they are asked one of two questions:

*How fast were the cars going when they **collided**?*

Or,

*How fast were the cars going when they **crashed**?*

The group who were asked the first question will guess *slower* speeds than the group asked the second question. A single word can alter perceptions.

It can even be more subtle. If two groups of people watch the *same* video of a bank robbery and are asked one of two questions:

*Did you see **a** gun?*

Or,

*Did you see **the** gun?*

The group asked about *the* gun, will recall seeing a gun, *even if none was present.* This discrepancy should not be underestimated: we will need to consider how we ask questions and in what order we do so. An empirical alternative to journalism must be more disciplined to incorporate other methods to create a new interviewing technique.

Spread of Activation in Interviewing

The point of an interview is to get information and very often *primary* information, such as victims of crime and eyewitness testimony. However, memories are not videotapes of reality: they are reconstructed from perspectives, interpretations, narratives and emotions. What we ask, whom we ask and how we ask questions are essential considerations prior to interviewing people.

Aside from loaded language, we need to have a plan when we interview someone. Primary research on the individual helps prepare you. Social media feeds, while helpful and should be used, are, in many ways, amateur public relations. It is the way someone projects an image and increasingly, personal information and happenings have been replaced with prefabricated images and sayings made by third parties.

More helpful, is looking through public records and speaking to those who know the individual in various settings. If possible, observe the person unobtrusively, as you may need a baseline behaviour of the individual. If someone claims to have an illness that is debilitating, it is a good idea to witness them. You are not to stalk the individual, but you do need to know how much of their behaviour in front of your is performance and how much is organic to them.

The preparation is key for many reasons, but the first is to get as much information as you can. Do not waste time on warm-up questions; what you need to do is find ways of triggering their recollection strategically and make the interview *flow*. When a subject feels comfortable and begins to speak openly, a jarring question may unsettle the person, make them second guess themselves, or fluster them.

The way to ensure flow is by ordering your questions strategically. Use your most salient question *first*: what question is likely to set of recollections of events or data? This will be your *orienting* question. You are quietly priming your subject to recall information that is important to your piece.

Spread of activation is a simple process: when we are presented with a word, we are more likely to think of *similar* categories of ideas. For instance, if someone says "bird", you are more likely to think of the word "robin" than "table." When you devise your questions, think of time and space: what concepts are closer together chronologically or spatially? You may start with the newest events first and work your way back to the beginning or vice versa. If you are in doubt of a person's account or narrative, begin at the *end* and then work your way backwards in time as it is more difficult to keep deceptions straight: people have rehearsed their stories and any deviation will require a longer time to think, making inconsistencies easier to notice.

Dealing with Deceptive Sources and the Meaning of Equations

When you suspect that a source is being dishonest, the way you ask your questions is vital to uncovering the truth. Police in investigations, for instances, have their feints and ruses, such as having thick, but empty files to make it appear as if they have amassed more information than they have against the target of the interrogation. They also employ, more controversially, the Reid technique, where often the "good cop/bad cop" system is employed. You are not in the position for elaborate methods; however, but there are other techniques at your disposal.

There are several ways to see an interview and one such way is to see it as a simple mathematical formula:

$$1+1=2$$

What this equation translated hinges on the *equal sign:* both sides are expressing the *same* quantity, but the side on the left is presently superficially different than the one on the right. The left side looks longer with three units, while the side on the left expresses the same thing through a single element. $2=2$.

When we are interviewing someone who may be a deceptive source, we must construct the interview in such a way that we can *balance* the equations of their answers. For every question where we ask for a specific answer, we ask *another* that should give us the *same* answer, expressed differently. We are not just recording their verbal answers, but also the time lags of between the simply posed question and the more elaborate one.

If there are discrepancies between how long it took to answer one over the other, that will become our new line in inquiry. Finding facts in narrative, deceit and propaganda is a method of factual extraction.

For example, suppose you suspect a source is lying about their age. You will now ask this question *twice,* but in different ways. Do not ask the follow-up question right after the first, give it some time first.

Your first question would be simple:

How old are you?

This is likely going to give you an immediate answer without pauses. Your balancing question will now be:

What year were you born?

If the person is honest, this response should be as fast or nearly as fast as the first answer. For someone who is lying about their age, it will take them longer to recall the lie they told and then have to do the math in their head as they reconstruct their fabricated narrative. Note the time differences: chances are very good that if you begin to dig deeper, you will find discrepancies.

People may lie about being savvy businessmen when they are grifters who are employing a Ponzi scheme. They may lie about being heroes when they are merely taking credit for something they did not do. They may claim to be victims when they are trying to fool others into giving them pity or money. They may claim to invent things or create things that they have stolen from others. They may claim to have witnessed something extraordinary or be extraordinary, but they are playing a pity or greed scam. If you suspect someone is not being honest, you will have to pay close attention to problematic aspects of their narratives. There will be a heavy focus on narrative roles and they may feign outrage if you question their lies. It often helps to act out their stories and ask them to demonstrate what they did in front of you. By bringing facts and tangible actions into the interview, they will try to cover up their lies with further lies, but if they cannot account for discrepancies in their timeline or account, it is the strongest possible sign that they employed you in their scheme to pollute the information stream for personal gain or protection.

Sensory-based questions

If the point of the interview is to reconstruct an event from memory, you are trying to trigger hidden memories. There are several ways to slowly nudge information and one way is to help the individual remember details that may trigger important information.

Direct questions may overwhelm a subject at first and once they begin to tell you their version of events, they may become so overly focussed on giving a narrative, that they begin to suppress factual information which may be critical to you. It is wiser to begin with an *indirect* approach, by asking about sensory information first. You are not looking to add colour to your story: you are resurrecting a memory, making note of information the subject begins to associate with that sense. If the person witnessed a bombing as they were dining at a restaurant, there are questions you may ask them:

1. What was the weather like that day?
2. Were you focused on your meal, on your companions, or did you notice anything else?
3. Did you hear the explosion?
4. What were you able to see first after the explosion?
5. How close were you? Could you smell anything after it happened?

These are not frivolous questions, nor should you ask sensory questions all at once. You are, without steering into specific details, asking the person to remember their *perceptions.* You are free to ask more than one sensory question; there is nothing stopping you from asking about sights and sounds before, during and after the event. The point of the exercise is to summon their memory to focus on various aspects of their environment, in the hopes of getting more accurate and detailed information. Once you ask a sensory-based question, carefully listen to the reply and then ask a more substantial question based on anything relevant in their account. It will help you establish a timeline and be able to confirm or refute information. It can also allow you to map out key events and revisit the areas, looking for possible footage, witnesses, or other pertinent information based on the sensory perceptions of those you interview.

Mapping events through multiple sources

Often, you need to interview several people connected to your article. They may be experts or witnesses or even victims of the same offender. It will help to have a large whiteboard or other surface to write down accounts before entering the data in a computer. You will need to see which person has different information, and which ones have the same information that you need to confirm or refute.

If you have witnesses to an event, establish where each person was in the time period in question. You can use a map to pin each location. It is often helpful to visit the locations before and after to determine which questions to ask and then confirm if this account is probable and if there are others who would have the information you need.

It can also be a matter of time: if someone has gone missing, you may interview various people who saw them in the day in question as you map out where the person was at any given time. You are looking for overlooked information and looking for ways to confirm or refute information. You are also determining what was routine and rote from what deviated from the mundane script. You may be looking for vulnerabilities or even contradictions. Any gaps in your mapping may require you to dig and find new sources who could speak knowledgably about the information that you are missing. However you choose to map your information, make certain you do this in a tangible form first before interviewing subjects and then adding information after. This allows you to visualize what has happened. Conflicting recollections during stressful events can be expected and if accounts are all identical, then there may be deception, collusion, or someone who has used misdirection to ensure people focus on something unimportant. Compare your mapping after every interview to notice shifts. Not only will you see how information plays out, but it will remind you of elements that could be easily forgotten.

The mapping questions you will ask will be crucial: you are looking to confirm and refute by comparing and contrasting what each source told you. The order you interview people will be vital: you may pick the source closest to the event—or the one who may have been there the longest, or seems to have the most detailed account of what has happened. The first person you choose to interview will be your *nucleus source:* this individual will serve as the centre of gravity in your interviewing, *even if they are not central to your final report.* Your most detailed questions will be with this

individual. While other people you interview will have new details the nucleus source will not, your questions for others will be based on the responses from this individual. You are weaving a web. You get the most important information from the nucleus and then expand on details and build on the chain of events from the others. The other sources may confirm or refute what the nucleus has told you, but you must build a solid scaffolding of the event and as you approach other sources, you are armed with the account of your first source. Your nucleus is your rough map and then the other sources begin to shade and add more details as you go along. Once you have completed your primary interviews and found other sources, then begin your refined map electronically. Your final version will deviate greatly from your first rough draft.

Interviewing experts

When you are interviewing people whose job it is to study and research, you are dealing with empirically-based information. It is imperative to find out as much about the expert as you can. Do not just read their credentials: read their studies and if they have been expert witnesses in court cases, it is a wise idea to read the court transcripts. Some have written books, but you may or may not have the time or mandate to read them.

You will be asking factually-based questions based partly on your report's subject and partly on what the source studies regularly. You will have to familiarize yourself with their work. You will have to define your terms ahead of the interview. If they use jargon that you are not familiar with, do not try to bluff or look up the term afterwards: ask them to define what *they mean* by the word or phrase's usage.

These interviews are not to speculate or use the source as a prophet or seer. You are asking about how people or events function or breakdown. You seek to know about process, vulnerabilities, as well as cause and effect. Evidence is to be put in context. Hidden problems and unforeseen consequences are also of importance. Have your plan well ahead of the interview and ensure that you have *several* experts to see if there is disagreement. For example, scholars often follow *schools* of thought. Some may believe in nature, while others in nurture. Getting more than one interpretation gives you a plan in your own empirical methods.

There is nothing wrong with stating the deficits in your knowledge when speaking to an expert. Do not try to bluff or compete with your source. Ask

clarifying questions. Ask if there are limits or exceptions. Seek deep understanding and confirm if your understanding is correct. Use examples of how you interpret information and ask if your understanding is correct. Even if you are certain that you comprehend what the expert tells you, always follow-up by confirming it.

But do not blindly appeal to authority: if your research seems to contradict what you are being told, ask and later verify the information given. While some subjects have many experts, other areas have less than a handful. In either case, your expert is giving you perspective, context and many times insights into the inner workings of elements that a general audience does not understand. You are serving as a translator, and it is a good idea to ask questions about *misconceptions* about the subject at hand. Use the expert's knowledge to find any myths or lies to dispel and if possible, ask if there is something that you have not asked, but would be pertinent to know. You may discover a line inquiry in this manner.

Interviewing eyewitnesses

In a social media age, eyewitnesses use their accounts to show footage and relay what they have seen, such as car accidents to mass shootings. Much of the previous cache of finding eyewitnesses has evaporated, but with an empirical alternative, we have the freedom of creating documents of events. We are asking eyewitnesses of their accounts and creating maps and timelines of what has transpired.

We must determine how much an eyewitness saw and if they saw an entire event or snippet. Snippet witnesses may, in fact, be *dupes* of a hoax who counts on someone who sees an event before *or* after it allegedly happened, but did not actually witness the event in question. For example, someone who feigns an injury or has committed a crime may point to a witness to substantiate their claims, but if we question the eyewitness, we discover they cannot carry the account all the way through.

When we interview eyewitnesses, we are to be rigorous in determining their location, what they saw and how much and how they saw. We need to establish what they have perceived and how they have interpreted the events.

We are comparing and contrasting accounts, but there are many considerations to make: were people afraid? Confused? Nervous? Ashamed? Repulsed?

Impressed? A heightened emotional state may give us exaggerated information or misinformation. Are people trying to please or pander? Have they been influenced by some outside factor? Are their memories impaired? Are they children who may not know exactly what they saw?

There may be collusion and if accounts are too similar, we must account for it and should accounts differ, we do not immediately dismiss the conflicting information. We avoid asking loaded questions: we seek to know events and how they unfolded. If there was emotional manipulation, we need to pay close attention to any peculiar variables. For example, during hold ups, some robbers force witnesses to strip naked as the shame and sensory overload confuses people and they are less likely to remember details. If cases where shame has been used on witnesses, a sympathetic approach is vital, but not one where you are melodramatic. Do not belabor the shame. Subtly help your source refocus without making them feel uncomfortable.

If you are able to use a map or photograph to mark locations, ask your sources to show you where they were at the time. Seek to find concrete information and if you are able, go to those locations to see what your source has told you they have witnesses. Do not be afraid to do the legwork to get as complete of a report as possible. You may wish to use Venn diagrams to see overlaps in common threads to pinpoint whether you need to speak with additional witnesses or have follow-ups with others.

Interviewing "tell" versus "sell" sources

More often than not, you will be dealing with sources who try to *sell* you a message or narrative. Business people will try to sell their product, service, business, or their prowess. People trying to avoid going to jail will try to sell you their innocence. Performers will try to gain free advertising and publicity. Governments will try to sell you their policy platforms and candidacy. You are looking for *tell* messages, not *sell* messages and you will have to navigate through various forms of selling. The point of your interview is not to bolster someone, but to get information.

There will be many feints and ruses: you will be insulted by many who will either outright question your ability to comprehend information or take on an attitude of intellectual or moral superiority. They may wish to disarm you through charm, praise and even flirtation. They will prime you, groom you and quietly use soft or hard power to orient you to see the *sell* as a *tell*.

While it may be tempting to take an antagonistic approach and tell them that you see through their ruses, it is better to be cordial, but steer the conversation to factual information. Nodding does not mean you agree with their sell; it means you have heard what they have told you. Ask for many clarification questions and do not lose focus of your mandate.

Many people who use a *sell* message will open with a quirky, outré anecdote to ensure that the narrative colour tells the story they want in public. With social media, they are free to present it there. You can listen to their "story", but you are under no obligation to acknowledge it in your report, unless you discover the anecdote is an exaggeration, distortion, lie, or misdirection and you can deconstruct it then.

Techniques for reticent sources

Some sources are passive and need prodding to speak. They may be nervous, but they may also be hiding information from you. There is also the possibility that their reticence is a *power play* used to control your emotions and make you nervous, upset, or submissive to them. As you are so focussed on their discomfort, they hold the cards and are *studying* you and your reactions.

If they are quiet, shy, or passive, but otherwise honest, it is crucial to put them at ease. That is the reason you need to establish a *rapport* prior to the actual interview. Be upfront with what you are seeking from them. Ask them if they have any questions or concerns first. By seeing their boundaries and motives, you can begin with soft questions about their knowledge and then begin to ask harder questions.

Use a friendly demeanour and do not try to intimidate them. You do not have to be chummy. But establish a professional core. Do not try to entertain them as if they were a spoiled child having to go to the photographer. Ask if they require information from you. If there are pauses, do not feel compelled to fill them. Perhaps they need longer time to formulate an answer: be patient.

If they are being manipulative, remain calm. Allow for long pauses and do not fill them. If they begin to make negative commits, then restate your question to remind them of the task at hand. The less nervous or agitated you are by their behaviour, the less control you lose.

Interviewing evasive sources

Some sources keep their cards close to their chests. They may be hiding information, but often, it is the way they control the interview. Here, you will remain calm and polite, but will require preparation and a more assertive method of asking questions.

Having photographs or documents is helpful. It is also helpful to interview these subjects *last*. Finding others who have information to offer allows you to come into the interview armed with information.

What you are trying to do is confirm or refute information. If they evade questions, ask for the *reason* for the evasion. Do not be afraid to discuss their method as part of your interview. This does not require you to be combative as many will use your provoked frustration as "proof" of your untrustworthiness or belligerence. *I am trying to understand the facts* is an acceptable reply to their evasiveness. Keep presenting information that you have as you then present a gap in your knowledge that they can fill. You can ask if the worst-case scenario you can imagine is the correct answer. If they deny it, then ask what is the truth.

Sources that dodge often parse their words: think carefully of what they are actually telling you. If they try to turn the tables and make accusations about you, merely state you are trying to fill in gaps and remain calm. *I don't know what to make of this situation* is a legitimate response to them. Emphasize the genuine ignorance you have as a result of their evasiveness.

They may also try to deflect attention by bridging and giving irrelevant information, or they may lie to cover up their guilt. Always ask for proof and clarification. In other words, the focus will be on using *follow-up* questions as your primary questions. Be prepared to stay longer than you normally would as often these interviews can become a battle of wills. If you are unruffled by their performance, they may inadvertently say something that becomes a useful line of inquiry. Be patient.

Interviewing sources with psychological issues

There are people who are paranoid, psychopathic, or narcissistic. There are people who are depressed, anxious, or bipolar. There are people who are schizophrenic or have anger issues. There are those who always blame others and those who gaslight their designated victims. These sources will

challenge you in two ways: the perceptions and interpretations are distorted and their rapport with you is always on the line.

If you know or suspect your source has a psychological issue, you must plan carefully. People who are narcissistic see themselves as superior and will inflate and exaggerate their accomplishments as they put down everyone else's. They will see everyone as being jealous. Paranoid individuals do not trust others as a general rule and see everything as a slight or conspiracy theory. People who are depressed may either try to entertain you, be overly reckless and impulsive, or may see the world in darker terms than is the actual reality. Those with phobias and anxiety issues will see heightened danger than is what is the actual case. Psychopaths will try to manipulate you and use you as their proxy.

Before conducting your interview, listen to their narratives. Ask them about people around them and their thoughts regarding them. Get a baseline reading. If you suspect the individual has flawed perceptions, you will need to consider how much of what they perceive is accurate and how much is misaligned with reality. You will need to verify what they tell you with more care, but do not necessarily dismissed what they say. They may be correct, and you can use what they give you. They may see things in exaggerated terms, meaning the reality will be muted, but otherwise accurate and you will adjust the degree accordingly. Ask for them to give you *examples* of their claims. As for clarification and verifiable instances. Do not dismiss or judge them, nor do not try to "correct" them or belittle what they have to tell you. Politely ask for proof and explanations so that you better understand their perspective. Ask for the origin of the information they have received and if it becomes clear what they say is too tainted to use, end the interview calmly and politely.

Interviewing combative and fearful sources

Some sources are aggressive and mean-spirited. Sometimes the reason is they are nervous and distrustful. Sometimes they are bullies. Sometimes they are controlling, and their weapon of choice is various forms of emotional and intellectual intimidation. They gain control by wearing down their target and have them defensive and looking inward for self-protection.

First, you must determine if their combativeness is the result of their fear or their cunning. If it is fear—regardless if they are combative or displaying signs of apprehensiveness, then you must show an open and friendly

demeanor and tell them they are free to ask *you* any questions to put them at ease. You can begin to ask about their emotional state. Focus on emotionally-based questions. Ask about their emotions and then ask a question that relates to both your subject and their *feelings*. When they give you a response, reword the response and reflect it back for confirmation. If you are not judgemental and remain neutral, their fear should ease. If they seem to collect themselves, then go back to your original strategy of questioning them.

If they continue to be abusive, they are trying to provoke you. Remain calm and state that they can say things civilly and they will get the same response. If they make accusations or insult you, be unphased and ignore the insults as this is strategic feint meant to cause emotional harm. If they press you for your reaction to their insults, merely state they are free to feel whatever they wish, but you need information from them all the same.

If they see their games and escalation have no power or control over you, they will either end the interview, make threats, be belligerent, or complete the interview. If they leave, that is a fact that becomes part of your report. If they threaten with law suits or destroying your career, remind them that you are recording the interview and you have said nothing inflammatory or untrue. If they continue the interview, ignore the brooding and continue, with particular focus on *what areas of discussion* triggered their outburst as this will now be the focus of your line of inquiry. Always note which questions triggered an *emotional response* and *strategic manoeuvre* as this is information in and of itself: it shows the critical facts are slumbering and their words and actions are meant to serve as a fortress.

Interviewing whistleblowers

This kind of source is extremely problematic: there may be safety or legal issues to consider. They may have ulterior motives for disclosing the information, such as a vendetta. They may be a proxy for someone else who has manipulated them into playing a hero. They may have delusions of grandeur or imagine themselves as the avatar of humanity—even if the information they give you is crucial.

You are often dealing with someone who is reckless, impulsive and prone to fantasy-narrative. Other times, you may believe they are paranoid, but they are rightly afraid as their consequences of their actions may destroy their lives. Some may see themselves as a saviour rescuing humanity, while

others have decided to end a corrupt or dangerous practice on their own. They may be recklessly naïve or brilliantly cunning, and they often will have demands they want you to abide. The romanticized ideal of the whistleblower can lead to many unexpected problems, and it is important to devise your strategy before conducting your interview: you must see the situation realistically and not as a cinematic adventure.

You also need to consider their well-being for exposing dangerous, yet important information: you will need to corroborate what they say as those who are indulging in illegal and immoral activities will retaliate against them. By shoring up your facts, you are not just informing the public, you are providing a vital shield to someone who has risked their career and finances to warn the public. Whistleblowers require a careful strategy in interviewing and making the process as transparent as possible.

If the individual has important information, you must still proceed carefully. You will need to assess this individual and the motives for their actions. Often, they are not whistleblowers by altruistic choice: they may have *benefitted* from a scheme and now they have either been cut out, are in trouble with the law and are now using a card to play to get themselves out of a scrape, or they had romantic feelings for a confederate and the relationship has soured. You will absolutely need to determine the *backstory* and events leading up to this singular form of confession.

If the person has had a role in the scandal, you will still need to account for it. Do not deify or suppress information that goes against their narrative. What they tell you is vital, but you still need to look at the situation realistically. Their conscience may have gotten the best of them, but you will need to ask questions regarding their role in the past. You do not need to judge them or chastise them, but it is imperative to understand their role as they may be hiding the extent of their involvement or hide their own dark deeds that may be even *worse* than the sins they are exposing. Your questions will focus on understanding the events that led up to their ultimate decision to break ranks. This does not mean what they tell you is not vital or useful, but it does tell you how to present the information and where to go to verify it.

On the other hand, these people are also vulnerable to being dismissed as "disgruntled." That may or may not be the case, but even disgruntled people have information to share and they may be disgruntled for a reason. It is the facts that are the focus of your investigations.

However, some people are *pseudo-whistleblowers:* they exaggerate the importance of their information. They may be leaking information to force a certain outcome. They may be in a power struggle and are in the weaker position. They may wish to best a rival or punish a superior for overlooking them. Worse, their employer may be the one who sent the whistleblower to you to test-run information in a public domain. You will need to ask questions of the information's *provenance* and establish the chain of events, making any careful note of parsing, evasiveness, gaps, or spin.

Some whistleblowers have a personal narrative and have cast themselves in some sort of hero. The problem here is that they are driven by their romanticized perceptions. They will dictate to you the narrative, even if the reality is different than their perceptions. They may exaggerate the importance of their information. They may villainize people to a greater extent. They may take guesses and speculate who is to blame, even the person's role is very different than their interpretation. Here, you will need to ask for their *reasoning*: how did they come to these conclusions?

You will need to do all of this as you also establish timelines, facts, events and wrongdoing. You will most likely require multiple interviews with the source, and you will need to establish context of the information. These individuals may have something to gain or perceive that they will once the information is made public. They may have signed a nondisclosure agreement and are risking punitive retaliation and may ask to remain anonymous.

Your strategy will hinge on many factors and more so than other kinds of sources. It is vital to understand possible motives before you begin the interview.

Interviewing those who fall within Patriarchal role designations

In an alternative model, we do not look at narrative, but there are times when a person falls into the category of villain and victim. The events are not in dispute, but you need to find information without becoming entangled with narrative. We will look at each kind of source in turn.

Someone who has harmed another person or group is seen as a *villain.* They have either broken the law or done something that has negatively altered another person's life. They may deny wrongdoing, even if guilt is evident,

they may blame others for their transgressions, they may provide excuses as to why they were helpless to stop it, or they may own up to their wrongdoing.

You will need to plan your interview carefully: someone may seem contrite and willing to admit wrongdoing, yet they parse their words and dodge the actual act. If you are interviewing a villain, it is essential to interview others before you tackle the interview. From those who stopped the individual (courts, police, whistleblowers, witnesses) to the victim, these are one level of sources. The next layer is those who would *advocate* for them as to see whether the person has mitigating factors, or if they have been enabled by those who would rather be in denial of a problem than confront it. If they have an attorney, they are the *next* layer to interview. Once you have gathered enough sources, begin to map a picture of this individual. *Then* interview the person.

You are gathering information. The person will have a narrative ready and will be trying to read you as much as you are trying to read them. Be polite, calm, but firm. If they spin information, have counter information ready. You do not need to be combative, but you do need to be assertive. Ask for corroborating evidence and restate what they have told you in different words as you reflect their answers. Often, by reflecting their statements, they will see the gaps in their logic and their contradictions in their accounts. If they change their story, you have managed to show where their deceptions are hiding.

On the other hand, victims of wrongdoing have their own special circumstances. While there are those who deceive by claiming false victimhood, if you have established the individual was wronged, you will have to determine several factors: do they blame themselves for what happened? Do they feel scared or ashamed? Their perceptions may taint their accounts and often, they will see themselves as weak. You must approach them carefully and not ask loaded or judgmental questions.

Here, a less formal and looser form of interviewing is preferable. Allow for them to speak longer. A less structured interview allows for you to assess their frame of mind and see the gaps in their stories. Fear and extreme stress causes for mistakes and inability to remember certain details as other details capture their imagination. You will still need to be as vigilant in verifying information, regardless. What you are looking for is factual information. You should also interview those in their inner circle to get more information

to portray a more nuanced picture. There will be times when their associates have distanced themselves from the individual as they do not wish to be depressed or burdened. This is not a negative reflection on the harmed individual and should not be seen as such, but it may indicate that fair-weather friends and family have decided to walk away.

If you are interviewing someone who has rescued or saved someone else, allow the facts to paint a picture of their actions. While they may be heroic, take care not to aggrandize the person or not use critical thinking. It is important to gain information, not give praise. We are trying to find information. Ask questions about the possible dangers and their actions. Establish timelines and determine the level of risk the individual took and if there were others who were also involved, but have not received proper credit. Try to cast as wide of a net as possible to paint a portrait of what happened and how the individual factored in the events in question.

Interviewing children

This can be one of the biggest challenges as you are dealing with those whose understanding and experience are limited. They may be traumatized, and their parents and guardians may put strict ground rules and may try to speak for the child themselves. Do not forget to get *permission* from their parent or legal guardian to speak with them and/or take pictures of videos of them. Written permission is desirable to prevent disputes later on.

Here, delicacy is essential. Your demeanour should be gentle, friendly and simple. Do not traumatize the child, nor guide them toward misremembering details. An *indirect* approach is key in certain events, such as having the child draw or play. If they have witnessed something, or their plight is newsworthy, do not push them beyond their comfort or capabilities.

It is also important to note that children have different cognitive abilities at different stages. Jean Piaget had marked four different stages; however, as the first stage deals with infants and toddlers, let us focus on the other three stages of development:

Preoperational (8-24 months-7 years): Children can think symbolically, meaning they may be able to illustrate what they know. They develop memory, meaning they will be able to recall events, often *more* vividly than adults, which is the upside. The downside is their logic is not fully formed. While they understand concepts such as the past, present and future, they

have trouble understanding cause and effect. Comparisons are often shallow, faulty and their understanding of time is often problematic. Finally, they are egocentric and have difficulty understanding certain concepts and may assume you know the same individuals that they know.

Concrete operational (7 to 12): Children have matured to be less egocentric and more logical, as they become cognizant of the environment around them. They also can empathize and know their thoughts and feelings may not be shared by others; however, abstract or hypothetical thinking is more likely beyond them than not.

Formal operational (12-adulthood): Abstract and hypothetical thought begins here, but be aware that not everyone reaches this stage. Teens can form theories and think of various scenarios; however, they still lack experience and understanding that experience—the testing of their theories—brings.

Take age into your equations and devise your questions accordingly, always aware that children's ability for recollection can be distorted, but do not necessarily dismiss information. Verify as much as you can and thank the parents for allowing them to interview their child.

Impromptu interviewing

Sometimes you will not have time to prepare: the opportunity comes immediately, and you do not have an opportunity for a follow-up. There will be no charting or research, but to reject the opportunity would not be in your interest. You may not even have time to devise questions, but establish how much time the person is willing to speak with you for and then devise your strategy immediately. If you are pressed for time, what is the basic information you require? If you have more time, establish a rapport as you assess what this person knows and how they see the world. Do not forget the basics of getting their name, including the spelling and any other important features. These days with social media, chances are great that you will be able to follow-up with them at a later date. But if that is not an avenue open to you, then try to provoke answers with focussed questions as much as you can. Walk with the person, buying as much time as you can. Keep your demeanor friendly, but stress the seriousness of the interview. Your strategy will be cruder, but if you can get to the core of the issue, push as much as you can with the time that you are given.

Media training and seeing interviews as modified speeches

You will often deal with sources who have media training. They will try various techniques to present a narrative unchallenged to you. They may "bridge" their answer with another answer that is irrelevant to your initial question, but it is the message or quote they wish to convey and have marked you as a proxy to their prepackaged message. You are not to accept narratives without question. You are interviewing someone to get pertinent information from them. When given a narrative, begin to deconstruct their story or message and begin to establish factual information, looking if their narratives conflict with the information you have. They may spin information to keep an image or reputation unscathed, but their explanation is secondary to the reality you are trying to find.

There are many ways of keeping a narrative unchallenged: the subject may become angry, belligerent, insulting, offended, or even weep. These may often be *ruses* to prevent you from approaching unflattering aspects of their past actions and deeds. You do not need to be combative, nor do you need to be defensive, apologetic, or ashamed. Keep a calm demeanor and ask why they are responding to your questions in that way. If they accuse you of not believing their story or trying to cast them in a negative light, tell them the truth: you will vet everything salient they have told you, and you are not judging them. The more information they can give you, the better it is if their account is accurate.

Many people are well-rehearsed with giving media interviews and it helps to see how to bypass their methods to find information. An interview, in many ways, is a *speech.* The audience is never just the reporter: but a *larger* audience, regardless of media. It is an interrupted speech and one where they are sharing the stage with others, but it is still a speech. If that is the case, then it helps to determine what *kind* of speech they are giving and to plan the strategy accordingly.

1. **Impromptu source:** The source has not done any planning or rehearsal. The interview may have been unexpected, or they are not the sort who plans. Their responses may be scattered and fragmented and even ramble at times, but if they are giving an impromptu interview, then you must carefully guide them by organizing their thoughts with your questions, but not in such a way that you are dictating their answers or being overtly authoritative where they either wish to defy you, or they try to

please you and the responses become less useful. Ask shorter questions and allow for more time for them to answer you. A spontaneous interview is likely going to give you more information, as it seems more casual than other kinds.

2. **Extemporaneous speaking:** The individual has planned their answers carefully. It may seem relaxed, and the individual will give eye contact, but it is often the sign of experience, media training and strategy. The source will be prepared to dodge and very often, will inject an anecdote, hoping to dictate colour into your piece. They will cultivate a persona, be mindful of how they dress and will have a narrative they wish to impose. They have built a fortress, meaning there is information they possess that is crucial to know, but they are not willing to part with it to give to you. Here, strategy is the key and is prior research. Who is their publicist? What is their skill set? Where is their likely weaknesses? What information do you need from them? If possible, discover something about them about their distant past. It does not have to be a deep, dark secret, but poring over their yearbooks discover they played in a school band will suffice. Bring it up before the interview casually as you are open about doing your homework. Quietly positioning yourself as someone who looks beneath the surface and use the various interviewing techniques discussed in this chapter, as you take away their centre of gravity and ask questions as they try to rebalance and orient themselves. Subtle unpredictability with a polite and relaxed demeanor will allow you to push deeper to either find the hidden information, or at least begin to know where to look.

3. **Scripted speaking:** The individual has deferred to others to tell them what to say. Their attorneys may have instructed them on what they should and should not say. They may have been coached by a parent or a spouse. They are acting as a proxy, or they are being micro-managed by a PR or crisis management firm. They will be tightly guarding a deeper secret, or they do not interview well and are too afraid of outside eyes. They will be tight-lipped and will repeatedly restate what they have said if you ask any probing or follow-up questions. This is a delicate interview and chances are great that the interview will produce nothing of value. You have several options in this case: if you believe the person is not under their own free will and is being threatened, you may try to establish a rapport and quietly ask for them to give you a sign that they are under duress. If that is not the case, or they do not

confirm that theory, you may require a different approach of indirect questions that *surround* the issue they are supposed to speak about, but goes off their script. The questions should be soft, non-threatening, but slowing move around and inch toward the information you require. Ask about those who were witness or would be in a position to know the same information. You may need to speak with more people to reconstruct what information this source knows. You are veering off the script in a less direct way, but make careful note of nonverbal cues of your source—and of anyone in the same room with them. Do not be afraid of interviewing their minders as well, though expect the interview to be halted by a controlling minder.

4. **Memorized speaking:** The individual may not have media training, but they have prepackaged a narrative and an image and will regurgitate whatever narrative they believe is advantageous. They may not have a minder or a publicist, but they have an agenda and will use various feints, ruses and misdirections to avoid the revealing of inconvenient information. Here, strategy is key, as is conducting a relaxed, if unpredictable interview. Allow them to relay their contrived anecdote uninterrupted and then ignore it for the rest of the interview and in your work. They will be focused and determined to tell it and any deviation from it will distract them and make them redouble their efforts, wasting time. Often, the anecdote is silly and is used to hide more troubling information. Many grifters and con artists are practiced memorizers and it is important to look for holes and flaws in their stories to see what they are planning to do and how.

Each kind of speaker presents their own challenges. Know how experienced they are with interviews as it will help you gauge how to approach the interview. It is not helpful to be in awe or look down on a subject: you are dealing with another person, and mutual respect is the key to allowing yourself to be connected and emotionally open to interview them without becoming overly sympathetic and falling for possible deceptions and games.

Hybridmental interviewing

When you have a source willing to speak with you, you will need to find out as much as you can about the individual prior to the interview. Face-to-face interviews are superior to all other forms. Video conferencing is second best. Telephone interviews are less desirable and email interviews give you

no guarantees that the individual you are interviewing is the person in question; however, there may be times when you will have little choice in picking the type of interview you can conduct.

You will need to determine the profile of the individual: are they a snippet witness? A nucleus source? A whistleblower? A newsmaker? A hoaxer?

Once you have a theory, you will need to determine the kinds of questions you will need to ask them. What is the point of the interview? What information can they provide?

Chart what information they are likely to provide so that you have a visual map of what strategy you will take.

The strategy you will use will be a multi-layered one: if you are dealing with a combative eyewitness, you will need to devise questions that deal with both their personality and their knowledge base. You will need to establish how they perceive information and how they interpret it. Before you begin the interview, it is helpful to find clues about how this individual sees the world. Ask friendly questions not related to the topic as a baseline. For example, if they are driving to meet you, ask about their drive, or if the venue is truly convenient for them and if not, if the interview should be moved elsewhere. What you are looking for is the tone of the responses. Are they measured? Angry? Rude? Nervous? Have a compulsion to brag?

When you begin the interview, you will be creating a *hybrid* interview: you will use several techniques to find information, even for a straightforward interview with a rational and reasonable person. If they wander into a tangent, it is not always necessary to cut off their detour as often *more* pertinent information with come from their unexpected stream of consciousness. Record the interview as you write down what they told you, marking important places for investigation and follow-up.

Keep calm. Do not make accusations or judge, regardless of what you feel. If you are sceptical, offer facts which contradict the account. What you are doing is determining whether or not you need to *switch* strategies or take the interview to a more *detailed* level. Your interviews are *incremental*: you begin by establishing questions and working toward the hard and detailed facts.

This can be dubbed *hybridmental interviewing.* You are using a web of various strategies as you ask questions which surround the subject of the interview. Aside from the traditional 5W's and How questions of traditional journalism, you are on a fact-finding expedition: the two most important questions to answer are the *whys* and the *hows.* Those answers require taking into consideration a person's behaviour, human nature, the subject of the interview and the purpose for it. You are creating a scaffolding. It requires putting sources at ease as you give them the time and space to speak.

The most useful ability for an interviewer is the ability to know which kinds of questions to ask and this will require experimentation. It is helpful to interview people you know, record the answers and try to find better ways of asking questions.

One exercise is to ask a small group of people to watch the same short film at the same time and then have them answer several written questions without consulting each other. Each person should get the same kinds of questions, but asked in different ways. See which questions gave the best and most detailed questions and then have others watch the same video and then ask questions verbally one-on-one without anyone in the same room. Note the differences in responses and then write down your observations.

Then make it a habit of asking people questions, from friends to classmates to strangers. Learn which questions give the most informative answers and then develop a style that is natural to your own talents. Do not be afraid to have a distinct style and specialty as it will guide you to excel in different and new areas of research. Your questions should be your signature. You may excel at interviewing children, mathematicians, eyewitnesses, combative sources, or deceptive ones. The questions you ask should cultivate your area of expertise.

Interviewing is more than eliciting answers: it is your way of re-building information, from an event to a person. The source is a *living* source, meaning this is a dynamic one who can offer more information than a document. It is imperative to put your source at *ease*: very rarely is a combative style helpful and often shuts people down as they refuse to give you any more information. The theatrics are embellishments. A relaxed subject is more likely to connect with an interviewer. If they do not feel judged, they will offer more information. Listen carefully and tailor your questions carefully. Do not waste questions, or use long ones. You should speak 25% of the time and no more. If there is a silence, do not feel

compelled to break it. The source will break the silence and is more likely
to give you more information to fill the gap that you hadn't.

Interviewing is a delicate skill that requires emotional intelligence and the
ability to read nonverbal cues. How tense is the person? Are they
intoxicated? Do they try to sit higher than you to look down on you to
intimidate? Note their parlor tricks and feints: do they try to deflect your
attention away from certain areas? What are their base assumptions and
biases? How slow or fast are they speaking? Note everything and then piece
both the verbal and nonverbal cues together to build a composite of the
person. If you have follow-up questions or a second interview, make use of
what you learned before, as it is certain they will do the same with you.

Being prepared before an interview is essential: looking for ephemera and
online archives and databases may give threads for you to use in a
meaningful way. You do not have to bring up every piece of information,
but if there is a pattern, then you have information to form better questions.
For instance, does the interview subject have unknown convictions? Have
they changed schools frequently in the past because of poor grades or
behaviour? If so, how does the previous patterns of behaviours interact with
the current situation they find themselves in? By using a hybridmental
approach, asking tiers of questions allows you to decide how much you need
to push and how much previous information you need to use in you
interview. By creating levels of questions, you can set *goals* for yourself:
each level should have its own purpose and mandate:

Level One: Confirming information, such as name, position, expertise.
Level Two: Findings, experiments or research they used.
Level Three: Their experimental designs, possible alternative findings.
Level Four: Significance of research and its limitations.

Create several goals per interview, if possible and it may be easier to use a
Kanban-type board to keep track of what information you have, what you
still need and any contradictory information you have received (see Chapter
14). If keeping close inventory of information, you can better visualize your
story and create more useful questions to ask.

By seeing interviewing as a form of empirical information-gathering, you
will be able to ask better and more useful questions in your line of work.
You will quietly jog memories and discover information that social media
feeds do not have. Questions are the shovel that dig out facts from minds

and they are a valuable tool to research and to connect to other people as you begin to understand human behaviour in a practical forum.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Journalism is applied psychology. It requires emotional intelligence to decipher events and people without falling for propaganda and cultish feints and not rely on scripts or rote methods such as memorization, mimicking or modelling. It is the way to avoid othering and other forms latent biases as we learn to understand human behaviour without judgement or prejudice. We are there to strip away narrative, find information to analyze and then present to the public. How they make use of the information is dependent on their wants and needs, but the reporter's job is to demystify the chaos and often, we are mystified by the behavior and words of other people.

To understand the thoughts of others, we need to understand their habits and rituals and the base assumptions which drive them. When we do not try to label others, we begin to explore the reasons behind their rationale. Sometimes it is a case of sensory overload, and they are frozen in place. Other times, they rely on a confirmation bias, never looking for refuting evidence. Still other times, it is a mass panic and pack behaviour. Your job is to follow the logic, finding facts along the way to see how the chains of events unfolded. Yours is not to justify, apologize, or excuse, but to explain. You do not sympathize, but empathize. You do not deify or demonize, but humanize.

To learn the ways of emotional intelligence, it is important to observe for prolonged periods of time and learn to find patterns and exceptions. We observe behaviours and present supporting information. We often fail to see problems if we explain away troubling behaviour. We may chalk it up to individuality when someone is in distress. We do not consider that someone is hiding a serious problem because of it.

For example, certain organic disorders, such as a brain tumor, radically alter behavior. Substance abuse does as well. Some who have depression may behave recklessly or be comedic and upbeat, as they smile in public. A child being groomed by a predator will become secretive. Those being indoctrinated

by cults or radicalized groups will isolate themselves from their friends and family. Someone who is becoming a victim of domestic violence may become increasingly anxious as they explain away cuts and bruises. Someone whose home has been burglarized may begin to alter their behaviour on the side of over-caution. Someone who has witnessed the death of a loved one may become agitated and prone to outbursts.

These individuals may not reveal what traumas they face. They may not even be aware of the reason themselves, regardless of how savvy they are in other areas of their lives. The point is to observe, but not judge or label people. These are not rigid rote rules: we are looking for patterns of behavior over time to make sense of motives, mindsets and consequences.

When you are reporting on an individual or group, interviewing others around them is critical: they may not know the reasons behind shifts, but their interactions provide insights. If you are reporting on a murder, for instance, you want to know about the victim and the alleged killer. If you are covering a Ponzi scheme, you want to know as much about the swindler and his targets as possible. Both may try to spin information to hide guilt or shame, but it is important to see the players of your reports as they are, not as characters in a fairy tale. Who are they? What are their core beliefs? How well aligned are those beliefs to actions? Who were they in their youth? How did they change? What milestones and traumas entered their lives?

It is easy to excuse bad behaviour by citing trauma; however, that way of thinking has a *confirmation bias:* are there others who had the same trauma or worse and did not follow the same path? Conversely, it is naïve to assume that awards and titles prove someone's abilities, but have others received plaudits and accolades and were revealed to be untrustworthy or even treacherous? A winsome smile or a penchant to always say hello is not a sign of friendliness. We must look beyond the shallow, but often, reporters do not have the luxury; however, by learning to observe surroundings and then *analyzing* what you have observed can go a long way in finding information through subtle and nonverbal means.

As we learn to see journalism as applied psychology, we can begin to focus on behaviors and interactions of behaviors over explanations for them. We are reflecting and not reacting, so that *motives* begin to emerge. If it is a case of infanticide, for instance, we seek to know the actions of the homicidal parent, from their financial well-being to their previous behaviours. Were they under a therapist's care? Were they urged to do so, but refused? Was

there a life insurance policy in the equations, or a significant other who did not want to continue a relationship with a partner who had children? When we have facts, we begin to comprehend motives. We are not confined by narratives, spin, folksy assumptions, or justifications: we look for information as we begin to create a map of behaviour, but the centre of the map is finding the motive.

Understanding motives

Human beings are enigmatic, with the primary question being *why*. Why do they do the things that they do? Why do they cause harm to others? Why do they believe obvious lies? Why do they opt for harmful problem-creating decisions over helpful problem-solving ones? Why do they get angry? Why do they kill? Why do they commit wars? Why do they deny actions that have been recorded and proven to be true? Why do they partake in sanctioned insanity?

The *why* questions are the ones that are meant to find motives: the point is to find causation for the manifestation of certain behaviors. Emotional intelligence is the ability to find motives from actions. We do not think the best-case scenario, nor do we think the worst-case scenario. We are not there to judge motives: we are there to find them. New consumers want to know *why* events they did not anticipate to happen: a reporter's mandate is to give them enough information for them to know. You do not rig the weights of the motives by exaggerating or suppressing information that can refute a narrative: you look for facts and allow the news consumer to weight them.

For example, suppose there has been several mass shootings in a short window of time of a year. You will have activists and advocates from various sides of the political spectrum assert the reason is their cause and that legislation needs to change. They are entitled to their opinions, but what *was* the motives for each shooting?

Perhaps two of the shooters had psychological disorders and were both on psychiatric medication at the time. Perhaps another shooter had a legally-obtained weapon. Another one had a stolen weapon. One made one from a 3-D printer. We can compare and contrast information. Perhaps one belonged to violence-prone group, while another had delusions of persecution, while the third was fired from his job. There may be no reliable common thread other than their rampage: but it is crucial to look at each one separately and then as a whole. Their motives all differ, and their

perceptions differed in each case. These facts inform the public that there are *multiple* reasons for the violence—but the violence as solution is the starting point of the larger issue—yet the individual ones require more information.

What this means is that we do not just look for patterns, but for *random* factors as well. We do not try to spin an easy narrative at the expense of reality: we let news consumers know that there are times when a simple one rule that explains everything does not exist, nor is the solution a simple one where they can tune out.

On the other hand, by providing verified information, scholars will be able to use the information in their work to find underlying information. The findings of traditional journalism have often been shunned by academics: a more empirical approach allows for better integration between short-term information-gathering of journalism and the long-term exploration of academia.

However, there will times when you see important events unfold as a direct witness and there will be times when are working on a long-range project through method research. We shall look at how to use emotional literacy for each.

Learning to observe as an outsider

The simplest way to have proficiency in observing others is by people-watching: being an unobtrusive observer watching others interact with one another without our interference. Begin by sitting in a public area, watching others and making notes of your impressions. Who leads? Who follows? Who lies? Who tells the truth? Who panders and pleases? Who dismisses and bullies? We watch dynamics and how each action brings a response from others.

When you are observing an event, such as a protest or the aftermath of a disaster, you are looking at human interactions. You may witness looting or a riot. You may witness people helping others survive. You will record everything you witness: from the number of people you can *guesstimate* are involved to their actions. If you witness a blockade, who are the people involved? Is the action organic or is it choreographed by a third party? If a protest proclaims to be a grassroots movement, yet the expenses for travel, placards and merchandise far exceeds what a grassroots movement can

afford, then how did they get the finances to fund their frills? Are protestors claiming poverty, but marching in designer clothes with expensive mobile phones?

We do not look at our surroundings with romantic ideals or a jaded attitude: we observe everything from clothing to insults. We observe body language. We watch events without drawing attention ourselves. We seek to record the events of reality without interjecting ourselves and altering behaviour. Once we have a clear grasp of the dynamics at play, we can then take the next step of introducing ourselves and asking for information that we will vet later on.

Learning to observe through Method Research

When we are walking among those we are covering, we have a long-range plan and multiple experiments to conduct. Our observations begin unobtrusively as we seek to see the dynamics of the environment that we are studying. We look for the power structure, mindsets and Shibboleths of the in-group and how they view out-groups.

Once we can orient ourselves, we are ready to observe in a way where we are still in the background, but now we are partaking in the *same* day-to-day activities as those we are covering. If we are going "undercover" in a casino where there has been rampant gambling addictions and poverty, we let others in the environment take the lead. We are guided by their actions, unless we wish to see what happens if they are challenged, or your behavior deviates from what they predict. We still observe their responses, but we must also be aware of our own. We do not wish to alter more than one factor: we need to compare and contrast responses.

We go through the same mundane motions to see our own responses to the *same* stimuli. If we are working in a sweat shop, how do we respond to criticism? Is it different than the responses from others? Do we feel intimidated? Unsure of our worth when we were once confident? Do we feel anger and begin to snap at others around us, emulating the leader?

Method Research hinges on the ability to empathize with those we are studying and requires a high degree of emotional literacy. We do not justify our lapses with the excuse that others in the same situation have done the same: we seek to find the *motive* for the lapse. Why did we respond in a certain way? What were the conditions that made it possible? Once we see ourselves as the prime subject as well as the applied experimenter, we can

easily shift our centre of gravity between being an observer and being the observed. We gain empathy because we are our most important subject: we expose ourselves to the very things that we are studying and observing. We are not above the people we are observing, nor beneath them. They are our equals and we go through the same trials as they do. If we are looking at the reality of homelessness by staying on the streets, we can begin to see the world from the same plane as those we are studying. It is the way we can see hidden issues, motives, elements and dynamics that we would not have seen as an outside observer. We can put the facts in the proper context and if we then study the issue from a *different* angle, such as volunteering and working *with* the dispossessed, then we can see the interactions from multiple sides of the equation to see the obstacles in a different light.

Self-awareness and emotional literacy

No matter who we observe and in what setting, unless we are aware of our own biases and beliefs, our perceptions will be tainted as will our interpretations of events. For example, if we believe that no one can be truly happy without a spouse, we will never be able to *see* those who are genuinely happy being unattached: we will always look for the tiniest sign that deep down, they are miserable and any problem they have we will use as proof that they were wrong to remain single. On the other hand, we will ignore the problems of married couples who are miserable and find any happy moment as "proof" that our theory is correct.

Rigging narratives is not journalism. As a news producer, we understand that in a world of billions, we can expect happy singles as well as unhappy ones, just as we can find happy and unhappy married couples. Our mandate is not to herd the masses to follow a single script: ours is to show citizens the *reality* of the world for them to find the truths they require to navigate through life.

To begin to understand your own personal narrative biases, begin to keep a diary of your assessments of people based on politics or personal life choices. For instance, keep a track of any childhood bullies you encountered and make guesses as to what happened to them. If you believe they all ended up in prison, for instance, you have a personal belief that shades your view. There are many children who bully and yet go on to successful careers, or grow out of their tendencies and are remorseful. Some may not ever be aware of the toxicity of their childhood personalities and would be shocked to hear how their peers perceived them.

Then begin to look for anecdotes of an issue that has a personal meaning for you—do you always seek the same ending or moral? If you are interested in animals, for instance, do you strictly look for stories that emphasize how sweet and friendly all animals are—or do you also seek stories of animals devouring other animals?

After you have collected stories and ideas, begin to look for similar themes: do you always gravitate toward a certain outcome? If so, what is it? How difficult is it for you to now seek stories that have the opposite moral or outcome?

Once we begin to expand what information we are willing to face, we can begin the journey to emotional literacy: we can connect to uncomfortable information without justifying it. We learn to see reality as it is and can relay information as it is.

The ability to empathize without over-identifying or justifying the behaviour of others is tantamount to deciphering motives, from an unhappy marriage to living vicariously through celebrities. We can look at the overall issue by comparing and contrasting with previous or concurrent instances to see why certain events have happened. We allow others to *ride* the wavelengths of other people who they would not normally be able to relate to in any meaningful capacity. By removing labels and judgements, we present the facts that show motives. We do not need to shame or praise those we cover: do they help others or harm them? The facts will reveal the reality of the answers.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CRITICAL SCEPTICISM

The follies and breakdowns of traditional journalism have been well-documented as many hoaxes were revealed and more troubling, the ruses would have been obvious with basic research and critical scepticism. A journalist's mandate is to report the truth, not validate hoaxes, lies, scams, or propaganda.

Critical scepticism is the simple process of verifying each fact regardless of which faction relays it. It is not the process of disbelieving other people: it is the process of ensuring what they have told you is the truth. One side is not seen or presented less critically of the other, regardless of the emotional triggers or any other factor. It is the process of finding proof. What we are told is in the realm of What If until we have determined that it belongs in the realm of What Is.

The process of being open and ready to take nothing for granted is the most important quality of a news producer. Without it, there can be no true process of information verification. It cannot be critical scepticism for some people and an assumption of truth for others, regardless of our own biases or personal beliefs. Equity of scepticism is crucial to prevent vulnerability to misinformation.

Traditional journalism has never been primed or schooled in critical scepticism and the results have been damaging and disastrous. For example, when US actor Jussie Smollett claimed he was victim of a vicious hate crime in January 2019, most media outlets did not even bother to use the word "alleged." One such publication that did not independent verify the facts was *Vice*:

> The star of the TV show "Empire" was hospitalized after he was brutally beaten by two men on the streets of Chicago who poured a chemical substance over him and shouted homophobic and racial slurs. Jussie

> Smollett, 36, had reportedly arrived in Chicago from New York City late
> Monday and ventured out to get something to eat, according to TMZ.

The Associated Press also was uncritical in its February 2019 coverage:

> Jussie Smollett was blunt, emotional and defiantly determined Saturday
> night at a Southern California concert some urged him not to play, telling
> the crowd before singing a note that he had to go on with the show because
> he couldn't let his attackers win.
>
> "The most important thing I can say is 'thank you so much and I'm OK,'
> said the "Empire" actor and R&B singer from the stage at the Troubadour in
> West Hollywood in his first public appearance since he reported to police in
> Chicago on Tuesday that two masked men had assaulted him and put a rope
> around his neck while using homophobic and racial slurs.

Even *GQ* magazine had made sweeping decrees in their January 2019 piece:

> The cautious wording is one last wound inflicted on Smollett's battered
> body, a careful hedging of bets that don't need hedging—a crime scene
> involving a corpse is not discussed as a "possible death." But the stodgy
> apparatus of law enforcement isn't particularly interested in acknowledging
> social ills—and neither is the news media when it goose-steps around the
> truth of the matter with shallow euphemisms like "racially charged" used to
> describe open, proud bigotry.

From the *New York Times* to CNN, the word of one man was enough to
determine that what he said had to be the unvarnished truth, even though his
account had many red flags. His alleged injuries were superficial, even
though he claimed he was attacked by several with hatred toward him.
Surveillance footage did not support his claims and when police found a
link between his alleged attackers and Smollett, the police determined the
attack was a hoax and Smollett was charged for fabricating the attack.

But traditional journalists had been so enamored with their own narratives,
that they wrote overwrought speculative articles without making so much
as a single phone call to determine whether or not the attack was true.
Countless outlets had already convicted the phantom bigots, regardless if
their credulity did not service to those who were genuine victims of
prejudicial abuse. Instead of going to visit the alleged scene of the crime
and speak to those who live in the area, they merely regurgitated whatever
the press release had stated was true. That is not journalism, but
stenography.

A news producer needs a specific skill set, namely, how to spot lies, feints, ruses, misdirection, spin, narrative, parsing and propaganda to report reality and truth. Reality and truth operate independent of lies and spin: it is our perceptions and interpretations of both which prevent us from seeing either if we are disinclined to acknowledge them. Your job is not to make excuses or apologies. It is not to buffer unpleasant realities with an indirect approach. It is also not to appease or frighten the public. It is merely informing them what is actually happening around them.

For example, in 2020, Coronarvirus panic caused governments and businesses globally to close their doors as people began to panic buy goods, particularly and inexplicably toilet paper. The doomsday scenarios petered out as the vast majority of those who had the virus got better in two to six weeks with most of the fatal cases were of elderly and already physically vulnerable people. Moreover, more people died of the conventional flu that same season as they did every year, yet there had been no panic buying or costly cancellations as a result. The difference was the narrative. It was not the first one presented over the years, from SARS to the so-called bird flu, but while the symptoms were unpleasant, the outcome for the vast majority of sufferers was a full recovery, yet the panic and fear had terrified people into irrationality. Had they had proper information and perspective, it would have been business as usual.

But sensationalism and fear-mongering have infected the information stream for decades, even longer. From racial and ethnic groups being targeted as untrustworthy to the so-called "Y2K" crisis in 1999 where computers were supposed to become non-functioning because of the change in century and millennium. Speculation replaced facts. Opinion replaced ideas. Insults replaced debate. This does not inform a public. This does not align with reality or the abilities of the human condition. These are manipulations and the point of journalism is to inform, not terrorize a public who does not have expertise or deep knowledge. Citizens require enough reliable and valid facts and ideas to navigate and negotiate through their lives in a useful and meaningful way in a self-sufficient manner. They need information that can help them progress without becoming dependent and distracted.

The point is not to herd a populace like cattle to be confined in cages to be at the mercy of others. It is to allow them to be able to roam out in the wild in wide open spaces with the knowledge that their chances of survival are

viable as they can depend on themselves to do it with the resources they have to do it.

Yet those wild open spaces can also be battlegrounds; yet even then, the information should help them overcome those daunting obstacles that seem bigger than they are.

But to do that requires not just emotional literacy, but also *strategic literacy:* how does someone employ strategy to reach their goals?

Critical scepticism and strategic literacy

Many grifters, hoaxers and even propagandists understand the workings of the human mind. They understand heuristics and patterns of thought and then use those intellectual devices to deceive a public. They understand strategy and know how to use it, spending millions of dollars every year conducting their own research in how to more effectively deliver their messages with less scepticism. Your job as a reporter is to bypass those strategies with refined counter-strategies to see the reality of the situation.

The games of war have their own manuals, such as the *36 Stratagems, The Prince* and *The Art of War* and a proficient journalist knows how to counter them with strategic literacy. If war is deception, as Sun Tzu noted, then truth is its remedy.

We require methods that can vet ideas and facts. We do not assume what is being told is a lie. We do not assume what is being told is the truth. We investigate *line by line* until a picture emerges without narrative. We do not embellish or downplay what we discover, but we do form a plan, sometimes several, to determine the veracity of what we are being told. What kind of resources does a source have? Do they have media training? A PR firm? Do they rely on colourful stories or emotional theatrics? Do they bully, shame, belittle, or insult you for asking questions? In each case, we see the obstacles to finding the truth and then devise the way we will overcome them.

So how does strategic literacy work with critical scepticism?

For example, suppose someone from our in-group comes to us with a narrative of being abused by someone from an out-group. Statistically speaking, we are more likely to be harmed by someone from our *in-group.* FBI statistics, for example, show that in-group murders account for 85-97%

of homicide rates. In-groups do not have to be racial: most murders are *familial*; i.e., it is a *first degree relative* such as a spouse who is more likely to kill us rather than a stranger.

But it is more than possible that an out-group targeted one of our in-group, particularly in times of civil unrest and war. We do not automatically dismiss the claim, but how do we determine if the claim is true or a hoax?

We need to remove all emotional triggers from the story. For example, if it is a race-based attack, forget about the race of the participants. We have Person A and Person B. If it is a sex-based attack, forget about the sexes. We have Person A and Person B.

Sexual orientation, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, is unimportant for the initial analysis. We wipe the slate clean and there is a reason for this drastic measure: we are looking at the *facts* first. We will use logic, not emotions. We do not want our assumptions to push us in the wrong direction or make us take our stereotypes for granted.

Person A and Person B.

Only after we run through the accounts and the facts, do we go back and fill in the slots about identity and then run the story again. We investigate layer by layer until we know the facts and the flow of those facts cold. When we run through the narrative, it should make logical sense. We can account for the timeline and what is physically possible. If there are any contradictions, they will appear visible.

But even if there are discrepancies, we have to consider alternative explanations as we begin to confirm or refute the facts. Regardless, we must look for which of the several possibilities is the most probable one; hence, there are four basic outcomes:

1. The events described are what transpired because the person is telling the truth and the perceptions were aligned with reality.
2. The events described did not exactly transpire the way recounted because while the person is being honest about perceptions, the interpretations of reality were misaligned because the person was deceived, confused, impaired, biased or in some way impeded.
3. The events described did not exactly transpire the way recounted because the one presenting information is spinning a narrative or

keeping out information that would give the whole story because the person is not as innocent or heroic as claimed because there is an attempt to manipulate our perceptions and interpretations of reality.

4. The events described did not transpire because the person is lying.

Every single story a journalist hears must go through this checklist. If it is true, the facts will prove it. That is how we uncover information that not even the person telling us what happened would be aware of because they are not privy to it. If there are discrepancies, there are three possible reasons for them and we have to find out which one of the remaining three scenarios it is.

It is irresponsible not to run through that checklist — even if you are recounting *your* own story. You, as an information disseminator, have the duty and the obligation to ensure that what you are reporting is the truth.

If we do not question stories, we run the risk of being deceived. We do not hold back our critical scepticism, not even if the story is a feel-good one involving kindness, as far too many hoaxes are contingent on such a set-up.

For example, a November 2017 Canadian Press article recounted the intersection of *two* random acts of kindness:

> An online campaign has raised more than $13,000 for a homeless man who used his last $20 to fill up the gas tank of a stranded motorist outside Philadelphia.
>
> The Gofundme.com campaign was started Nov. 10 by 27-year-old Kate McClure after she said she ran out of gas on Interstate-95 and a homeless man named Johnny Bobbitt Jr. offered to walk a few blocks to buy her some.
>
> McClure says she didn't have any money to repay him at the time but she's returned to the roadway several times to give him cash, clothes and food.
>
> After a few visits, she started the fundraiser with the hopes of using the money toward housing and other expenses for the 34-year-old Bobbitt.

The campaign would net over $400,000 US, but within months, the truth came out: Bobbitt and the couple knew each other beforehand and made up the feel-good story to net the money. Only after they had a falling out and the police became involved in the affair did the truth of their scam emerge. Had traditional journalism removed the folksy emotional triggers and went

to look for corroborating evidence they would have seen they were being used as proxies in the scam.

In this case, critical scepticism compels us to come up with a matrix:

1. The events in this narrative happened as described.
2. The events did not happen as described because one or more of the participants are mistaken.
3. The events did not happen as described because one or more of the participants are embellishing key parts of the story in an attempt to hide mundane or unflattering details that would radically alter the story.
4. The events did not happen as described because one or more of the participants are lying.

We can look for surveillance footage or speak to possible witnesses. We can look for confirming and refuting evidence. We can look for past associations. If we find discrepancies, we know the first scenario cannot be possible. We can use interviewing techniques to see if the parties were mistaken. If the stories begin to radically change, then the second scenario is off the list, but so is the *third* if more than one person changes their story and now we know all parties are in collusion. If one person is mistaken, it is more probable than if it is more than one. By devising a strategy to determine where in the matrix reality lies, we can be efficient in finding the truth.

Countering the war manuals

When we are dealing with those who wish to deceive us partially or fully, they see us as someone to dupe. They will use us as proxies to spread their misinformation to the public and if war is deception, what this means is that they wish to wage war on the truth.

Methods such as the *36 Stratagems of War* have been employed for centuries as they are effective tools of manipulation. As a reporter, you must be aware of them to build an effective, reliable and valid counterstrategy. When you can recognize feints and ruses, you already have viable information: the person is not telling you the truth because the truth works against their self-interest. You have feedback, and can devise the strategy that is the most likely to show you what the hidden truth happens to be.

Let us look at a few of these stratagems to know how to recognize them and how to counter them:

Cross the sea without the emperor's knowledge: This simply means to hide your true goals from authority. If you suspect someone sees you as an authority or believes authority is watching through your reports, the goal is to find their true motive for presenting their narrative. If they see you as the authority, then they wish to use or manipulate you without you realizing their true intentions.

Besiege Wèi to rescue Zhào: This means if a target is too powerful to attack, then find someone to attack in their place, preferably a person or cause they hold dear. Sometimes you will be presented with an exaggerated claim on a seemingly minor figure or grievance, but you are being used as a proxy for them to distract the true focus of their campaign. Here, being vigilant to the logical inconsistencies will present their narrative in a realistic manner.

Kill with a borrowed knife: You may be the borrowed knife the source wishes to use to slay a rival. You will find yourself in situations where the goal is to use your reports as a means to an end in a subversive manner. By doing your due diligence and removing narrative, you prevent yourself from becoming a propagandist's puppet.

Make a sound in the east, then strike in the west: This is classic misdirection as a source will deflect your attention away from the critical information toward something trivial. War propaganda will do this by making people fear for their health or safety, while those who disseminate it work to confine or control those they are scaring. If you suspect a source is trying to deflect your attention, keep focussed on what they are suppressing as you dismiss the fear-mongering they are employing.

Create something from nothing: This may mean turning something mundane to seem extraordinary, such someone claiming to have supernatural powers such as prophesy, or someone outright deceiving you. By verifying their claims, you will be able to judge their trustworthiness.

Openly repair the gallery roads, but sneak through the passage of Chencang: Those who wish to feign brilliance or prowess may present a goal in public that seems impossible or difficult to achieve, but they have already achieved it or have assurances and they wish to make their accomplishment seem better than it is. If you are coming across someone in

the realm of business, it is a good idea to see what is transpiring behind the scenes and verify if the accomplishment is genuine, or an exaggeration.

Hide a knife behind a smile: Some treacherous sources will try to exploit you by feigning an alliance, only to use you and then cause you harm or embarrassment. Do not automatically assume a friendly source can be trusted. Verify what they tell you as you find out their history and personality from others.

Sacrifice the plum tree to preserve the peach tree: The "fall guys" and "scapegoats" are those who are being sacrificed so that the collective does not have to answer for their own lapses. If you are being presented a narrative where a single person is being blamed for a group or institution's failures, find evidence that shows the problem has more than one architect.

Stomp the grass to scare the snake: There will be times when a target of your report will make threats to force you to reveal what information you have. They are not certain what you have discovered and hope a generalized threat will compel you to reveal what you have discovered. By keeping calm and not allowing yourself to be provoked, you will not fall into their trap.

Borrow a corpse to resurrect the soul: Sometimes a source will try to lure you into a sense of security by bringing up past people or ideologies that you identify with on a personal level. They are not trying to connect to you or build an alliance: they wish to appeal to your beliefs to misdirect your attention. While it is important to be open and connect with sources, at no time do you go on a tangent and forget your mandate of fact-finding.

Lure the tiger off its mountain lair: Some combative sources will wish to make you lose your confidence by luring you away from your knowledge-base into an area where your expertise is wanting and then use your ignorance to unbalance you and prevent you from seeing their weaknesses or knowing what questions you need to ask. If you are dealing with a manipulative source, openly admit the limitations of your knowledge and remind them that your job is to fill those gaps by asking questions of others. Do not bind your ego to praise or criticism that is used strategically to control you and keep you away from the truth.

In order to capture, one must let loose: Some targets of your investigations will try to prevent you from making the final push to expose their dubious acts by making you complacent or confident that you have found all there

is to know. Without full knowledge, you may give a premature report where your source can offer a counteroffensive to make it seem as if you are grasping at straws. If you cannot hold off, then present the questions you still need answered, thereby letting the source know that you plan to follow-up and are fully aware of their ruse.

Tossing out a brick to get a jade gem: People often feign intellectual inferiority to disarm their targets. Some people will deliberately give a bad or silly answer, hoping their target is arrogant enough to feed them the right answer, or give them intelligence that they can make use of later on. They give poor-quality information hoping to provoke someone into giving them valuable information. Many times, your sources will be on a fishing expedition, wanting to force your hand to tell them what you know. If you suspect that you are being manipulated in this way, do not try to correct or one-up the source: you may ask questions to show the weakness of their responses, but do not show off as that is the point of the ruse.

Defeat the enemy by capturing their chief: Political and corporate rivals will go after the other side's leaders to defeat them. "Leaks" and rumours will often come your way with operatives hoping you will take the bait. If you discover you are being manipulated in this way, your report is on how operatives tried to recruit you to do their bidding. Sometimes those rivals come from within the party or business and they hope to make the leader so tainted that the individual must step or be removed.

Disturb the water and catch a fish: Some sources will try to confuse you with chaotic responses. They wish to unbalance you to prevent you from asking questions. By remaining calm and focussed, look where and when they are using confusion as it will give you clues where to dig for more information.

Point at the mulberry tree while cursing the locust tree: Some sources will use an indirect approach to drop salacious hints meant to weaken or malign others without naming them. If someone is using you to spread misinformation, it is often wiser to omit than become their vector.

Feign madness but keep your balance: Many people underplay their cunning and intelligence as revealing their shrewdness exposes their intellectual patterns. If you knew how they thought, then you would easily see their schemes. If you believe you are intellectually superior, you will not think to look for the obvious. When someone presents themselves as

being flighty, silly and child-like, consider whether they are trying to make you underestimate their intelligence. If so, you will need to find evidence of their true abilities and interview them in such a way that you indirectly assess their levels. Being unpredictable allows you to see how they truly think when you do not play by the script.

Decorate the tree with false blossoms: For those covering industry, this ruse will be a common one. Many people who fleece or use Ponzi schemes will hide their failures and poverties by presenting an image of success or even decadence to not just impress people, but to make them feel too inferior to question the truth of their wealth. When you are being sold on an idea of great success, you must see if the blossoms are real, or a mere fabrication to hide financial skulduggery.

Inflict injury on oneself to win the enemy's trust: Many con artists who use a pity scam are feigning a piteous and vulnerable state to lull you and the audience into believing they are too fragile to be able to con you. They may feign tears or moral superiority if you begin to ask questions that will reveal their ruse. When you are presented with such a narrative, you will need to be diligent in finding corroborating evidence and even observe the person from a distance.

Once you have considered how you can be manipulated, finding the antidote becomes straightforward. You should not stick to a static strategy as your body of work can be used as a roadmap to bypass your methods. Avoid relying on a single method and learn to refine and improve your most effective ones.

When we can begin to spot inconsistencies in a narrative, we can immediately begin to decide how we need to approach the report. What misdirections are being used? What narrative feints and ruses are supposed to deflect our attention away from the inconsistencies? What stratagems are being employed to gain legitimacy? Once we can gauge the reality of the situation, we can form a plan to discover the truth to present our findings to the public in an empirical and meaningful way.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RADICAL CENTRISM

Keeping a balance while reporting can be a difficult task if you are focussed on narrative. Narrative is a misdirection. It is the facts which focus you on reality. The point of narrative is to *suspend our disbelief to immerse in fantasy*. The point of facts is to challenge our beliefs to see reality. When our job is to report on reality, we must also realize there will be a battle for our explicit or tacit approval and there will be no shortage of people pushing their narrative as insisting it is fact. When you begin to specialize in a single area of reportage, the challenge is not to become insensitive to the differences and drift as you submit into narrative as you forget your mandate to inform.

If there is wrongdoing, the facts paint the picture. There is no need to "push" a narrative to illustrate it; however, there are many times when two or more conflicting sides are equally culpable and conniving—or neither have ill-intent. There will be times when a conflicting party has extensive media training, publicist, PR firm and a legal team, while the others have never dealt with a reporter before and are dealing with you directly. You will have meddlesome sources who believe they have every right to meddle and interfere with your work, while others will be chaotic and disorganized, but will not give any clarity to you. Finally, there will be times when one side cannot or will not speak with you; however, you will still have to find information about them to give a valid report.

The problem for traditional journalism has been a lack of definitive understanding of how to present "balanced" coverage: the terms used were never precisely defined, nor has there been empirical study on how to refine or alter it in news coverage. How can you make your coverage accurately reflect reality without rigging perceptions?

Traditional concepts of journalistic objectivity

Objectivity in journalism began when wire services wrote neutral reports to appeal to partisan newspapers on both sides of the spectrum. Newspapers soon followed the lead to increase their appeal and their sales. The ideas of journalistic objectivity were simple: interview "both sides" of an issue, keep opinion out and answers all the 5Ws. Conflicting sides were to be given "equal time" or "equal space", regardless if one side had media training. While flawed and problematic, this notion of objectivity became the standard approach to the profession. By 1923, the American Society of Newspaper Editors had declared the notion *ethical journalism.*

But the concept was never refined or tested and remained static for decades, even as it was increasingly challenged—and bypassed. By the late 1990s, US cable news took a more brazenly partisan approach and the ideas of objectivity began to fall out of favor as audiences began to increasingly distrust the press.

There had been numerous complaints regarding the concept, with some scholars unhappy that equal time would be given to both someone who harmed another person, for instance. When misapplied, journalistic objectivity seemed as if a reporter sat on a fence and refused to challenge information given. Other times, it seemed that the journalist drew an arbitrary line in the sand and then created artificial groups by the very design of objectivity.

The challenge for the reporter is to present conflicting sides with *equity*: we do not steer audiences to choose a side. We show the *weights* of both sides. If one side has a publicist and the other does not, we *disclose* the inequity so that audiences understand that one side has more media experience and exposure to another. If one side is more educated than the other, then we disclose the differences: it does not mean that the wronged party is the one with less media training or education, but when we present information, we are transparent to present a balanced view of the situation.

Often, it is spokespeople who speak to the press when the better source would be a C-suite executive: we need to disclose that the spokesperson is *not* a primary source. Showing the levels of degrees away from the primary source also paints a portrait of how far removed we are from the centre of gravity.

In this case, we are not sitting on the fence: we are hovering around as we walk among those people we are covering without trying to rig the scales. We wish to be transparent with how *we* as news producers are being treated by those who we are covering. If a source is shutting us out, then we inform the news consumer. If they are trying to curry favor with graft, we disclose it as well.

Radical centrism: a new empirical approach

Centrism has traditionally meant either clinical or pragmatic neutrality, a blandish aversion to making a decisive choice. However, *radical* centrism is a different concept: it requires creating transparency and allowing an audience to weigh the scales of all sides, the negative, the positive and the neutral. The reporter is not be taken in by any side as truth needs no meddling. Traditional journalism would have subjects pose in unnatural settings: for example, someone who claimed they were a victim would look doe-eyed into the camera, skewing a narrative. This posing relays no information as it merely allows image cultivation: the facts may point to an entirely different narrative: moreover, staged photographs do not tell the news producer anything of value.

Photographs should be natural and add information to a report. A radical centrist approach is to created factual equations: what are the main relevant elements of the event and how do they interact with one another to bring the outcome of it? We do not overload on information, but we balance relevant factors to show cause and effect, or how conflicting interests are creating a greater problem. If resources are being taken way from normal operations into having to resolve a problem (such as a legal defence in a lawsuit), we show the funnelling of resources.

If we are covering the clashing of two or more political parties, we do not take sides: we show processes, but allow news producers to draw their own conclusions. If one party uses fear-mongering, as does the other; we do not decree one set of fear-mongers are superior to the other: we show how each one relies on it. If there is a campaign, we look to the candidates' tangible and quantifiable platforms, their experience, their record and their knowledge.

Radical centrism requires us to study *relevant* sources and not include those who are not directly involved. We look how best to give information that includes everyone who requires to know the information, including

children. For example, we can ask "Are your children safe at school?", but perhaps the better anchoring questions should be "Are *you* safe at school?"

Finding the centre of gravity

Radical centrism requires strategy and planning: we do not merely react, but reflect. It also requires us to understand how to weigh conflicting sides. For example, we may be presented with a so-called grassroots organization of protesters who are opposed to a wealthy target. Traditional journalism would cover the event without consideration of digging deeper. If we study the group, we should take careful note of how protesters arrive, who maintains and pays for their web sites, who pays for their ephemera and how much it takes to run their operations. Often, we can see that the group's resources are too *lavish* for their means; we will need to account for the discrepancy. Perhaps the group is being covertly funded by wealthy rivals who wish to shame and embarrass their target so that they can further their own plans and ends. A radical centrist approach does not make assumptions about right and wrong: it finds information that paints an accurate and useful picture of reality.

We do not deify or demonize groups. We do not insult, shame, belittle, praise, patronize or rig a report with superlatives or adjectives. We do not make one side faceless and then personalize the other. We do not use colour. We do not use slang. Any narrative technique is to be avoided.

All those tricks prevent us from finding an issue's centre of gravity: as events collide and impact other events, it can become difficult to know which facts are relevant and which are not. For example, a murderer may have graduated from a certain university and dined regularly at a popular restaurant, but it had no relevance to his crime. We focus on the facts: he may have been a con man who fleeced his marks, but was confronted by one who he wished to silence, and he was not aware of surveillance footage that recorded the act. In this case, the centre of gravity revolves around the *motive* for his crime: his dubious interactions created the environment. The confrontation was the consequence of it. The murder was the outcome.

In this case, we have two conflicting sides: the victim and the killer. A radical centrist approach does not belabor the victim's virtues or the killer's cruelty: the victim could have been greedy and embezzled funds to use as his investment money. We do not blame the victim, either: what we do is

report on the events that brought the outcome, using the centre of gravity as our anchor. The facts paint the picture.

Nor do we need to paint a false picture by framing events in a folksy way: traditional journalism often uses phrases such as, "No one expected a murder here," or "They seemed like a happy couple." We look for the facts of the case without a preface. Person A used a Ponzi scheme on Person B. Person B became suspicious and confronted Person A. Surveillance footage captured the altercation as Person A murdered Person B. There may be more relevant information regarding Person A and Person B, but when we understand what was the *first defining* event that brought a *final* outcome, we can focus on finding the most important facts to inform the news consumer.

Most of the information you will need to find will be *behind the scenes* and hidden from you with narrative. The killer may present himself as a victim defending himself. The victim's family may try to protect their loved one. The police may have a narrative they wish to entrench to the public. Your job is not to push a theory or narrative, but to present facts.

Anchoring questions and radical centrism

An anchoring question is merely the question we seek to ask as we begin to follow an event. It should focus us on what is the most important question to answer, which news consumers need the information and how to approach our fact-gathering. It is the question that allows us to see the bottom line and the big picture. It is the starting point of our empirical inquiry.

If there have been a series of muggings targeting college students, those in that area need to know. There can be any number of anchoring questions, from who is targeted to what the police have done to resolve the issue. The question you ask will determine how you will find your information.

So, for instance, if we have an activist group who suddenly manages to obtain a national spotlight and have become polished, the anchoring question will not be "What is their message?", but "Where did they get the funds and assistance to transform themselves?" You may discover they have been turned into a front for a less sympathetic person. The next arc would now be, "Why is this person using a proxy instead of appealing directly to the public?" You may require several anchoring questions for each arc of

your reporting. You are not telling a story: but you have facts which point in a certain direction and news consumers will see a story emerge for themselves. The series of events make the reality transparent.

When we use a radical centrist approach, we do not favor sides. We are both factual and empirical. We may, for instance, find a group's cause appealing; however, they may be merely exploiting a popular issue as a misdirection to push an unpopular agenda. Journalistic objectivity merely required the journalist to quote both sides and present it. Radical centrism requires the journalist to question the motives of both sides and look for the facts which show the truth of the reality. We often see groups that proclaim to be peaceful use violence as a means to an end or groups purporting to raise money for charity when they raise it for themselves to live lavishly. Radical centrism does not rely on press releases: it looks for what has actually transpired.

Conducting studies to improve the concepts of radical centrism

As you work and improve your methods, you will need to review your past work to conduct a *meta-analysis* on your previous reports. Look for places for improvement. What information was missing? How could you have found a better line of inquiry? Take each report and begin to see your own patterns of thought: how could you have done a better job? Did you skew one way? Did you give a source the benefit of the doubt and then discovered later on that the person managed to outwit you in some key way?

Begin to graph your successes and failures: look how to refine your filters. Do you tend to ask harder questions of one gender over another? Do people who remind you of someone you dislike get more scrutinized than the ones who remind you of yourself?

Find ways to counter your weaknesses: do you need to surround yourself with more contrarian ideas? Do you avoid unpleasant confrontations? How will you overcome your own invisible walls?

As an exercise, interview three people: someone you care for, like or even love; someone who is a complete stranger to you who you see as neutral and someone you profoundly dislike. Ask them these five questions in this order:

1. Who is your role model?
2. What is your proudest achievement?
3. When did you develop your own philosophy?
4. Where do you go for guidance?
5. Why do people stick their noses where it doesn't belong?

Now write three five hundred-word theses on what is the essence of each person based on their *last* answer to your unexpected question. Find someone else to read each report and ask them to guess which person you like the most to the least. If they have guessed correctly, ask them why they came to their conclusions. If they guessed incorrectly, ask the same question. If they cannot determine the order, then ask them what they have learned from reading it. The point is to learn how to give information without the compulsion to editorialize or present narrative.

Radical centrism liberates the reporter from favoring sides: if one side is correct and/or moral, the facts will show this to be the case. But if that side is hypocritical and deceitful, our investigation will reveal this reality as well. We do not become distracted by petty grudges or spin from bickering vested interests, nor do we feel pity for those whose woe is me narrative sounds dramatic: we merely look for information that allows us to understand where there is danger, dysfunction and breakdowns that need attention to correct and restore. When we focus on the vulnerabilities of a systemic breakdown, we are looking for possible solutions. Radical centrism finds the centre of gravity and then asks the pivotal question to illuminate what has gone wrong to determine what needs to be done to correct it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

INFORMATION VERIFICATION

The mandate of a journalist is to present the relevant facts of reality. The facts must be reliable, valid and useful. They must revolve around breakdowns, dangers and problems that citizens need to know. These facts will give us an idea of what is the source of the problem and method of the solution. It is without narrative, spin, fear-mongering, hero-worshipping, or propaganda. A person should be able to pick up a report, read or watch it and then make *use* of the information given. People can act, feign tears, accents and even movements as there are schools of techniques for all of those facets of human behavior: there has to be a way to find information, despite ruses and static.

But for anyone to make use of information, it must be accurate, reliable, valid, relevant and truthful. If the information is misleading, inaccurate, wrong, or a lie, then it has no value and no use. It is poisonous and can cause harm, as it compels people to make bad decisions that can never lead to the correct solution. No matter what you have uncovered, you will need to independently verify the information you have found.

There are a variety of techniques to determine the veracity of information under a variety of circumstances. We will look at several methods, as well as how to organize yourself to do it, but first, let us look at what isn't information verification.

Pseudo-verification

Traditional journalism's methods of verification have been imprecise and unscientific: fact-checkers would call sources to confirm if they were quoted accurately; not whether what they said was true. Stephen Glass, a reporter for *The New Republic* had worked as fact-checker and knew their vulnerabilities and had for years written fraudulent stories that fact-checkers could not properly vet. *Der Spiegel* journalist Claas Relotius had also bypassed fact-checkers until 2018. Reporters have often reported hoaxes as

truths and when they were discovered, could not explain why their verification process was wanting.

There are methods that are not true verification: traditional journalism often relied on the "three source rule": if three sources confirmed information, then it was considered true, whether or not all three got their information from a deceptive meta-source. Looking at information from other publications also is not genuine verification and neither is relying on a press release or a publicist. Deferring to an authority or mob is also not actual verification. We need rigorous and precise empirical methods to vet information, meaning we will need to go through numerous stages to become familiar with our information. Sometimes, we have months to do this; other times, mere hours. Either way, accuracy is essential, and we need to look critically at information. Fortunately, to build a more solid piece of reportage, we can look to engineering for our solution.

The DFSS method of organization

In engineering, the "Design For Six Sigma" (or DFSS) method has several components: Define, Measure, Analyze, Design and Verify. While it has traditionally been used in engineering for process improvement, we can modify the methods to apply it to news producers.

1. *Define:* Before you begin verifying information, define your terms and standards for what will considered true and verified. For example, if you are reporting about a research study in medicine, what will you consider an accurate study? One with a control group? One which accounts for a placebo effect? How many subjects will be considered useful?

   Defining your terms also requires some sort of significant *threshold*: how significant is the problem based on the affected population? If it is crucial to define *how* serious is the problem. Often, mundane disagreements have been inflated to seem as if there is a significant trend or controversy. For example, traditional journalists would look to the number of negative comments on a social media site such as Twitter and then report there was a backlash, without looking at whether political operatives, bot accounts, or other factors artificially inflated the numbers. Worse, sometimes the number of responses was so small compared to the number of real users, that the criticism of a couple of thousand

people in a pool of millions constituted less than half of one percent, meaning it was not remarkable. In a world closing in on *8 billion* people, we would expect to see disagreement on every topic imaginable.

For instance, a single homicide is important to report, but it is not a sign of increased violence. The report will focus on the event, but it should not be made to seem as if the entire region is in danger of the same fate.

In 2020, there was much made about the Coronavirus, with fear driving citizens to agree to authoritarian measures without question; however, the death toll had been a fraction of what the *regular* seasonal flu had done in the same time period. More interestingly, the press had not shown most of the "faces" of the victims: had they, it would have shown that the vast majority had been ill and elderly. While tragedy is tragedy, the targeted audience was not the ones who had to worry. It was a curious oversight and one that required critical scepticism. If the virus was a danger to the elderly, then what is the point of closing elementary schools and nightclubs? Had traditional journalism *defined* the terms, standards and dangers, they could have been better informers to the public who had a damaged economy that placed them in *greater* danger than the sickness.

2. *Measure:* Related to defining, measuring requires comparing and contrasting key elements in your reports. We do not merely relay information to the public, we can describe its size to them. How large is the problem? What percentage of people are affected? How much money is missing? We do not use adjectives, such as "spectacular fire"; we describe the size of an area that has been set on fire, the cost of putting out the blaze and the financial loss of it: how much did the loss cause a family or business? How many days or months did it take an insurance company to cover the losses? Was it the full amount? How many people lost a job? When we measure gains and losses, we can begin to understand the value of elements.

    If a company has lost earnings, we need to measure which elements were negative and positive. We quantify as we begin to see the big picture: we must be willing to weigh various elements so that we

can identify and relate to the information given to us. News consumers should be able to comprehend the significance of an event by how you *empirically* describe it. If you notice that measures cannot be done, or there are discrepancies, you can delve deeper to see if information is being suppressed or is someone is being dishonest. It is at this stage where you may begin to see deceptive information, but just because you do not see lies or hoaxes at this stage, it does not mean that the information is correct. This stage is your first step towards verification.

3. *Analyze:* Once you measure, you need to understand the significance of those measures. If a company lost a billion dollars in a single day, how *severe* is that loss? Could there be a recovery? Does this loss mean impending job losses, leadership change, or change to their product line and quality? How much tax money will be lost? Will taxpayers be bailing out this company? How much money will those who own stocks lose? Are there any pension funds tied to the stocks of the company?

   There will be occasions where you will notice contradictions, gaps, conflicts and discrepancies from your measurements: that will be your first clue that what you have been given is suspect. A company may be fudging its books, but it is not obvious until you begin analyzing the information they have presented. Sometimes, information is ambiguous or subject to multiple interpretations: if information is not clear or is troubling, you will *flag* what is suspect and what are your *theories* as to what are the implications of your findings. You will need *two* sets of theories: one if the information turns out to be correct after Stage 4 and one if they turn out to be faulty or a lie.

   It does not necessarily mean your measurements are quantities: they may be events recounted from a source who claims they were a victim of a crime. The measurements may be their timelines or claims of wounds. You will still need to find a way to measure the facts they tell you and should those facts not align with reality, you will have to devise your strategy to test your theories.

4. *Design:* This stage is a crucial one, regardless of your findings in Stage 3. You will need to design a way to *test* your theory regarding the information you have found. For example, if

someone has claimed to have been a victim of a mugging and they relay to you that they walked home: you will need to verify if anyone saw them, was there surveillance and if you can walk from Point A to Point B according to their accounts.

Other times, you will determine who else may put information in perspective: perhaps and expert or someone who is familiar with the individual. You may need to conduct method research to understand the environment in question. Flag all information that you need to vet and then how you will test your theories and any time and financial constraints you may face to do it. You may need to establish provenance, or you may need to try to *replicate* certain actions yourself given the confines and parameters told by a source. Your experiments should be elegant, precise and measure and verify what needs your attention.

5. *Verify:* This is the final step of reconciling your information by experimentation or verification. You are trying to confirm or refute your theory. If information proves to be inaccurate or wrong, you will need to record your findings. Sometimes you will go back to a source and seek clarification or explanation. Other times, you are ready to call the information inaccurate or misinformation. Note that you have studied and processed information *numerous* times in these simple steps.

    For example, if someone claims to have witnessed an event from their vantage point and you arrive to see that how they described the events was inaccurate, you will need to know, for instance, the time of day, the weather and visibility and any other variables at play. If you cannot account for their descriptions, you have *refuted* their account. You may need to discover their *motives* for their deception, but often, this information is not needed, as it may be *omitted* from your work.

These steps allow you to become *familiar* with your information and consider various interactions and implications. You may wish to *rate* your information: one set to determine the importance of information and another for quality or truthfulness of it. It may be necessary to employ a *peer-review* process, or you may require some other means of checks and balances to ensure consistency in verifying information. By examining information through various critical lenses, you will train yourself to spot troubling

information more efficiently. Using a Kanban board can help you visualize your progress.

Verifying information

Verifying information will constitute the bulk of your work: you will need to ensure you have actual information. This will require finding as many *primary* sources as time and constraints allow. You may need transcripts, documents and interviews, but then look for information that supports those primary sources.

But even then, you will require ways of determining if what you are told is the truth. While it may seem there are times when this kind of vetting cannot be done, there are ways to test the *crux* of an account. For example, we may not think we can verify information coming from a war zone, there are ways we can put the information to the test.

During the first Gulf War, one December 18, 1990 wire service article described the alleged atrocity committed by Iraqi soldiers in a Kuwaiti hospital that we saw in Chapter Nine. The so-called "verification" of the yarn was an alleged fifteen-year-old witness who recounted the story in front of US politicians in her testimony amid a stream of tears.

It was her televised testimony that built citizen support for war; however, it was only after the war that it was discovered the story was a fabrication. How would it have been even possible to vet the tale of woe?

Simple: by devising a simple method of verification. Why would the Iraqi soldiers steal incubators for infants? We are offered no logical reason. How did they remove the infants? Gently enough to place on the floor where the babies died? Why would they do such a thing, if their intent is to kill them? Wouldn't they merely throw them out without regard? If they took them out roughly, then the witness would have said it as the point of her speech was to emphasize the enemy's brutality.

But if they took them gently, why not order the staff to remove the infants? Why did they harm the infants, but not the staff who were the adults and the bigger threat? Why didn't the staff pick up the infants? As we can see, there are *many* points of inquiry and if we were to act out the event, we could see the story cannot hold together.

However, there is *another* point of inquiry: it was assumed the testimony was genuine, yet it was for show. The event had no weight, and the footage did not come from government sources, but from a public relations firm hired by one of the warring sides to gain support for the war. From a single videotaped account, we have several lines of inquiry to verify: and *none* would have confirmed the story. Every avenue strongly hinted that the story was not what it appeared to be. Every facet of a piece of information yields valuable clues if you question every angle, from the fact's provenance, to how realistic is it when we try to replicate the events ourselves.

You will often come across various groups: ensure that they exist in the first place and are not a front for a less sympathetic group. Sometimes a person will proclaim expertise and purport to have various degrees; however, they may be fabrication those qualifications.

Sometimes the person will claim to suffer from a physical ailment or affliction, but if you unobtrusively observe the individual when he or she is not performing, you will see a healthy and robust person who is malingering. You may need to discover the symptoms of a medical disorder and then not only speak to an expert, but also to several who do genuinely have the illness and ask them for their feedback on the claims or accounts. You may also need to do the same with other groups of people who know the Shibboleths and minutiae that is not obvious to you.

Creating testable theories

How you will verify information will depend on what theories you seek to prove or disprove. If you are reading a police report and all witnesses report on seeing the same things in the same order without any conflicts, there may be *collusion* on their part, a problematic police officer, or someone has deliberately misdirected their attention to keep the police off their trail.

You will look at the information you have: some of it may be already verified or called into question. You will need determine what *other* evidence you need to decide which of your three scenarios is correct. You will need to guess which is the most likely correct theory and what is the simplest way to test it.

If you suspect deliberate misdirection, you may wish to see if there is smartphone footage that someone is willing to show you, or provide you access on their social media feed if their account settings are set to private.

You may speak to others who were there to confirm or refute your theory. You may wish to see if there have been similar crimes committed in the area. If you cannot confirm or refute, you will make a notation in your report that you cannot be definitive in this aspect of your research. Do not try to fill in the holes with speculation: sometimes the most important piece of information is the lack of venues open to find a critical piece of the event. You will discover that these knowledge holes are common and by stating what is left unknown, you will often be contacted by someone who can accurately and truthfully fill in those gaps and you can update it once the barrier has been removed.

Verification through Method Research

If you are working on a long-term story where you are conducting experiments by taking on a role, you will obviously have more time to verify information and often can be *proactive* in this regard. As you know ahead of time what information you wish to seek, you can devise a schedule and a strategy well in advance. For example, if you wish to see if there is sex discrimination in receiving helpful advice on getting a mortgage, you will be the primary source of your own story. You will need to record and keep meticulous notes on every interaction and then have a control group who will do the same. You may then have a secondary round where you have exchanged notes with your control group and then can ask the target of your investigation why they did not disclose certain information to you. What you are doing is creating the record as a primary source, but you will need to keep track of names, dates, times, addresses and have transcripts with notations that you can compare to other information you receive.

You may then interview others who have genuinely asked for the same service and compare their responses to your experiences, noting any patterns, similarities and differenced. You may even be in a position where you can discover people who are going to ask in the future and ask them to note any important elements when they do so. Look for any differences or similarities between those who asked in the past and those asking in the present to see if things have changed, progressed, or regressed. Does the way someone behaves or dresses impact the answers equally for both groups, or are there divides? Does the location or time of day make a difference? The more information you have, the more precise your report will be, but it still requires precise terms and theory going into the assignment.

Sometimes, you will be a mere observer. If you wish to understand the nature of civil protests, you may be going to several over the span of months to record your findings. If you are covering environmental erosion, you will be visiting and recording a specific area over a period of time. You may be testing water and soil as well as observing the flora and fauna in the area before going to other professional who will have more nuanced information, but your tests and measurements will be not just a starting point, but the way you can explain your findings to an untrained civilian audience in a way they can relate as you then anchor your findings to more expert ones. Your findings will serve as a Rosetta Stone allowing an untrained audience to be able to comprehend more nuanced and complex concepts.

Regardless of your reporting methods, you will always look for ways to verify information without spinning information positively or negatively. If you are looking at school safety, for instance, you will go directly to various schools, looking for physical disrepair and damage. You will be speaking to students and teachers. You will look at records of repairs from the school boards and noting the costs and the time between reports and action. Are all schools in a district in equal disrepair? Which ones get primary attention and why?

For governmental stories of national or international importance, you will need to map out the chain of command, find legislation and then begin to verify information step by step. It is important to observe unobtrusively to look for alliances and connections, but each time you observe an interaction or conflict, you will need to map it out to see alliances and rival factions within a single organization. Looking for former employees is also crucial: you are not just looking for sources with information, but sources who can *vet* scenarios to you. You may discover those sources have alliances to those still in power and will *tell* them of your investigation, but even then, you can discover who wields influence even after they have left the organization.

Every interaction is a unit of fact. Often hidden information becomes exposed or hinted at by the mere act of approaching others. Sometimes the people who will give you information are assistants, nannies, maids, hairdressers, bartenders, waitresses, seamstresses, tutors, interns, receptionists, drivers, sales staff and janitors. Sometimes, it will be a paid escort, exotic dancer, or even drug dealer who has valuable insights into people that can lead to finding the correct path in your line of inquiry. Do not squander valuable witnesses just because they do not wear a three-piece suit to work. In fact, your *opening* to powerful institutions and organizations will come

from the lowest level of workers who see everything, but disappear in the eyes of those who have power and clout. Do not confine yourself to conventional channels as those often have been finessed to keep outside eyes from scrutinizing the real workings in an organization.

Your job is to find information and that may mean rummaging through a trash can to find it. It may mean sitting for hours in the corner of a function just to observe interactions among various participants. It may mean talking kindly to neighbors and listening to them to be trusted enough to be taken to a source you wish to interview. Finding creative ways of verifying information will allow you to find vulnerabilities and openings that those who carefully guard their fortresses cannot account for, but realize you may have to change your repertoire once your methods are realized.

Information verification is both the science of verifying data and the art of finding novel ways to do it. By finding elegant and unobtrusive ways of discovering the veracity of information, you can get ahead of those who wish to hide the record of their sins, as you empirically devise ways of examining the information you have gathered for your reports.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SOCIAL MATHEMATICS

So far, we have looked at the rational elements of news; however, human nature is a highly volatile and emotional one where people can be frightened and enraged easily as they are vulnerable to propaganda, fear-mongering, rumors and disinformation. Most people will react on information rather than reflect; ergo, it is imperative to present information rationally, empirically and realistically.

To be able to do that, we must be able to visualize the impact of information: we must see where there are vulnerabilities. People may be jealous, greedy, disrespectful, arrogant, fearful, immature and even paranoid and their interpretation of events they witness will be tainted and their perceptions distort the filters that news consumers use. Your job is to be the translator between the primary source and the primary audience of that information.

Your job is not unlike a clinical psychologist who must decipher the thinking patterns of patients to help them integrate and understand the outside world, or an experimental psychologist who must decipher patterns of everyone to them understand their inner world. This requires an understanding of hard data, such as economic indicators and *soft* data, such as public knowledge and perception of certain events. You will be interviewing those with strong opinions, but little knowledge of relevant information. They may sound confident and even authoritative, but the information they give you is wanting.

We need to find ways to visualize perceptions and compare them to the reality of a situation. If there is a mass panic, for instance, do the facts support the fear? If not, how does one interact with the other? If there is a divide, we can begin to see the *reasons* why a collective perception does not align with reality.

But how do we use logic to compare, contrast and verify emotional and social factors through emotional or social computation? People make

decisions based on information, but also on tradition, habit, ritual, superstition, appeal to mob or authority, but also emotions. We need to consider this mix of factors when we are reporting: if someone holds prejudices, for example and they are speaking poorly against a group of people, we cannot merely relay the accusations: we need to determine if these accusations hold true first. Other times, an estranged couple may seek revenge by making accusations of abuse or molestation against the other. In other cases, someone is a victim of domestic violence, yet keeps the truth about your source hidden out of fear.

We may be dealing with partisan sources who exaggerate the flaws of a political rival, all while downplaying their own flaws. We may be dealing with a psychopath who wishes to isolate a vulnerable target. We may be dealing with someone who is in denial about a loved one's role in a heinous crime. We could even be dealing with someone whose nation is at war with another and they believe the rumours spread by propaganda. We must carefully consider the *mindsets* of certain sources in order not to become distracted by their own biases and motives. They may be telling us the truth, but their *interpretations* may lead us astray. We do not dismiss, but we need to understand how *far* their information takes us.

Graphing emotional factors and personal biases

We can mathematically chart and graph information we receive to account for personal biases. For example, in one 2020 study, twenty percent of US respondents believed they would be infected with the so-called coronavirus, even though at its peak, 0.001 percent had been diagnosed with the illness, while 0.00002 percent had died from it.

In this case, we have a *wide* divide between perception and reality. Worse, those who were in their twenties were far more likely to be concerned, while those over sixty were the least (20 percent versus 3 percent), even though the illness was the *least* fatal in the age who were the most convinced of impeding sickness.

It does not end with illnesses. Many hoaxes of hate crimes hinge on the belief that people in a racially based out-group are more likely to fatally attack than a member of an in-group, but the xenophobia is unwarranted. By the FBI's numerous statistics: most homicides are committed by those who are of the *same* race as the victim: for African-Americans, it hovers at 97%; for European-Americans, it is 85%.

When we begin to cover any event or issue, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of stereotypes, assumptions and perceptions that may distort our understanding of events. For example, a city may see a surge in house prices and assume that it is average citizens who are causing the spike in prices, when the truth may be that foreign investors are looking to invest their money or even the government is making the purchases and it giving an artificial impression. In this case, what we must determine is (A) the source of an event or phenomena and (B) the *perceptions* of the event in question.

Then we need to see how *closely* one relates to the other. There is an important reason: if there are misconceptions, then it is your job to dispel them. If people fear crime, for instance, but the incidences of crime in the area are low, then there is an unnecessary fear distorting perceptions. In the US, there has been a steady stream of mass shootings; however, the chances of being a victim of a mass shooting is still much lower than the *domestic* homicide rate.

The point is not to downplay or dismiss problems or dangers; however, the point is not to fear-monger, either. We also do not try to give "good news" to bleak reality. We are strictly looking to present reality as it is.

It is important to see how perceptions interact with reality. Sometimes you will interview several sources about a single event, and each will have very different recollections, with some having negative perceptions, while others having neutral or positive perceptions. Traditional journalism would often take the most extreme or emotional response as part of their narrative. Often, those extremes proved to be wrong, even fraudulent.

In August, 2019, there seemed to be a sniper who was targeting police, according to CNN:

> Police were searching Thursday for whoever shot and wounded a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy from a distance, a day after the shooting happened.
>
> Someone fired a gun at Deputy Angel Reinosa on Wednesday afternoon while he was walking to his personal car outside the sheriff's station in Lancaster, about an hour's drive north of Los Angeles, police said.
>
> The sheriff's department said "this was an isolated incident targeting a deputy."

> The bullet apparently came from a four-story apartment building across the street and hit Reinosa, Lancaster Mayor R. Rex Parris said. Reinosa was wearing a bulletproof vest, which saved his life by deflecting the bullet into his shoulder, the mayor explained.

According to ABC 30, there was good reason to worry about where the sniper had been lurking:

> A manhunt is underway at this hour for the shooter who targeted an L.A. County Sheriff's deputy.
>
> 21-year-old Angel Reinosa got shot in his shoulder Wednesday afternoon while walking to his car at the sheriff's station in Lancaster.
>
> It's believed the shot came from a four-story apartment complex next door.
>
> Officials say it houses people treated for mental illness.

Days later, police determined the shooting was a hoax and Reinosa admitted the "bullet holes" were created from cutting his clothing. While the mayor— an authority figure spoke of the incident, and the phantom sniper was allegedly from an assisted living complex, it did not make the story true. With both emotional triggers and a subtext of stereotypes of the mentally ill, it can be too simple to take the narrative at face value.

But had reporters begun to weigh the emotional triggers with the information, a different picture would have emerged. We can begin to see how fear interacts with perceptions and we can then look at the probabilities of such an event taking place. We can begin to ask if it is possible for residents there to be able to have or hide weapons and such weapons that could be used in such a scenario. Once we can visualize the emotional to separate it from the factual, then we can look at information from a more rational perspective.

We can use a Cartesian graph for our purposes as a simple starting point. The Y axis may represent Source A's Story, while the X axis may represent Subject B's story, or Y may be the facts discovered, while X is an eyewitness's perceptions of those events. If a company has been tolerant of sexual harassment in the workplace and has downplayed the problem, but your investigation finds many credible witnesses and victims, then you can graphically *see* the divide to determine how *severe* the reality is to the picture the company paints. We can also see gaps and conflicts in a simple way.

If we are interviewing several eyewitnesses, we can see if there are gaps where we do not have anyone who has witnessed a certain portion of events, which may hint that perhaps the eyewitnesses were fooled to believe something transpired, but prying eyes were kept away from something that would have given the hoax away. We are trying to account for events as well as perceptions.

The spectrum of positive and negative impressions

Conflicting impressions is something you will need to factor in your reports. For example, one group's hero is another group's *villain.* Both groups may covertly or brazenly seek to lobby you to push their assessment in your work. The reality may be either, both or neither, but your job is not to make a decree, but to show the facts that will give an audience enough information to judge for themselves.

Charting information is essential: it allows a tangible representation of not just perceptions, but how the same facts impact the interpretations of various players. We are not looking to validate or condemn people: we are trying to present reality to explain events. For example, if a man is convicted for murdering his wife, the couple's children may often disbelieve their father's guilt and insist that he is innocent, while the woman's parents and siblings are convinced of his guilt. Both factions will present information and narrative that they will insist proves their position to be correct.

The spectrum of positive and negative impressions allows you to map out a battlefield, from political clashes to civil litigation to even war. We can study narratives that use the *same* factual basis and see how the filters for each faction operate. One group may have mildly positive impressions, while another has extreme negative impressions. We can then look to why one side has more emotional reaction than the other. We do not judge which side is or isn't justified; we merely wish to understand to know what facts we need to explain the differences in impressions.

For example, in one February 13, 2020 CBC News article, after the murder of a young teenager by his tormentors in Hamilton, Ontario, had reported on such a divide between the school board and parents who attended:

> The anger and frustration that has been brewing since Devan Selvey's death boiled over Wednesday during the first public session organized by the panel charged with reviewing how Hamilton's public school board handles bullying.

> Parents stood up, one by one, in the Westmount Secondary School cafeteria
> to describe what their children have endured, venting months-worth of fears
> and tension before a crowd of about 90, many of whom felt the same way.

It was obvious that parents were unhappy with the set-up with the event,
which gave them no input prior to its start:

> "How many people's kids have not been listened to?" asked a woman named
> Suzi Spelic.

> Hands shot up across the room.

> "With all due respect, I don't want to write it on a paper anymore," she
> continued.

> "Everything you're asking every single person [here] has already written it
> on a piece of paper."

But the story made a curious judgement about the role of the parents:

> It was a hijacking of the carefully laid plans of the KOJO Institute, a
> consultant firm called in to support the experts and left panelists suggesting
> a different format for the meetings moving forward.

The word "hijacked" is an extremely loaded word that makes assumptions;
namely, that parents are in a subservient position to educators. It does not
consider that parents, for instance, are taxpayers who are funding public
education, nor does the report consider whether the meeting was for optics,
or if there was any evidence that the meeting would address the problem in
question.

Had we used an empirical model, we would look at various factors: from
the cost of the meeting, to any empirical evidence that such a move would
produce tangible results, but we would also observe and chart the
impressions of those in attendance: the fact that parents who attended had
to contend with their children being bullied had a *negative* reaction hints
that the problem rests with how the school board had handled the aftermath
of a homicide that took place near the school grounds after months of
torment and that teachers and the principal were *aware* of the problem
beforehand.

The school board may have had positive impressions of their actions, but
that the parents had negative impressions gives us a very clear idea of the

landscape and goes the heart of the issue. We can then begin to look at the number of reported cases and how many have been resolved to see why each side's impressions have such a deep chasm. We do not take sides: we present the facts, and the reality begins to emerge.

In the previous chapter, emphasis was on testing for factual veracity; however, this does not mean people do not leave positive or negative impressions on you. The facts may compel you to pick one side over the other; nevertheless, you still need to address your own biases, meaning you may need to chart *your* perceptions against the facts of the issue. Where are your blind spots? What are you willing to believe and take for granted? What angles and narratives do you accept without critical scepticism? If you begin to favor one side over others, it is essential that you begin to map out your own impressions: and then look to see if you need to look for information that challenges your own perceptions.

Thresholds

Not every issue or event will provoke a positive or negative impression, but there will be times when there will be social illusions that you will not question, but should. Traditional journalism often talked of "fads", "trends", "controversies" and "crises" when they did not exist: in a world of billions, there will always be disagreements, diversity and problems. The question is whether there is a significant number of individuals whose beliefs and actions are shaping society as a result.

Often, advertisers or politicians wish to present a cluster of behaviours as a "trend": an advertiser may wish to push a narrative that their product is now in vogue, while a politician may claim violence is increasing and needs his policies to save the public. The question is how to critically look at social trends and assess them.

Many people rely on emotional manipulation to push their agendas, knowing people may get defensive, angry, or frightened into compliance. A common gambit is a politician or activist group pushing for controversial legislative change that would not gain acceptance under normal and peaceful circumstances. There will use a real, perceived, or manufactured crisis as "proof" that a problem is getting out of control. Your job will be to balance their position with the actual reality.

In this case, we are looking at *thresholds:* is the actual problem worse than before? Is this a new problem?

If someone is pushing a platform based on an increase in gun violence, then you will require to find an affected region's population, the number of violent incidences from the past to the present and then compare the claim against the reality of the situations. If there has been no significant increase (i.e., it is not a statistically significant outcome) and the problem is no worse than it is in surrounding areas, then the problem has failed to reach a threshold. We then go back to the original claim and begin to examine the individual to see if there is any reason why their interpretations of reality are not aligned with the actual situation. Do they have a vested interest in the outcome? Are they trying to differentiate themselves from a rival? Are they being lobbied by a particular group?

By looking at thresholds, we can begin to orient ourselves to power plays and public relations campaigns. This requires you to compare and contrast what is being claimed with what is actually happening. If the threshold is *greater* than what is being claimed, we can begin to investigate why problems are being ignored. When the threshold is *less* than what is being claimed, we can investigate why events and issues are being exaggerated. Propaganda becomes evident. Censorship is uncovered. We can find wrongdoing and misdirections when we compare actual statistical shifts with platforms and claims.

Using etiquette with empirical methodology

Social mathematics is the way we can see both the physical facts with the emotional reactions triggered by them at the same time. They are separate entities: one is reality, while the other is the interpretation of that reality. However, many people would become offended to be told what they perceive is not reality. We must take care not to add more extraneous emotional triggers when we are interviewing.

This requires etiquette to go along with our empirical methodology. We require social intelligence as well as *connect.* We need to take care to be open with sources and allow them to speak freely without judgement. We can confirm and refute their beliefs, but even then, if what they provide is factual, then we do not dismiss it just because their perceptions are skewed.

It is important to ask clarifying questions when you know or suspect their conclusions do not fit with the facts. They may believe unemployment is a bigger problem than it is simply because they are in an industry that is lagging behind, their educational level or training makes it difficult to find employment, or they live in a region that is too isolated or otherwise not attracting employers. Other times, you may speak to experts who are isolated and do not realize their data does not account for what is actually happening in the area. We need to be polite when we ask others of information, but we can also use misperceptions as a line of inquiry.

The reporter's job is to reflect reality. It is a difficult undertaking and often, we can be swayed into narrative unless we begin by creating an effective strategy to focus on relevant elements. If you are given a press release, for instance, a narrative be prepackaged for you from the get-go and the point is to frame the landscape for you immediately. The mandate is to break away from subtle and overt intellectual interference by examining both the facts and the emotions in front of you. By getting information from a variety of primary sources as you graph their emotional impressions, finding the reality becomes a simpler exercise. By being aware of emotionality, we can assess information rationally without being vulnerable to manipulation in the process. Sources may be generalizing and assuming what is part of their world is absolute everywhere else.

Now that we have laid the basic groundwork for the empirical alternative, let us examine its practice.

SECTION THREE:

THE EMPIRICAL ALTERNATIVE

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FACTS

The measurement of reality is the fact. It is the essence of how we understand our world; however, extreme emotions cloud our judgement, such as fear, panic, anger, hatred and even romanticism. However, when we have information that does not align with extreme sentiments, we can begin to anchor ourselves as we question our perceptions and interpretations.

Facts bring rude awakenings. They also bring understanding toward workable solutions. This section will introduce you to a five-point system of chronicling for a mass audience that liberates truth from lies and allows a new breed of reporter to reflect reality through empirical, yet easy to understand methods that can be applied in other communications industries as well, regardless of the medium.

This chapter will focus on the definition of facts as the atom of creating a map of reality to find the truth. What different kinds of facts are important? How do facts interact with each other? How do we distinguish fact from opinion? How do we know we have found facts? How do we present them in a news report and what is the consequences when we do?

A Primer on facts

Finding facts is a difficult affair. Often, information is distorted or incomplete; however, if we look for multiple sources, we have enough of a sample size to be able to discern useable information from it. For example, if someone died of food poisoning, there will be signs a coroner can find. If unemployment rose, we can not only expect to see both an increase in migration of the region, but also an increase of unemployment benefits. There will be signs that a shift has occurred: something increases, decreases, changed, begins or ends.

It will be something measurable. An increase in the suicide rate can be measured. A decrease in marriages can be measured.

The symptoms of an illness may be visible and there can be tests to confirm or refute a diagnosis. A building collapsing has visible evidence as do faulty brakes that causes the death of drivers and pedestrians. A bomb being dropped or a gunman opening fire leave a trail. How many people died? How many people failed? How many people went through the court system?

In every case, we have something new and significant, but we also have a *baseline* reality to which we can compare and contrast. A badly constructed and maintained bridge which disintegrated will be different than a sturdy one that is maintained. An ill person will be different than a healthy one. A company in the hands of a swindler will function different than one lead by a competent C-suite. We have elements to examine, with a base assumption that the mundane and unremarkable are *functional*. We take it for granted.

There are other factual elements that are measurable and observable in other ways: embezzling or Ponzi schemes are illegal activities that leave a trail. Discrimination in the workplace will have observable signs from hostile comments to the lack of promotions or hiring of certain groups. From human trafficking, child abuse, to missing persons, there is evidence left behind.

Did a company's profits increase or decrease? What is the ratio between the highest paid employee and the lowest? How many government grants does it receive? All of the facts we need to know begins with the questions we ask.

But we are careful not to skew those questions to push forth an agenda: we take a look from every angle to see the big picture. Traditional journalism had either taken the side of business owners—or of workers, when many cases, both sides were taking advantage of one another in various ways. If there is a high degree of employee theft, then it must be addressed, even if management is overworking them. What we have is a dysfunctional workplace. Each side will have their own carefully constructed narrative that will appeal to certain groups. Your job is not to be their conduit. Your job is to look for the facts that show the complete reality in question, but to do that as you avoid narrative trappings, you will need to understand the differences between fact and opinion.

Differentiating fact from opinion

This aspect may be the hardest to grasp: facts are quantifiable and measurable. They are falsifiable, meaning you can prove them right or

wrong. Facts are objective. Opinion is subjective. To those who stoop to sophistry, they will attempt to muddy the waters with false arguments; however, their intellectual confusion should not distract you or divert your attention as you second-guess yourself.

What is a fact?

It is a quantifiable unit of reality. Opinion is the interpretation of perceptions. We have seen a few examples in Chapter 7, but we can delve further into the matter:

Fact: Celia Smith was convicted of first-degree murder.
Opinion: Celia's conviction was a miscarriage of justice.
Opinion: Celia's conviction proves the justice system works.
Opinion: Celia is a victim of a vast and diabolical conspiracy.
Opinion: Celia was framed.
Opinion: Celia is an evil monster.
Opinion: Celia's conviction is evidence that the current government system does not work, and we need to completely overhaul the constitution.
Opinion: I think Celia did it.
Opinion: I think Celia didn't do it.
Opinion: I think Celia should die in jail.
Opinion: I think Celia should be given a second chance.
Opinion: Celia would never do that.
Opinion: I always knew Celia would do that.
Opinion: Why is everyone focussing on Celia, and not her victims?
Opinion: Celia's victims had it coming.
Opinion: Why are people so biased against Celia?
Opinion: Why is Celia's plight getting all the attention, but not victims of forest fires?

There is no end to opinions people will put forth, but asked for their expertise, knowledge and evidence, they have none to offer. None of those sentiments are relevant to factual information. Celia may be guilty, or she may be innocent. You need evidence to confirm or refute the theory. How did she become a suspect? What was the evidence? What was her defence? Is there any information that disproves the theory of her guilt?

Your information will come from a variety of sources. Each one will need to be vetted. How does this person know information? What is their background in that matter? Did they experience this firsthand at the critical

juncture and would they be in the position to know what it means? How naïve are they? How conniving? Just because your source does not know what to make of the information, doesn't mean what they tell you isn't useful, nor does their manipulative nature mean that you cannot cut off the strings attached to the information. You merely will account for their perceptions and interpretations and gather and hunt for facts.

They may very well believe in Celia's guilt or innocence. You are not obliged to take sides on the matter or read into it more than what it actually there. Village gossip is not your mandate. That is the white noise that distracts you from seeing the heart of the matter. You look for information and then present the facts unfiltered. Whatever the truth of the conviction will become evident without editorializing, but one of the biggest deflections is accounting for ideological biases and personal attacks.

How ideology taints facts

Ideology is the interpretation of information. It is not actual information. We must be careful when we present information that we do not try to sell the facts, but tell them. It is often tempting to push a narrative and see information in a certain light, but often, we do not know the actual mechanics at play. There is often a "default delusion": we know that one interpretation is wrong; ergo, its deemed "opposite" must be right by default.

That is not the case. It may be a combination of both, or *neither.* There may be crucial factors that we do not know at the time: making ideological assumptions sends us down the wrong path. Often, it is a political Left/Right divide, with different levels of both making up the whole.

Ideology often is rigged to the believer's personal benefit. If they are wealthy, they will argue that they have the right to be such. If they are not, they will complain the rigs are unfair and should eliminated, without considering whether those who are wealthy would be regardless of rigs as they have the ability to benefit regardless of them. On the other hand, those who do well may not consider they are financially blessed by sheer serendipity. Unless we have ways of comparing and contrasting both groups, we cannot answer for certain. We know only that we have two kinds of economic castes who are at odds with each and differ in the mindsets.

We may have admiration for one group, sympathy for the other, or we may have a disliking for one, the other, or both; however, we need information to determine which factors are at play.

We can interview people. We can look at various interactions: from how often each group interacts with politicians to how well they can network with various people. We can examine how banks deal with both groups. We can look at grant availability. We can look at geographical restrictions and benefits. We can even conduct experiments to see what factors need considering. From the educational background to television program preference, we can create profiles to compare and contrast without judgement. If we use multiple factors, we can find the most salient indicators to discover how one side benefits and one does not. Once we understand how facts reveal reality, we can open new avenues of ideas so that citizens can glean insights from the knowledge we give them.

Avoiding logical fallacies

Aside from ideological shading, we need to consider how logical fallacies can prevent us from finding information. We may make assumptions based on faulty thinking and it is a good idea to become familiarized with such problematic logic.

You must also ensure that you consider the logical flaws of documents and interviewees as often their arguments hinge on some faulty base. While this list is not exhaustive, it is a starting point to consider:

Confirmation bias: This fallacy occurs when we look for evidence that confirms our theory, but not the evidence that refutes it. We may believe that the aforementioned Celia is guilty of first-degree murder as she had no alibi and ignore the fact that the blood found on the scene did not match hers. The confirmation bias can skew perceptions, leading to false and misleading conclusions.

Personal attack: Simply put, we begin to insult or belittle those with whom we do not agree. Their personality is irrelevant to the quality of their observations. We often see attacks during political campaigns with rivals battling for victory, but they can be in other places as well. When someone gives you a negative or even positive assessment of another individual, make certain you separate their opinions from the facts.

Appeal to authority: Just because an authority makes a decree, it is not necessarily correct. They may be mistaken, uninformed, deceitful, or confused. Confirm or refute what they have told you and do not use authorities as a shortcut for your work.

Sink or swim: When groups or individuals wish to push for their own ideas or policies, they will claim that if their way is not implemented, dire consequences will occur. There may be several alternatives and there is no guarantee that their position is correct or better than another. While they may try to push for immediate change, it is important to look for alternative methods or ideas as you avoid falling for their dire decrees.

Hasty generalization: People often jump to conclusions without sufficient information. You will need to look to various sources as you weigh what each one offers.

Strawman fallacy: Do not be deceptive restating an argument to sound incorrect, nor should you believe second-hand information from others who may try to do the same with a rival or target. If you are given negative information, try to confirm it with the one who allegedly said it. You also should ask for evidence from the second-hand source as it may be a way to test their truthfulness.

Slippery slope: Are often alarmist or conspiracy theories that purport that an increasingly dire chain of events will inevitably occur if the first step is taken. Be wary of such claims and look for past instances as a reality check.

Avoiding the TORTEE

There is often an inclination for those who learn by rote, to assume that a single truism is an all-encompassing rule which applies in all situations. We see this when people discover someone benefitted by performing a certain action and then mimic the action as they model themselves to those individuals as they memorize their steps. For instance, if a schoolmate won a sports scholarship, parents may then send their own children to hockey camp to replicate the same success, not questioning whether a plan that worked twenty years ago will still work now, or whether their children could qualify.

The One Rule That Explains Everything (TORTEE) is an easy error to make, particularly if you are covering the same issue repeatedly: you may

see the world in static terms, but it is a dynamic one where technology and outside circumstances shape thinking, making certain elements obsolete as new wrinkles emerge. It is essential to be aware of how various changes interact with the events and issues that you are covering. Laws change overnight, fortunes rise and fall, education progresses and cultural shifts and milestones shape the mindsets of citizens.

While it is important to be aware of your own base assumptions, it is also important to know if other sources of information that you are gathering have relied on TORTEE. An interview source may have a narrative that will never alter, regardless of the circumstances. They may always cast themselves as the hero or victim. There may be government, medical, or corporate documents that used measures that cannot detect changes in the environment. For example, for years, men and women were given the same recommended doses for medications, when their weight and size dictated that there should have been differences.

The exception that disproves the rule is an important element to seek when you are working: when you are offered a theory, it is essential that you consider what may weaken that rule. It is the way to find balance and precision of information. If you are told that A causes B, you need to discover if there are times when A does not cause B, or if other elements cause B. You may not know the reasons, but by the act of finding exceptions that goes against the rule, you are providing crucial information for people as you are warning them not to follow a single rule blindly.

Venn diagrams and factual analysis

Often, there is a factual overload: giving too many facts is often used as a misdirection to confuse and muddy the understanding of a situation and to make the audience feel intellectually *inadequate* to understand a problem. It is a form of one-upmanship to create a false pecking order; however, having too little facts is equally impeding to seeing reality: it gives the audience an *inflated* sense of knowledge and competence. Both methods are deceptive, and it is essential that we see the balance of informing without distortion or manipulation.

The "Venning" of information allows us to present facts as intersecting elements with different stories to create maps of the ideological battlefield. For one group of people, an event will lead to their downfall, but to another, it marks the beginning of their rise. We look for common elements, even if

the outcomes are vastly different. Other times, we may not know the link or common threads unless we map them by looking for common points. When you are interviewing various people, it is a good idea to visually compare and contrast individuals. They may rely on the same source of information, meaning you are not getting two different sources, but second-hand information coming from a meta-source. Other times, several people are the victim of a heinous crime, but they may share the same landscaper as a common thread, hinting the source of the problem began there.

This allows you to compare and contrast information and common traits. Who went to the same university may give you clues and additional sources to interview, for instance. The same arresting officer targeting people of the same ethnic or racial group may expose corruption or bigotry. The same physician who has more deaths than the average may also bring you to significant breakthroughs.

Always try to create a map of commonalities as you work: there may be obvious, subtle clues that become apparent when you see them.

Creating theories to uncover factual information

When you come across information, you will eventually have enough facts to warrant a theory about what those facts mean, but that doesn't mean your work is done: what you will need to do is to find a way to confirm or refute your hypothesis. If, for instance, you have several facts indicating Celia's innocence, you may wish to *test* your theory. What fact will help you feel confident enough to present your information to the public?

If her lack of alibi is a sticking point with you, you may ask to interview her to ask her details, but then try to find other ways of pinpointing her whereabouts; however, you may not find the answer in this method. What other point would be helpful? You will devise a strategy to look for information that can clarify or question a key point. You will be looking at court transcripts, looking line by line for anything which can be proven or disproven; however, be aware that if your theory is repeatedly refuted, it most likely a sign that you are wrong.

No matter what theory you use as your starting point, you must write down what it is that you are setting to prove:

Celia was wrongfully convicted of murder because a witness perjured himself.

There is a statement and then a reason why you believe that the statement is true. There is an element of *risk* involved, as you may be right for the wrong reason; however, you have done your research enough to determine this is the cause of the outcome. You have your theory and the element that you need to test to prove your theory right or wrong.

Many times, a theory will be unnecessary as the event or issue is straightforward, but when working on an investigative piece, or one which requires method research, you will require to have one to focus on finding the right information efficiently.

Presenting facts in news reports

We will take a deeper look at presentation in Chapter 20; however, it is a good time to begin to consider how we present facts in our reports. This is the reason for your work and the primary focus and interest to your audience. Without facts, they have nothing from you.

You are working without narrative, but you are still relaying information that needs to flow and make sense to people. You are presenting information in the order of importance or chronologically, but there needs to be a logical basis for how you present it.

You will relay facts, but also ideas. Your work is brought together by the results of your theory: you are explaining an event, person, issue, or situation that requires attention. What crime has been committed? What law has been passed? Why does the audience need to know?

Avoid the temptation to explain how to interpret information. A sanctimonious attitude is merely that—an attitude. You are not a crusader, activist, superhero, monarch, or deity. You are a fact-gatherer and fact-hunter. That is far more important than selling opinions, but there is a deeper reason to avoid ideological conclusions: you may lack crucial information that makes your own opinion on the matter completely wrong. This takes skill and the understanding that different people will use your information differently. If your report is a tool, it is best seen as a Swiss Army Knife: what one person uses to solve one problem, another will use something else entirely.

If you are writing about the crime rate in a particular neighborhood, this may help one family decide to move away, while another decides to pressure their local politician for better policing. Another person may decide to take legal action instead, while someone else may decide to run for local office to tackle the problem from within the system. While there may be those in denial, what you have shown are the inside workings of the issue and where the problem lies. How other find the solutions is up to them entirely.

To master fact-writing, find three films or music albums: one which is your favourite, one you despise and one which you have neutral feelings. Watch or listen to each one and write a guide for each one without judging the quality or preference of any of them. When you are done, ask someone to each one in the order of their choosing and ask them if they can determine your feelings of each. If they have guessed correctly, go back and look for any overt of subtle judgements and rewrite them, finding someone else to repeat the exercise. When someone cannot determine your preferences, you have completed the exercise. If you have done this exercise correctly, you are merely explaining the essence: you are serving as a translator to explain what the artists are trying to convey.

Trending is often an illusionary hypothetical construct. Traditional journalism made covering so-called "trends" part of their staple: however, what were seen as fashion or entertainment trends were a choreographed affair. With billions of people with a wide spectrum of beliefs and tastes, finding a group of people who enjoy something is not difficult to find. Social media often has paid operatives who purport to hold beliefs, or advertisers giving graft to "influencers" to shill their wares. We must take care not to confuse rhetoric and hyperbole as truth.

For example, many celebrities who have social media accounts have often bought pseudo-followers to inflate their numbers. The press often made mention of an entertainer's popularity, yet the truth was that those were phantom followers of bogus accounts used to put forth a narrative of the individual being a popular trend.

Looking for fresh information is an active process that requires sceptical criticism. There are people who can *sell* a message, as that is part of their job and personality. Your job is to find relevant information that explains problems and processes. When you learn to recognize information, you have found the very element you are supposed to disseminate. The following chapter discusses how to find that information in the first place.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

RESEARCH

A reporter's job has several components: to find issues and events to cover, gather information, analyze it, produce it and then finally disseminate it, but none of the other elements can come together unless research is conducted. The bulk of your job is to find new, important, accurate, reliable, valid and useful information. You will conduct interview, fill Freedom of Information requests, find documents and even work in the places you are covering. You will conduct experiments and observe. You will test theories as you compare and contrast information. The atom of your career's existence is the fact.

But how do we create new forms of research to cover current events and issues that is accessible to different audience types? How do we execute research and evolve them over time? We need to use our time and resources efficiently: there are many misdirections, tangents and deflections that will test our focus. There will be those giving up spin, advertising, gossip, narrative and propaganda. There will be people who wish to instill fear in us, as well as pity, greed, vanity, jealousy, anger, hatred and self-doubt. Those emotions are manufactured to throw us off the trail of the truth.

We must be aware of our own limitations and biases whenever we begin a new report. We must also know our limitations in knowledge as we work. Each assignment is a blank slate and no matter how many we have done or the expertise we have amassed, each one will challenge our truisms, surprise us with the unexpected and force us to come to grips with the very essence of humanity and reality. We may become philosophical at the end of our journey, but we must begin by being inquisitive. The goal is to find data and that is not an easy task: people hide it, are ignorant of it, disrespect it, or are in denial that what they are facing is the truth. A good reporter treats each piece of information with respect and listens to what each piece has to say.

The intellectual and emotional openness is essential as it allows us to orient ourselves into being able to find information and recognize it when we see

it. We learn how to turn over every rock before examining the rocks themselves. We are like toddlers, always asking "Why?" We jump into the assignment, with a plan of action and strategies to help us move forward for each task we are assigned. It is the key element of successful research.

But we cannot do any of that unless we understand what is and isn't research.

What isn't research

Press releases are not informational sources as they are skewed and usually used to bolster a company in the public eye. PR firms and publicists also are paid advocates and they are rarely, if ever primary sources: they are the source's proxies.

Speaking with irrelevant parties for their untrained opinion isn't research. We may wish to discuss ideas with those with fresh eyes for their impressions, but it is not to be used in lieu of research or work. Reporting on feel-good choreographed and canned events is not research. Reporting on press conferences is not research. Using Video News Releases is not research. Speculating is not research. Giving opinion isn't research.

To make what isn't research clear, here are some examples:

Reporting that a fictional character has been married, killed, or is celebrating a birthday or anniversary.

Reporting on the plot lines of movies, serials, comics, books, or video games.

Reporting on a celebrity's love life, personal feuds, sales records or flops, fashion sense, latest product, or plastic surgery.

Reporting on the latest fashions or trends according to the companies or firms who benefit from the information.

Reporting on the likes or dislikes of celebrities.

Reporting on the clothing choices of celebrities or politicians.

Reporting on the awards or accolades of public figures.

If it reeks of advertising or positive information, it is not news. There are countless *other* outlets which can be conduits for such information: journalism is not one of those places. Sometimes what you need to find will be obvious, such as an arrest, accident, or lawsuit. Other times, you will require ingenuity to find what is hidden, but often, you will have to open the path yourself by devising a research avenue to begin your investigations.

How to create research avenues

We question everything. We take no explanation for granted. That is how every line of inquiry begins: with the question *why?* Once we learn to look at the mechanisms of reality with critical scepticism, we can begin to look for information where no one thought to look before. The rote habits are rich fodder for examination and many troubling scams and hoaxes slumber where no one thinks to ask.

For example, a reduction in force (RIF), often requires a company's attorneys to work out a disparate impact analysis, which is jargon to see if the reduction would disproportionately hit certain groups more than others, such as race, age, or gender. Seniority also applies, but managers' assessments rarely have any impact. What does this mean in terms of job security, quality, employee loyalty and future hires? When we begin to ask, we may find hidden discriminatory practices that are made to look fair and sensitive.

Or, for instance, many retail outlets have donation boxes—do you know where the money goes, and who gets to claim a charitable donation with it? What do the numbers on an SKU represent? Why are there mass recalls for multiple companies instead of one when an item of food has become contaminated? How do human traffickers hide their operations? How often do the police investigate identity theft? All of these questions are fair game and you should learn how to ask about the mundane to find out more about the world around you.

Learning to look beyond the surface is critical to finding hidden events and issues that people take for granted. For instance, here is an undated article from Candor, a website for tech professionals for salary negotiations and networking about what a job applicant should do if a recruiter withdraws an offer for employment:

> If there is something in your background that can be an issue—speak up. Most commonly in tech, we see candidates feel insecure about not attending

college and purchasing a fake degree (the dark web is not your friend) or claiming they graduated when they dropped out. Please rest assured that no one cares if you graduated if you're a gifted engineer or data scientist or if you've already had some career accomplishments. You're only screwing yourself over by lying. It's truly not worth it.

At first glance, the author (who states in the piece is a hiring manager) is advocating honesty, but, on further examination is stating the *opposite:* It is all right to *lie* about the qualifications when applying for the job, but one should come clean during the interview. Education would be tantamount to getting an initial interview, but during the interview, so long as you can do the job, educational and initial dishonesty are unimportant. What are the ramifications of this singular chasm? How easy is it to exploit this loophole? What does it say about the company? As you can see, it is vulnerabilities in these points of entry where a very promising line of inquiry can begin with a simple corporate article.

We can begin to ask *other* questions: what sort of power does the human resources department have? What kind of information do they have? What if human resources are outsourced, and they have accounts with companies in the same industries? Once we begin to focus our initial attention on questioning something most take for granted, we can find rich and important fodder to explore.

For an exercise, go to an art gallery or library in person and ask how each acquires their art and books respectively. Find out if the system is consistent, if there are any exceptions and had there been any changes in policy over the years. Ask about any surprises that have happened and how does the person think the system could be improved.

Go to another gallery or library and ask the same questions. Finally, compare and contrast the answers. Do you see any potential line of inquiry that you would pursue? Why or why not? If yes, what would it be? If not, as someone to look at your work and ask them if they see something potentially important. Did they see something you missed? If not, ask them what would they have liked to know that you did not ascertain.

When lines of inquiry come to you

There will be no shortage of those who approach you with information. Many times, these individuals will withhold important information themselves which would significantly alter their interpretation of the

narrative. They may wish to malign a rival or enemy. They may have financial or political gain from the publicity. They may wish to fright or manipulate a public for personal gain. They may be mistaken or give bad information. They may be at fault for their own woes and wish to seek retribution as they try to spin a narrative to preserve their reputation or self-image. They may be paranoid, prejudice, superficial, narcissistic, or fearful and their distorted lens skews toward a pre-set narrative. They also may be telling the truth and what they tell you is accurate, reliable and perfectly valid.

On first glance, it is nearly impossible to tell, but even if their spin on information is skewed, it does not mean there is no problem. We approach each possibility with an open mind, but that also means that we are open to the possibility that what we are being told is a scam or a bid to cover up a problem by deflecting blame before the problem is exposed. We have a theory to test from the onset.

We begin by questioning the person, asking them to provide as much concrete evidence as possible. How do they know this information to be true? They may give you documentation or additional names of players. You should also ask why they have come to you rather than some other reporter or merely dump the information online themselves, even the reason is obvious: you are looking for clues as to their own mindset and thinking patterns. If they are being evasive and deceitful, you will need to understand the landscape before proceeding.

Ask for names, times, places and dates. Ask background questions to understand the situation. How did this problem come to be? Is there any attempt to cover up information or doctor reports? Once you have a grasp on the situation, you will need to find additional information from outside sources before proceeding. You may need to interview experts, attorneys and witnesses. Many key players will not speak to you, but you may find a more receptive audience with underlings and support staff who may be more willing to tell you what is transpiring. From Security and Exchanges Commission (SEC via electronic data gathering analysis and retrieval, or EDGAR) filings to Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filings, you will need to find information of financials, history of lobbying, criminal and civil cases, human rights cases and any official records to get an idea of the background before finding original information.

When you are vetting information, it is also a good idea to research on the individual who has relayed information to you. While part of the reason is to ensure the person is honest, the other reason is to look for possible connections the person has with other players. The more information you have, the easier it is to see who has access to the information you need. While social media sites are partially helpful, they often mask unflattering information or exaggerate accomplishments.

You will look to understand key players and here, you can scour for old yearbooks, which is vital when building a profile on an individual. It can reveal if they have gone to multiple schools, were accomplished, or failed. You can also see if there are associates or schoolmates who may have more information to share with you. Looking for archival information is also important, and it is useful to know where to find them. Not everything is place on an online database, for instance. There are local museums, archives and libraries that have important information that has not been scanned. What we are doing is starting from the past and moving forward as we also begin circling from the outside layer before devising how best to enter the centre of the issue at hand. Each strategy will be different. Sometimes, you are looking for former clients and associates who have had a falling out to see what has happened in the past and you are testing if there is a pattern.

Do not be afraid to do legwork: going on site to see if information that has been presented to the public is aligned to the reality of the situation is crucial. You may find yourself filming, photographing and even measuring elements of a site. Other times, you may be going to a courthouse to look at court cases, proceedings, wills and codicils. You may go to City Hall to attend meetings and get the minutes; however, just because it is an official document does not mean we do not try to find corroborating or refuting evidence through other channels.

The purpose is to verify information as well as confirm or refute the information an outside source has given. Many times, the source will be used for multiple reports; other times, it will be used for a single one. When information comes to you, you will do more than just pursue the lead, but also the one who asked you to pursue it in the first place. Do they have something to gain or lose? What are their expectations? Do not automatically assume these sources or devious, but do not assume they are altruistic, either. Make no assumptions. Just investigate.

Using Freedom of Information

For many governments, you can request information by filling out a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. While sometimes the requests have varying fees, often these fees can be waived. There are manuals to download and become familiarized with various stipulations in each. These normally do not include congressional or senate records, court cases and there may be other exemptions as well. There are online directories of exemptions and departments that permit FOI requests, but be aware that often, requests are denied and information is redacted. Before you begin, make certain you know what information you want and how best to obtain it.

Do not hinge your entire report expecting these documents will be a "smoking gun": there may be omitted pages, or the information you expected will not be there. While important to obtain, government filings do not always convey the full story or show the smaller details that are required to see the reality of a situation.

Finding primary sources

Once you have a firm grasp of the event or issue, you will need to find *primary* sources; that is, a source that has direct connection to information and they have first-hand knowledge of information. Secondary sources are *accounts* of events by those who did not witness or experience the event or issue. When you are working, you will come across both kinds of sources; however, the goal is to have as many *primary* sources as you can: every vital piece of information should contain primary sources.

How to find primary sources can be challenging, complex and difficult. Sometimes the primary source is in prison, and the warden's policy is to deny outsiders from speaking to the person via telephone and you cannot go there to interview them. You may need to relay your questions to their attorney who can record the conversation and then give you the recording, for instance. Sometimes you will need an advocate who your source trusts to broker enough trust for them to open up to you. Many times, attorneys will tell clients not to speak with outsiders. By talking to as many people as possible, preferably in person, you will find new avenues of information to explore. Not everyone will be receptive or trusting and they may try to impede your work, but you will need to account for these variables and form ways of circumventing the white noise.

You may require to find various directories of key personnel in whatever field you are investigating, as well as any "temp agencies" a particular company uses to find anyone who has had dealings on the inside, but not in the capacity of insider. Often, on a long-term story, you are looking for a *curator source:* that is, someone who knows the workings of an institution or organization and can explain the scaffolding to you. They may not be direct sources or ones you use in a dossier, but they will be the ones who can give background information, explain the internal politics and power structure and give advice as to where you will find the most willing sources who will give you the information you need.

Many times, finding old court transcripts will give you a wealth of information about those who were harmed. Many charitable organizations give awards to people who have helped the less fortunate—finding those individuals on web pages can help you gain access to those who have seen abuses and can help you find those who were harmed and are willing to speak to you. From nightclubs, pubs, libraries and recreation centres, groups congregate and if your report has a focus on a certain demographic or psychographic, this may be your first stop. Organizations that help certain people are also a good gateway to finding information and primary sources.

When we form a plan, we need to make lists of possible sources and where they are likely be found. Sometimes we cannot get the person at work or at home, but may have better luck with an advocate who is in contact with them at their leisure class at the local college or at the spa: by cultivating sources and being vigilant of local events and organizations, we can find those who have first-hand knowledge and will trust us enough with the information they have to relay it to us.

How to avoid narcissistic biases

When we conduct any research, we must be aware of our own biases: not just of those ideological ones we hold, but the *narcissistic* ones as well: how do we preserve our sense of self-worth? How do we explain our failings and flaws? Do we tend to be fearful or jealous? Do we believe we are entitled to things though we have made no personal investment? If so, you are vulnerable to skewing and misinterpreting the information you are receiving.

If you consistently explain away failure by stating only those individuals who come from wealth get chances, then you will miss on information that

challenges your beliefs. It may be true some of the time, but other times, it is not. What you will need to do is see what are those sorts of truisms you hold and note what they taint your perceptions.

For an exercise, save every traditional news article or story which captures your attention in a separate file for one week. This includes any write up or video on specialty sites, such as animals, celebrity and technology.

After a week, open your files and read every article before classifying them in separate folders based on the underlying morality message each story has: are you attracted to stories about rags-to-riches tales? Is the theme that money does not buy happiness? Or that the government favors one entity over another? Are you attracted to stories about people who rescue animals or deniers of medical advice got their comeuppance? Is it repulsion that people are exercising free will against social mores?

After you have classified your files, read them once again: what is the typical *outcome* of these stories? Are they positive or negative? Then classify by the ratio of facts to colour. After you have tallied up the numbers, what are the kinds of narratives and morals you seek? Do you have any contradictory messages? If not, why not?

Once you have determined the kinds of morals and narratives you are drawn to, for the next week, actively seek those which *contradict* those stories: if you always look for stories of people rescuing shelter animals, start reading those where people *abandon* or relinquish their pets. If you always gravitate toward stories of companies laying off employees, look for those pieces about those who are actively *hiring.* How easy or difficult was this new task to you? How resentful or uncomfortable were you and why? Did you read these articles more or less thoroughly? Which points did you skip or become upset?

Now compare your reactions to both files: how many errors did you spot overall in each category? How many exceptions did you come up with in each grouping? Once you see the patterns and limitations of your own personal biases, you can begin to devise methods of reaching a radical centrist position: look for the base assumptions of every grouping of articles. Look for their structural and narrative assumptions. As you look at your own ideological proclivities, you can begin to *balance* them with *alternative* viewpoints.

For the final week of your own self-assessment, look for information that takes a *third* approach to the same issue, preferably one that takes neither side. Find raw information: for example, what is the ratio of animal adoption to abandonment and relinquishment? Do all states or provinces have the same rates? What about other countries? Begin to look for hard numbers instead of narratives. Once you expand your repertoire, it will become easier to let go of your biases—both ideological and personal, to create useful information for others.

Near and far away

It is often simpler to make assessments as an outsider far away from the epicentre of an event: it is easy to judge how physicians *ought* to react in natural disaster when we have never been physicians or ever experienced a natural disaster. On the other hand, it is too easy to make excuses for why our in-groups have been failing when we are also failing right along with the group and do not wish to change our rote routines or faces the consequences of our flawed actions.

Our perceptions of near can be as distorted as those of far way: we can be myopic just as we can be hyperopic: if we are too far away, we do not understand why there has been a breakdown, but if we are too close, we begin to justify and explain away those breakdowns and can even take them as unalterable reality.

When we begin our research, we need to first establish our psychological distance: how near are you likely to be or how far away? You may have personal experiences that provides crucial insights into knowing the overlooked details, but you may also miss out on more obvious signs of deceptions and biases. On the other hand, you may have no previous experience and will struggle to understand the rigs, rules and rotes of an out-group, but you will more easily see their sanctioned insanity and untested truisms. To balance your distance, question every assumption as you get to know the subject as intimately as you can. The ideal is to get as close to the epicentre of a problem as you can and then pull back to see the big picture. It is no different than looking with a telescope with one eye, but a microscope with the other.

This is a delicate juggling act: you are doing this while being focussed on your goals. One exercise to get you started is to go on an outing with your regular in-group and bring up a topic of conversation not normally

discussed. Note reactions and responses. Then make an acquaintance with a group you have never socialized with before and sit in quietly, making note of the conversation topics. Bring up a topic that would likely not be a regular one and again, note the reactions and responses. Compare and contrast your groups: how comfortable were you in each group before and after your suggested conversation topic? How comfortable were the two groups? How did they respond to you? How would you approach each group differently next time?

Psychological distance will be the cornerstone of your work: while you focus and balance, you will need to re-focus and re-balance as you become familiar with people and the environment. You will come to care for some sources, while others will anger you. Your job is not to pass judgement, but to find information. There will be many times when a source you like or even admire is mistaken or deceptive and a source who annoys you tells you the truth—and a truth you do not wish to hear. Your reports are not a forum to settle petty vendettas, tweak noses, or show solidarity with people who praise you and tell you what you want to hear. They are created expressly for the purpose of relaying information.

How to ask research-focussed questions

The kinds of questions you ask will determine how you will orient yourself in finding information. Ideally, finding non-binary information is key: we are not trying to create political or ideological narratives: we are looking for information.

For example, natural disasters bring a statistically significant rise in incidence of domestic violence for women, children—but also men. Why does violence increase in these situations? What are the factors? What we ask will determine what we ultimately find.

We are not looking to create a narrative. We are not looking to express sympathy for victims of violence: the facts we uncover we be sufficient for a society to self-examine itself. It is far more potent when people come to a conclusion on their own and not through prodding or shaming as their focus will be to fit in and please others rather than ponder the significance of their violent environment.

We can go further: what are the economic *costs* of domestic violence? How much does an economy lose? How many lost work days? How much less

does an average person lose in income? How much more money do police and courts need? What about healthcare and education? How much worse do children in these environments fare in school socially, behaviourally and academically?

But we can also ask who benefits from domestic chaos and disruption? We can look at past spikes in a local and national level and see if the problem has gotten better or worse and if worse, why hasn't the system adequately addressed the problem? Is every region unteachable and unprogressive? We may find shocking answers to our assumptions: we may imagine a problem is far bigger than it actually is in reality. But every question should spur not only a new line of inquiry, but also another major question that brings us closer to the root cause. Every arc and segment should progress our understanding. We may discover, for instance, that neurobiological disruptions lead to poor anger control, or that those who develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are reacting out of fear—or people lash out on those they see as weaker than they are. Sometimes it is domestic tyranny, sometimes it is another cause. By asking questions, you are creating theories to confirm or refute.

This kind of questioning takes strategy and practice. We are reflecting on what information means. You may have several competing theories, and you examine each one, finding evidence and then comparing and contrasting the results. One theory may prove to be correct, other times, it is a combination, but there are times when the evidence suggests the right answer is none of your guesses. You lack key information and your new line of inquiry will be focussed on finding those missing elements. If none of the answers are satisfactory, ask another question. Keep a flow chart of your progress as you go: it will help you visualize your information as you learn to organize it in a constructive manner.

Method Research

If you are undertaking a long-term project where you will be working or associating among those you are studying, then your research will be just as focussed on your responses and reactions as it will be on the industry or environment you seek to understand. This is not espionage or undercover work: you are *living* the life of someone native to that environment. You are not gathering intelligence on people or salacious gossip: you are determining the *structure* in the environment, how others react and then *comparing* your organic reactions to the collective reaction.

That means the research you are primarily focussed on is *structural* in nature: you are actively seeking the rules, roles, rotes and rigs. What are the base assumptions? How does a collective react to the unexpected? How do they react to outsiders or those who think or act differently? What are they vulnerabilities and blind spots? How do they normalize behaviour—or even indoctrinate it? Your research is finding codified rules as well as unspoken assumptions. You are actively experimenting in that environment, meaning that you are creating *raw* data. While you may come across other information, your primary goal is to turn the environment into your laboratory. How do supervisors behave? How do underlings respond? What cycles do you witness? These are your primary considerations. For example, you may see a workplace where hiring an individual requires ten rounds of interviews: is this the best or more efficient method of hiring new employees? Is the retention any better than by a single interview with a mere handshake? You may find the results are better, the same, or worse, leading to other questions. What about withdrawals of employment offers? What are the reasons behind it? Poor vetting, unstable and predictable financial realities, or nepotism, for instance? As you observe your surroundings, you will look for ways to test your theories that are subtle, but elicit usable data for your work.

Research is the backbone of reporting: we do not merely rely on a person's say-so: we need proof to back up those claims. Eyewitnesses can be deceived or mistaken, filings can have flawed methodology and there are misdiagnoses and deceptions in many official documents. When we have multiple sources of information, we can be confident that the information we have is true. We do not discount information entirely: some of it may be sound, but there may be a single error we can discount. We try to get as close to the source we are investigating as possible: the closer we are, the more we can see the why of an issue or event. Distance is often used to hide the real happenings and prevent the curious from discovering the truth. Do not be afraid to come face-to-face with those who have information, especially if they have something to hide.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EMPIRICAL

Traditional journalism not academic. It is not scientific or empirical. It is the construction of narrative nonfiction with non-standardized methods of gathering information or conducting interviews. It is the reason why public trust eroded over time: information was often misleading, out of context and fraudulent when a con artist proclaimed to be an expert or successful businessperson. Without empirical methods, there were many criticisms and frustrations. People need easy access to important information, but the quality of information needs to be more than just verified: it needs to be placed in a useful context. The more we base our data on empirical methods, the more useful and versatile it becomes. We can see hidden connections, find deceptions and encourage critical thinking as we challenge folksy logic and untested beliefs.

It is the last item on the list that we need to carefully consider: much of our understanding in the world stems from assuming our untested beliefs or opinions reflect reality. Much of our systems, such as the legal system and even government, make peculiar assumptions. We often vote for leaders who have no expertise in economic, medical or crisis issues, yet expect them to devise effective strategies when problems arise. We have judges with no empirical training who rule based on hunches, not deep understanding. For instance, many judges have dismissed sexual assault charges purely on the basis of an alleged victim's post-assault contact with the defendant; however, judges forget that domestic homicides had victims who not only had continued contact with their killers, but married them, lived with them and raised children with them.

Individuals and societies alike take things for granted and do not question the mundane. Those are the places where troubles lurk and we cannot see the obvious as we have been taught to accept them and not challenge those elements. As a journalist, you will have to *relearn* your thinking patterns: it will be a challenging, but liberating exercise. When your thinking is sceptical and empirical, you will learn to automatically study your

environment and even the smallest, most mundane of happenings will suddenly be seen in a completely different light.

In other words, your perceptions of reality will shift and will keep shifting until they become *aware* of that reality and align with it. For that to happen, we need to consider eight key elements: the 4 Rs and the 4 Ms. The former sets up the latter, while the latter reinforces the former. It is a cycle that lulls us into complacency, but now, let us jolt ourselves to become aware of them.

Rigs, Rules, Rotes and Roles

When we see or merely perceive patterns, we learn to ignore random elements and begin to form habits. We do not perceive sound as it is as our minds suppress our awareness of its true chaotic nature, for instance. When we look for the most salient features, we begin to be blind to other factors. Many times, this method of thinking is helpful, but if someone should manipulate our attention, the salient features are misdirections used to prevent us from seeing and processing all of the relevant facts.

Our natural learning habits can be exploited. When we become aware of our style of learning, we can observe more important, but subtle stimuli and make *better* use of the information that we have. Active, higher-order learning is critical: when we synthesize, evaluate and create, we become better thinkers, but we also must learn to *challenge:* when we examine and test information that we are given, we can then we can find the flaws and improve them to create something new from the old.

There are many factors that prevent us from being able to challenge, create, re-create or improve, and we need to become aware of these elements so that we can become better empirical observers. Let us look at four that we will refer to as the 4 Rs:

Rigs: Simply put, these are elements that ensure certain people succeed while others fail. Rigs are often useful and can help with the learning process. For example, anyone who scores below a certain percentage on a test is rigged to fail, while those who score above are rigged to pass. These are *transparent* rigs and those who enrol are fully informed of them. In the world outside academia, there are other sorts of rigs: for instance, in the United States, their federal elections have a rig known as the Electoral College system where a candidate who wins the majority vote in a single state can get so many weighed votes no matter if everyone in the state voted

for them or they won by a single vote. This rig gives each of the fifty states equal say in the final outcome as more populous states would skew the vote, meaning candidates could win by focussing on no more than five of the most populous states and ignoring the other forty-five. It also ensures the candidate who is more strategically minded succeeds over the one who believes they can win by pandering to popular sentiment.

However, many times, the rig is hidden, not obvious and destructively unfair. Nepotism, the practice of giving positions to relative and cronies instead of qualified candidates is an example of a rig. If an outcome cannot be altered regardless of what a contender does or doesn't do, then the contest or competition is said to be rigged. A contest where a winner is predetermined from the outset is a rigged one. When answers are given ahead of time to certain people and not others, it is a rigged test.

Often, we are not aware of rigs being used as fortresses and assume the outcome was genuine and organic. We come to admire those who were rigged for success and pity or ridicule those who lost by those same rigs. We may learn false morals as we look at the outcome of events and not question the structure of it. People who cheat via rigs may control the optics and shame and belittle those who fail through accusations of jealousy and ignorance. We may believe people are more intelligent, attractive and successful without realizing the behind the scenes machinations that brought it. Had the contest been fair, someone else would have won by different means and strategy and we would learn a different set of ideals.

Before we make assumptions, we must first look at the possibility that there are rigs that have altered our understanding of reality. We take the outcomes as unvarnished truth and reality without asking how the results came to be in the first place.

Rules: Rules are a fixed clear or tacit protocols or procedures that govern behaviour within a group, institution, or activity. Often, these policies help maintain order, progress and provide guidelines to optimize outcomes. *No jumping off the building* is a rule to prevent injury or death. *No cheating on your exam* ensures the test is reliable and valid as it measures what the test-taker actually comprehends. When used properly, rules can offer guidance and ensure fairness as it creates both equality and equity among members of the group.

But rules can also create imbalance if there are loopholes, exceptions and uneven enforcement. If those who follow the rules fall behind to those who break them or make them, then the rules are an obstacle and impediment. If rules impede free will and free thought to those who innovate, then the rules are not being used to progress society, but to hold it back and favour certain people. Rules can be discriminatory, repressive and tyrannical and for authoritative regimes, rules may be deliberately cumbersome and confusing as to ensure people fail and are targeted for abuse.

If rules are arbitrary and untested to their consequences, rules can bring horrific unintended consequences. They may allow cheating, abuse and other troubling outcomes. They may also be used to deliberately impede people's progress and prosperity. We cannot automatically assume that rules are good for the whole without testing them.

When we are in a rule-bound environment, we may wish to see how those rules came about, the purpose they actually serve, have they cause problems and if they are an underhanded way of targeting people or groups. Rules are put in place to protect people; the trouble can be who is being protected by them. The main line of inquiry may very well be the nature of the rules, how they align with the reality of the environment and are they being misused to serve some other end to those who created them. Finding a rule's provenance may be the critical key of exposing problems in your reports.

Rotes: Learning thorough memorization is often how many people gain competency. Practice makes perfect. We follow the steps to the letter so that we can do an active the same way everyone else is doing it. We memorize lines of a script if we are an actor in a play or film; we memorize dance steps for our wedding day. We learn to read, write and do math through rote and for many skills, rote is the method of learning.

However, not all learning works with rote methods. We may memorize steps, but never improve or find more efficient ways to do it. Rote discourages creativity and ingenuity. It does not encourage critical thinking or scepticism. When we exclusively rely on rote learning, we have no deep understanding, nor do we see the flaws of a concept: our goal to repeat, not alter.

Many times, systemic breakdowns and tyranny arise from rote learning. People do not question the steps: they merely follow them. The fact that others are doing the same does not make the action any more correct. You

will see instances of rote operations in industry: when rote learning ensures the safety of workers, it is a wise route to take, but when rote learning prevents workers from seeing flaws or opportunities, then it becomes a hazard that may threaten jobs, safety and freedom.

You will encounter many instances where rote adherence entrenched bigotry, inefficiency and even sanctioned insanity: people will do illogical and irrational things, but assume that their rote actions are justified. The heart of the problem may precisely be that the group use rote instead of higher-order learning to progress. When you observe a group, ask whether what they do is the *best* way of doing things. If you can come up with *several* more viable alternatives, then you are witnessing a stagnate, rote environment.

Roles: Roles are a two-fold concept: one, they create a hierarchy and a chain of command and, two, they designate specific actions to certain individuals. If we are in trouble, we seek those whose role it is to correct the problem and has the power to punish or reprimand the ones who harmed us. It makes progression easier when there are predictable and reliable roles. If we move to a new area or workplace, knowing the roles of others makes a transition easier the more consistent the roles are across the board. Even if we are doing research as a journalist, having those in roles facilitates our work as we know who is most likely to have the expertise, expertise and information we need.

However, roles can be misused. If a role is mere window-dressing, then the mere designation means nothing. It is meant to deflect and deceive. We can create roles for the pure purpose of malice and evasion: we can create rules that dictate a wronged party must go to a person with a certain role, but the role is meant to shield others from having to correct the problem. A CEO can create roles to either have someone to blame and discard should there be a scandal of his own making; or insist journalists speak to those with lesser roles so that he does not have to answer to the public.

We may come to think these roles are logical and should be taken for granted, or we may not push the boundaries of roles and become apathetic to our troubled environment. Many roles are redundant, manufactured and have no purpose other than being a patronage appointment to those who curried favour for us. If we do no question roles or test their limits, we become slaves to routine and miss vital opportunities for repair, growth, innovation and change. Many people who use rigs, rote and rules to secure

their positions, often work hard to ensure their roles are never questioned or challenged.

When you begin any assignment, remember that some roles will be of great help to you, others will be a deliberate hinderance and some you will expose as being a weapon of control. Learn to understand the nature of various roles as you begin and do not be intimidated to challenge roles as you work.

Understanding the 4 Rs will go a long way to understanding the layout of any given environment; however, those elements are entrenched by human behaviour. The 4 Ms are equally intriguing, and it is important to be aware of how our own behavior may impact our understanding of reality as well as those we are studying.

Mimicry, Modelling, Memorization and Mastery

How we come to accept truisms as reality and not hypothetical constructs depends largely on *how* we learn. The more we use critical scepticism and higher-order learning strategies, the more we can shape and create new paradigms and find flaws as well see what elements have become antiquated and are in need of replacing. If we fail to intellectually challenge ourselves, we become stagnate and take everything at face value, fearing change. Those who learn actively learn to embrace change. Let us look at what else you will need to consider as you work through your journalistic assignments:

Mimicry: This is strict imitation. We use the same mannerisms and phrases as those we are emulating. We add no nuance or personal touch, but merely repeat what someone else does. Various forms of mimicry have become prevalent: there is no thought or analysis, for instance, when we use the same phrases and arguments in social media. There is no original thought or sincerity involved. Mass protesters, for instance, may all chant the same phrases, but that is no guarantee that they *feel* the same way or understand the issue uniformly.

When we see mass social movements, it is tempting to assume those numbers mean there is consensus or a groundswell; however, that may not be the case. We need to ascertain what many in the group believe or understand. Who are they mimicking? Are there any deviations from the script? If not, do not assume you are witnessing consensus, but a group who follow a leader who dictates what is acceptable behavior.

Modelling: As children we often model the actions of adults to gain competency. There is nothing wrong with modelling; in fact, it is the way to develop hand-eye coordination, learn to use tools, play sports and work. However, when misused, an individual may use modelling in lieu of trying to understand a situation or skill based on their own thinking and effort: they merely follow how others have done it without understanding the significance of what they do. They are less likely to find solutions based on lateral thinking and should there be a novel challenge, they are unable to rise to the challenge. They did not success based on thought, but their ability to copy the behaviors of others.

Often, how someone in a position of power behaves in a time of crisis will give you valuable clues on how strategically minded they are—or whether they managed to slip into the position of power by merely acting the part and cannot navigate a nation out of a cataclysm. Other times, a so-called "wunderkind" will dazzle the public by echoing the manners and ways of a past iconic leader or visionary: your job may be to see if the individual has substance to the style or is merely an empty shell with the ability to model after the right person.

Memorization: Some people can come up with original ideas, while others merely parrot or memorize another's words. Memorization is a helpful skill when learning; the problem becomes when it is used in *lieu* of creative or critical thinking. It can be a form of intellectual appropriation; other times, the person mistakes using the words or ideas of another as a sign of real competency.

Often, during tragedies and crises, a spokesperson will use the same phrases and words in a press conference. These are acceptable and "safe" sentiments that are canned: these are used for optics to make it seem that a company or individual is repairing the problem, or taking responsibility for it. When we press for specifics or see whether there is true sentient and understanding, the individual merely repeats the memorized sentences.

Memorization is an important factor to take into consideration: how much of what is presented is organic and how much is mere theatre? Do phrases sound familiar? When given novel questions, does the person seem lost or upset? Those will be your primary clues to see how deep or shallow key players are and what deficits are at the root cause of an institutional problem.

Mastery: Mastery is often considered the definitive sign of intellectual or physical *success:* we now understand with fluency how to do something. We are proficient at a task, and we can do it without hints or help. On the plus side, when we practice and experiment, we gain mastery.

Yet, it is not a given that it is always a desirable trait: when we slavishly focus on a task at the expense of questioning it or improving it, mastery does not expand our knowledge or skill, but greatly confines it. The obsession takes over, and we cannot do *other* necessary things as we put all our mental resources to a single task. We see people who can do something better than others, but when there is a challenge which requires another skill, they falter.

In many institutional settings, we see the rise of those who have mastery in a single skill, but the job requires a more well-rounded skill set. Someone may be able to charm people into making alliances, but the day-to-day oversight is neglected and the structure begins to erode and rot. When you begin many assignments, it is wise to consider the level of mastery each key personnel possess: how you will be able to determine whether their lack of other key skills may be the root cause of a problem. Those who are masters of charm may even attempt to manipulate you and present themselves as being intellectually superior to you, but if you go in with an empirical mindset, you can ignore the taunts and ruses and begin your journalistic testing.

Empirical journalism

Traditional journalism did not have its roots in the scientific method and over time, it still shunned it. Psychology, on the other hand, had its roots in philosophy and yet *evolved* into its own discipline by incorporating other methods into its own system. These days, psychology is everywhere: from the corporate world to the academic and all points in-between.

Yet journalism *is* applied psychology and it is important to use the methods of experimental psychology to be more precise and insightful reporters. We can ask questions based on observed behaviour and even create experiments to narrow down possibilities as we expand our deep knowledge of people, issues, events and shifts. Let us examine how to use the Scientific Method in journalism: from how to operationalize our terms, remove sophistry and logical fallacies, create hypotheses, how to determine a good design from a bad one to find relevant and reliable information, and then test it.

What makes a good academic study

An experiment is an elaborate measure of reality: we are looking an element to determine its nature in reality. We are creating a measurement. The experiment is the tool to measure our element. How accurate the reading depends on the quality of the experiment. A poorly-constructed element gives inaccurate and useless readings, while a well-constructed one opens up hidden worlds to us. We see connections, relationships and mechanics. We see cause and effect and quantity. We see shifts, erosions, evolutions and revolutions.

We must determine what we are measuring, but also what we expect to see based on our previous research; that is, we need to form a workable and falsifiable *hypothesis:* what is our best educated guess of what will happen to our elements when they interact with various variables? If we reward children with a treat after learning a task, will they learn faster the next round, or slower? Either guess is our hypothesis. We state our reasons for our theory before we conduct it so that we know what is the measure to study. *If X is the reason for an event occurring, then Y should be the outcome.* We are testing X to see if we get Y.

We then need to create precision within our own experiments, meaning we carefully define the parameters of our terms, or operationalize them: what do we mean by "improvement"? What do we mean by loss or gain? What are the benchmarks? What are the Gold Standards? Why? How do we create precision? We set parameters based on a number of factors: for instance, if we measure whether more surveillance cameras curb theft, we would note how much theft in a given area occurred with a camera and then place cameras to see if there is a decline; however, if there is a small decline (say less than 1%), we cannot state the cameras were the cause: perhaps the criminal elements were arrested, went elsewhere, or there would have been less regardless of the camera in that time frame, with a spike coming later. There needs to be a statistically significant change for it to be of any value.

We need to remove sophistry and logical fallacies from both our hypothesis and our analysis of the results. It is less important that our initial theory was right or wrong than what our experiment uncovered. We are not prophets. The experiment is a journey to a destination we have not seen. We do not appeal to authority or use the confirmation bias: we measure amounts, essences, construction, evolution, erosion and causation.

When we create our working hypothesis, we wish to discover the *reasons* for the measurements that we uncover. How and why did these results happen? You may not have a clear answer, but you may be able to *discount* certain theories or factors and narrow down possibilities. You may even discover something entirely *new* that you had not counted on in your initial hypothesis: it is the last on the list that is particularly fortuitous and do not dismiss any findings just because you had not anticipated them.

When then need to design the actual experiment, how do we determine a good design from a bad one to find relevant and reliable information? We need to look at key elements of experimental design to make certain we are making proper measurements and comparisons. What we have is a *dependent variable* and an *independent variable*: the dependent variable is the element that the experimenter is studying and measuring in an experiment, while the independent variable is the element controlled by the experimenter.

We require comparisons, meaning if we look at a single group or event without comparing it to others, we have no context. It is one thing to say that a certain strain of flu is deadly and panic, but if there has been more deaths and higher fatality rates with other illnesses, then we can understand the level of danger there is. We need to do more than determine who things were before and after: we also need to look at other similar and dissimilar groups: are there common threads? What are the differences? The groups need to have equivalency in order for us to reach an unambiguous conclusion.

It is important to exclude extraneous variables that may taint our results: if other factors are at play that can also account for the results, then our experiment is an imprecise measurement. We require a control group that does not receive the independent variable so we can detect with their dependent variables will change. We must ensure none of the subjects have previous knowledge of what we are doing and that they are not trying to appease us. There should be a "blind" where experimenters do not know which test group a subject has been assigned. The ideal of "normal" should be properly and reasonably defined. Are the results reliable, valid and useful?

Once we have created our measurements through our experiments, we can gather information and study our results. The mechanics of experimental

design are critical in a laboratory setting, but we can take the same elements and apply them in a journalistic setting as well with a few modifications.

How to modify empirical methods in your work

What we are seeking is the landscape of reality: what is happening? Why? How? Is there corruption? Is there deceit? Is there erosion? Is there manipulation? Is there fear? Is there negligence? We will need to determine what we are seeing by devising strategies before we investigate. We do not have to strictly adhere to the original plan as unexpected factors will alter our understanding; but if we have a solid grasp, then making modifications becomes easier.

If we are watching civil unrest between police and protesters, we will watch for interactions between individuals: what is the length and nature of them? How do protestors interact with each other? The police? How do the police interact with one another? How do those in other groups fare in the melee? What is the power structure within the groups and between them? Once we finish recording the protest, our work is not done: we will then try to see how these same groups deal with each other afterwards, such as legal proceedings. How well do the parties know one another? We can ask both groups after the fact to see their reactions and responses. We can look at previous arrests and court dealings to find previous history as we move beyond the police and the protestors.

Here, we are observing two groups and comparing them. The clash is but a single moment in a much longer arc of reality. We can then look to other similar protests to see if *other* groups received the same treatment from the police—but also the protesters.

What will be your independent variable? What can be accounted for (not controlled in this case)? What will be your dependent variable—the element that you are measuring?

In times of breaking news, such as disasters and tragedies, you will still need to use empirical methods, but with the *primary* focus on the event in question; however, you will still need to question your initial reactions and question narratives presented. If you are told that hospitals are filled to capacity as a direct result, visit the hospital to confirm it. You will often ask for hard evidence of those making claims. If a gunman opens fire on a crowd, was there evidence of previous troubling behavior of psychological

problems that were inadequately dealt with? How does the case compare to others?

Often, you will be presented with a confirmation bias: for instance, many times, a murder suspect's "anger issues" are used as proof of guilt, but how many times are people angry, but not murderous? Is anger the key—or does the theory fall apart? The point is not to serve as stenographer, but investigator: find comparable events and begin to compare and contrast them, looking at similar factors to find your answers. How permissive is a single workplace with bullying or harassment? At what point in the chain of command do the breakdowns begin? If we are measuring employer response, that is our *dependent variable,* but it is the employee complaints that are the *independent variable*. While we cannot control it, but by asking consistent questions to those who experienced or witnessed it, you will be able to get a more accurate reading than if you merely relay what you are told without analyzing it for its significance.

There are several ways we can record our findings to see patterns. For instance, the Likert Scale can be employed to place facts into context: for example, if we see an array of responses, we can categorize them to see changes and differences. For example, suppose we are investigating the business practices of a real estate market that seem over-priced for a region: we can look at who is buying homes and then classify them as categories of purchasers: government buyers, corporate, foreign and domestic citizens. We can then use a scale to place the selling price of each kind of purchaser to see what sort of picture emerges:

  Over $2,000,000 $1-2,000,000 $500,000-$1,000,000 Under $500,000

We may find the municipal government is purchasing houses in economically depressed-areas for over the asking price, inflating the picture.

We can use the Likert Scale for more traditional purposes, by classifying intensity of emotions, level of beliefs and satisfaction ratings. We can take several readings to see if there have been changes over the course of our work.

If we have raw data in the form of numbers and measurements, we will use statistical calculations to find interactions between variables and groups; however, there may be times when your initial hypothesis was wrong, yet you understand there has been some significant interactions at play. In those

cases, using Euclidian Cluster Analysis may help you to see hidden facts and interactions.

Empiricism in Method Research

When we are walking among those we are studying, empirical journalism applies: we are not just observing the target environment: we are *interacting* with it. You will observe an environment to understand its workings and then create *natural experiments* to see what are the responses to various stimuli. The experiments are not theatre: you are not creating unnatural wrinkles or events. If you are studying the workings of journalism, for instance, you may send the same résumé to several similar outlets with various cover letters to see if different approaches are more likely to get attention. If you are studying how companies hire individuals, you would go to several job interviews, using various approaches during interviews to see responses from interviewers.

How are complaints handled? How does a neighborhood react to an outsider seeking help? You will be using a variety of approaches and noting the results. How are protestors treated? What kind of advice do lawyers give potential clients? How do real estate agents approach clients? You may be looking into troubled areas where there are accusations of corruption and wrong-doing: you are looking at the structures and interactions to see where the problems reside. You may do work as a volunteer or entry-level employee for months learning what is happening and why there is simmering trouble. There will be times when you are asked to sign an NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement): in that case, you will still be able to observe, but then find other ways of corroborating what you witnessed. You are, at the very least, doing the groundwork, to know about the environment and how it is failing.

In each case, we are recording our results and interacting with the environment and the people. We are mapping out the reality and then testing it as we try to determine its mechanics. Is this an environment where supervisors manipulate underlings to distrust each other? Are the underlings wasting resources and sabotaging the company? Is there discrimination? Is there dissent? Where are the breakdowns? How did it happen and why? Can we tally up the incidences and decipher the deeper meaning? Unlike regular reportage, Method Research allows for the journalist to *control* the independent variable. We are not looking for breaking news in this case, but

more long-form investigative pieces where we strive to pinpoint the source of the problem.

Once we begin to devise our strategies to study an environment, we can then begin to explore them. The following chapter will show us how.

Chapter Nineteen

Experimental

There have been many grifters who have proclaimed to be adroit business tycoons: Bernie Ebbers, Kenneth Lay, Bernie Madoff and Lee Farkas, are just a few who were con men who swindled people pretending to be Titans of industry. Traditional journalism allowed these men to gain trust with the public as they often gave them fawning praise in hard news articles and profiles and gave them legitimacy.

They knew how to deceive and beguile experts and the public alike, but they were also experts at deceiving journalists. When we are dealing with sources whose job it is to "sell", whether it be products, services, or ideas, we need to understand that they very well may be selling their image to us. Traditional journalism did not have safeguards for this problem, but we will need consider how to approach subjects and issues knowing that there are many traps and pitfalls that await us, from gaslighting to propaganda.

However, to determine if we are targets for manipulation, we will need a baseline to know whether the information we are receiving is factual, or if it is persuasion-based narrative. This comparison is not difficult to establish and in a milder form, we are setting up a form of a lie-detector test, only without machinery. We need to set up specific experimental conditions to test the information we are given and, in a way, where we are not beguiled or even indoctrinated into confining our thinking into someone else's self-serving rigs so that we miss the obvious.

For example, suppose a medical expert insists that a certain medicine or piece of equipment will save lives. In traditional journalism, the reporter would present this information without challenge or question. However, we will need to determine (a) whether this information is true and (b) whether the expert has a financial interest in presenting the information as such. We attack the problem from various fronts: why is this expert making such an assertion? Where is his evidence and how did he obtain it?

Similarly, if someone makes a scandalous claim against a public figure, we need to determine various factors: when did this alleged incident happen? What is the timing of the revelation? Who has encouraged this person to come forward and does anyone have a vested interest in destroying the person's chances at obtaining a position? Then we examine the accused. After we look at various players, we may discover that while the accusations may be wholly or partially true, the accuser is being paid by the accused's rival to make those claims now, the traditional narratives do not apply and what we have are two intersecting reports: one of the initial case of wrong-doing, but also one on how other players are just as corrupt, hinting that there is far bigger rot than two dirty players. There may be systemic corruption and rigs that seem to favour elevating those who are treacherous individuals. The initial bad behaviour may have been known for years, but tolerated, meaning the triggering event is just the tip of the iceberg.

We do not pick sides. We present facts. We do not shade information. We provide context. We do not give opinion. We give ideas. Folksy logic has no place in an information stream. For instance, during the #MeToo movement, it was a popular declaration that "victims don't lie", which is a patently false assertion. People not only lie about being victims, but often, victims do lie: they may be too *afraid* to admit they were abused out of shame or fear of death, but it does not mean they were not assaulted. They may have been lured, primed and groomed into believing that they were complicit in the assault and their understanding of the reality is false. We do not go in with an assumption that victims do not lie: we go in to find the reality of the situation, which will very often be far more complicated than what people are willing to believe. People may minimize what happened, or they may exaggerate: in any case, what we are looking for is the facts: there may be crucial patterns that are ignored if we try to make the facts fit a narrative or comply to a socially acceptable jingoism.

We look for facts that gives us an accurate picture of reality: we challenge folksy logic without telling people what to think or how to think about those facts. We prove our work with an experimenter's eye: what really is the truth and reality of this person, event, or issue? Is it true that victims always report on crimes that have be committed against them? Why or why not? What are the obstacles? What is the nature of those obstacles? What if you uncover a piece of information that has been always been there, but no one else thought to examine it? What is the atom of reality that we are looking for, how do we find it and how do we know that we have?

We are looking for information that illuminates and brings rationality. We are looking for data that does not placate or appease people into passivity, nor are we looking for information to anger or frighten them: we are not to manipulate a public. Propagandists thrive by causing internal chaos and panic, whether the panic be hatred, jealousy, helplessness, or fear: we are the antidote to those lethal games because when a public can no longer think straight, they are at the mercy of those who seek to weaponize them for personal gain.

The problem with propaganda and other manipulative forms of communications is that their effects go to the base of the brain: when people are frightened to an extreme, their cortisol levels rise, their hormone levels elevate, their neurological firing can increase to their uppermost limit, causing sensory overload. They are then unable to process any information that counters their basest beliefs that their survival is in question. People will go to into ritualistic habits and will be able to remember and process less information if they are under psychological siege from an instigator who gaslights a public. They are primed by loaded language and cannot ask the hard and sceptical questions; therefore, our job is to ensure civilization remains calm whether the crisis is genuine or manufactured.

But how do we do this when we may be equally susceptible to such manipulative techniques? We are not helpless as we have already begun to train our brains to think differently and the less predictable our thinking is as journalists, the less likely we can become pulled into a rigged vortex. We must always question information and challenge it. We look for exceptions, contradictions, logical fallacies and deceptions. When we cannot find any obvious signs of manipulation, we then look at who is funding and choreographing the information flow and follow that trail.

For example, traditional journalism adheres to morality narratives and ignores information that counters it. The *BBC* did such a thing with regards to the COVID-19 outbreak on April 6, 2020:

> Pastor Landon Spradlin wasn't worried about coronavirus when he went to New Orleans to preach during Mardi Gras. A month later he was dead.

> …Officials in the city now blame government inaction for what appears to have been a large spike in cases that followed.

> Pastor Spradlin was one of those who became ill, but tested negative for Covid-19. Even as he was sick, he posted on social media about "hysteria" surrounding the virus.
>
> On the 13th of March Pastor Spradlin shared on Facebook a misleading post comparing swine flu and coronavirus deaths…

This genre of schadenfreude stories where an individual did not fear and danger only to be felled by it was a common theme in many news stories in early 2020; however, these are highly misleading: there were few, if any news reports of those who feared the virus, only to get it all the same and perish. There far more of those cases, yet the point was not to inform people of the dangers; it was to instill fear, with the subtext that those who chose to take a risk were ill-formed and fated to be punished. It also ignored those who feared it and did not get ill, or those who did not fear it and were untouched by it.

That matrix is no minor oversight: when the lens focuses on a single profile receiving pain and suffering, the article is not meant to inform; it is meant to give orders to those reading it. This is not an empirical piece of news, nor is it experimental. It is a skewed narrative that takes a single case and the article itself had mostly colour that hinged on a confirmation bias and almost no true reportage. What we need is helpful and useful information and the article was not useful; after all, he may have been terrified of contracting COVID-19, but had to put on a brave face for his family and congregation. As we are not mind-readers of the dearly departed, it is far more useful to find information that serves as *currency* to an audience. If an audience can trade that knowledge for a workable solution, then we know we have done our jobs.

An introduction to experimental journalism

Because of such uninformative stories, such as the one mentioned above, the public has little or no understanding of events or issues. They are herded based on various irrelevant emotions, such as greed, fear, jealousy, competitiveness, vanity, hatred and anger. Narratives by their very nature seek emotional reaction and this is not what journalism was supposed to do: it was supposed to inform and educate.

A scientist conducts experiments: the researcher creates primary information in a controlled setting to what specific reactions and interactions. Here, there is no narrative: it is facts that drive our understanding. The more we

understand the versatility of facts, the more we can make use of it. We may have only one fact, but if we know how to place in various circumstances, that single fact goes much further than if we have a dozen facts with no context or understanding how it relates to various environments and situations. The way we discover a fact's versatility and limits is if we see it interact in various elements, but to do that we need to conduct experiments to test those facts for ourselves. Experimentation opens up exciting new possibilities for the journalist: no longer confined to rote presentation, the reporter can now concentrate on a single atom of information and then show what that fact means in a variety of situations.

For example, suppose a federal regime is offering financial incentives for couples who have more than one child. In traditional journalism, the reporter would merely relay this information to the public and may proffer a variety of opinions on the matter, from pundits, parents, activists, think tanks and critics. There will be those who complain this is a drain on the taxpayers, while there will be those who complain that it is social engineering, discriminatory to parents with one child or no children and those who say the amount is not enough. No matter the amount or method of implementation, these will be the stock answers of speculation. There will always be critics and there will always be opinions and neither is useful to know.

What is more important to know is how the source of financing will be generated, method of implementation, cost of it and the actual goal of such measures. We need to know what groups or individuals lobbied for it, whether there were any studies and which constituencies have the most to gain. There may be strategic political reasons for the maneuver, for instance.

We also need to know if this program replaces and another and the reasons for the switch. Have other places used a similar approach? What were the results, both positive and negative? What were the consequences of using it, if any and if there were negative results, or no difference, then why is it being presented here?

If we have similar cases elsewhere, we can see if there have been improvements. Has the system been abused and prone to fraud? Has it been successful? What were the measures and benchmarks of success? How were they determined? How were they measured? Are these good measurements? Are the methods reliable and valid?

We can find that information, but we can also find those answers in another way: we can compare and contrast people on our own to see what they have experienced, but also what we observe. For example, if the reason for the policy is to counter a specific problem, then we can see whether the problem exists and if the proposed method is the best, or if there are other alternatives; however, we are not doing this as social scientists, but journalists, which means our scale and scope is much smaller, but we are looking vital clues that explains a problem or policy to people.

For instance, is the policy a racist, sexist, or classist one? Is it being used to win crucial ridings in an election? How can we tell? By starting to interview those who lobbied for the measure and those who were opposed and then work from there: by understanding the battleground, we can see what was the impetus for those measures and see why *other* measures, data and arguments were rejected. Our starting point in this case is to find out why a specific policy has been decided on in the manner that it has been devised. If one group paid more money to lobby than another, for instance and the one with more resources succeeded, we have a starting point. If the group with more resources is the one whose wishes are more likely granted, then we have a pattern to explore.

But how do we conduct non-manipulative and ethical experiments in the real world to compare and contrast groups, people, environments and concepts? First, we need to breakdown an event or policy into components: how to did start? What were the obstacles? Who are the key players? We are looking for any opening where we can test: if, for instance, there has been increase in house sales, but there has been no corresponding increase in high-paying jobs or raises, then we need to discover why the prices have increased: are out-of-towners now flocking to the area? Are foreign investors parking money in real estate? Is the government buying the houses? Have banks and lenders made it easier for those to buy a house with less income? Has organized crime decided to launder their money in this way or has someone decided to buy up as many houses as possible to rent them?

If other regions are not experiencing the same pattern, then we need to see what are the differences between the regions. While governments and industry publicists may spin the information to prove the economy is humming along, we need to take a critical approach and see what is the real reason for sudden changes. We are asking questions along the way, challenging every point we have, looking for multiple explanations and then

finding facts that can confirm or refute each explanation. We are not trying to argue an event or policy is good or bad: we are providing an accurate sketch of reality. We need to answer three main questions:

1. Who is doing this action?
2. How are they doing it?
3. Why are they doing it?

If you cannot find this information on your own through research, you will need to employ an experimental design. Will you need to call different realtors or mortgage brokers to see their methods and then find the profile of those who benefit the most? Will you hire several agents to show you houses and then see the pattern of their pitch and methods and criteria of showing you homes? Will you need to speak to those looking for houses from a variety of backgrounds and compare and contrast their situations? Will you need to find various governmental grants or special programs to find who is benefitting from them?

We can use several experiments and pool our results to find patterns and then modify experimental design to clarify our findings. We may find that programs favour certain kinds of people over others: for instance, we may discover a city offers free transportation for people, but those who know about the program are well-to-do, but those on a limited income may not even be aware the program exists, meaning it is not targeting those who would benefit, but it has been hijacked by those more savvy in finding special services. We can ride on such services and talk to those who use the service and work in it, finding out as much as we can before finding other ways to confirm or refute what we are told.

We also may need to understand the psychological factors that shade an individual's perceptions and interpretations: for instance, we may discover that a certain government institution is over-budget and would like to know the reasons why: it may be that the problem or issue they are in charge of overseeing requires more money than they receive, meaning the priority id elsewhere, or we may discover public sector servants are taking medical leave, but are taking more time off than needed in order for temporary workers to receive more pay as the absentee worker is getting full pay as well: while the dynamics within the workplace is once of helping one another, they are less likely to consider the financial ramifications of their largesse by proxy. The workers may be well-meaning, but their perceptions may be focussed on their designated in-group. Other times, a toxic workplace

is made so by a manipulative supervisor who wishes to create chaos and dependence to guarantee they are not replaced by a more competent worker. We need to know what we are dealing with as the ramifications of office politics can spill beyond the office: government policies may not be enacted properly, businesses may become bankrupt and there may be negligence and even sabotage as a result.

By using controlled observation, we can see the dynamics at play: often, workplaces favour certain personalities over others, creating intentional or unintentional rigs that favors certain behaviours over others. It helps to account how much events are shaped by physical realities and how much by mere human perception. If people hold collective beliefs that are inaccurate, destructive, or unrealistic, what they believe is sanctioned insanity. They may believe there are no opportunities when they are bountiful or may believe they are prospering when they are in decline. We need to put information in context to separate fact from interpretation, reality from truth and perception from data.

Understanding psychological campaigns

Often, people are being manipulated by an individual or group and are unaware of it. They may have limited information and rely on people who deceive them. Cults, militias, radicalized groups and terrorist organizations thrive on this model; however, it is not limited to outside fringe groups. A workplace may be equally toxic. Racism and bigotry thrive when societies base perceptions on misinformation that is rigged to place the in-group higher on some perceived pecking order than another group.

We cannot assume such factors are not in play, nor can we assume we have not been affected by the manipulations of others. Wars begin when such games get out of hand. Fascist regimes needed to make a series of steps that allowed them to prime their populations to fear as they relinquished their own freedoms and liberties. When we are examining a group dynamic, we need to consider the environment they are immersed in: it allows other people to understand their perspective, but it also allows to account for their interpretations of their surroundings as well as their perceptions.

Often, when we are examining an environment, our experimental investigation will involve reconstructing the mindset or groupthink: how to people see their jobs? It will determine what solutions seem obvious to them and what problems or alternative solutions they miss even they are obvious to others

outside their in-group. For example, some environments rely on authority: there is a hierarchy with leaders and followers: leaders set the rules and standards as they decide what standards are superior or inferior and they have the power to shame people within the group as well as determine who is an outsider. Anarchy, on the other hand, relies on power within the members of the group who are in charge of shaming those they disapprove of as they also allow for more diverse acceptance of what is considered superior. One thrives in order, but the other in chaos. There are other paradigms as well, but as we can surmise, different realities bring different ideas of what is acceptable or even functional.

But within groups, there are those who gain power and control through various psychological techniques. We will need to determine if such dynamics exist within a group that we are investigations. Though the following is not an exhaustive list, there are many factors we will need to consider:

One of the most powerful methods of gaining control of people is through the use of cognitive dissonance: people may believe one set of values, but if they are cajoled into performing an unnatural act which clashes with their initial beliefs, they may begin to change their beliefs to align with their actions. They are made uncomfortable for the express purpose of behaving in unnatural ways before they must adopt unnatural thinking. Because their thinking is not natural to them, they will be focussed on changing their beliefs, rather than questioning their environment and leaders. It is a form of misdirection and over-burdening their thinking processes. Be aware if you are dealing with those who try to gain control of you through such methods: you are dealing with someone who will be pressuring you through shame, ridicule and various accusations of being an outsider who does not understand the ways of the in-group. You will need to devise strategies to counter their pressure.

Psychologist B.F. Skinner's experiments in operant conditioning showed that rote learning is often nothing more than pairing a stimulus with a response by means of reward. While this is a natural and normal form of learning, it can be misused and done so in non-obvious ways to control and train people into performing in predictable ways which a manipulator can easily control.

You may find yourself with a source who plays favorites, or rewards those who present the individual in a positive light. They may belittle your

intelligence if you ask questions that will expose their weaknesses or praise you if you lob soft questions at them. They may be controlling an in-group or even out-group in the same manner. They may employ passive-aggressive techniques to encourage others to avoid unfavorable behaviours, for instance. You will need to be aware if such sub rosa techniques are being used on you and you will need to find your own methods of countering discomfort.

There are other factors to watch out for: for example, in one well-known experiment, subjects sat in a waiting room, unaware that the actual experiment took place there. Sometimes they sat alone, other times, there was someone they assumed was another subject, but was the experimenter's confederate. A small fire was made to break out: if the actual subject sat alone, they quickly went to put out the fire, but should there be another person, they took much longer, often in the hopes that someone else would do it.

This will be a common dynamic you will find in times of scandal and disaster: there will be many people who were aware of the problem, but had hoped someone else would fix the problem and they will proffer a variety of reasons why they could not be the ones to do anything about it. You may also find yourself not taking advantage of opportunities in your own work if you are partnered with others on a report. If you learn to cross lines in the sand in your own work, you will also do so when observing and gathering information. There will be times when a source will offer to help you with information: they may be sincere, or they may hope that you rely on their source and not go looking elsewhere where they have less chance of controlling the optics.

Psychologist Phillip Zimbardo's prison experiments in the early 1970s were suspended as they worked a little too well. Ivy League university students agreed to participate in a prison simulations experiment where there were prisoners, guards and wardens. The problems began immediately when students who were given a label suddenly began to behave in shockingly different ways: students who were prisoners became submissive and took abuse. Guards took orders from wardens who took full advantage of their position and abused their station.

You will come across labels that establish pecking orders: you will also have a label of journalist and outsider with every report you do: observe the dynamics and look for behavioural patterns: does one group of labels

behave differently than others? What are the differences? How are you being treated with your label? If there is a change in leadership, is there sudden change in labels to establish a different order? If yes, how so and what are the consequences of the shift?

Psychologist Solomon Asch showed how powerful group conformity could be: his subjects had to judge which group of vertical lines were the same height as the test line. The subjects believed that they were working with a group of other subjects, but these were the confederates of the experimenter and their job was to pick the wrong line each time. Subjects then agreed with the group, though there had been a few notable holdouts who went against the group and went with the correct answer, even though it was obvious these subjects were becoming agitated. When the real subjects were asked after the experiment why they picked the wrong answer, they stated they did not want to stand out from the group and merely went along to fit in.

There are many lessons for a journalist from this powerful experiment: you may believe you are getting confirmation of events, but it may be a case of group conformity: the group will not go against a leader who tells them what is considered right. Other times, you may be pressured to report things differently than you know to be true through group pressure. Regardless, be aware that group pressure can be as powerful as authority pressure. You may need to break up a group to prevent the tainting of information, particularly immediately after a newsworthy event has happened. Striking first before a group huddle can make the difference between obtaining explosive and vital information, or a rehearsed revision of history.

Psychologist David Rosenhan had confederates enter psychiatric hospitals by claiming to hear a voice saying a single word such as "empty", yet complained of no other symptoms. Every confederate was admitted without question, staying from a week to almost two months, even though they showed no symptoms of any psychiatric disorder. All were labelled by doctors, while patients suspected the confederates were either journalists or malingerers. While many critics have decried the study, the fact remains that the confirmation bias can taint expert perceptions, as they rely on narrative, not facts to guide their decisions.

Psychologist Stanley Milgram's experiments on conformity were the most disturbing, but telling as he had subjects administer shocks to strangers who failed to learn information. The person receiving the shocks was an

experimenter confederate and feigned getting them as the machine was not set up to do it, but subjects did not know and many gave shocks to a silent person who told them of their heart condition, with the implication they would give shocks to a dead or unconscious person—all because the experimenter in a lab coat told them that they had no choice but to continue.

You will see many environments where people defer to authority. You will see people base decisions on authority and not question or challenge decrees that are harmful, cruel and even abnormal. You will not be seen as authority to these individuals, but you will still need to get information and reconstruct scenarios from what they tell you. Often, you will know what it *isn't* based on what you are told. You will also have to question how dutiful you are to authority decrees and whether someone knows how to seem as an authority figure and is manipulating you and others with the gambit.

We also have another factor to consider: the Sleeper Effect. People may hear information from a source that they do not at first believe is credible, but then begin to believe the information as they forget the original source of it. This can pose two problems for you: one, people may not know the original source of information, leaving you scrambling to find the primary source and two, you may make assumptions about a tidbit you recall, but have forgotten the source was faulty. Before you write a dossier, be sure that you have careful notations of the origins of information: if you are adding anything as you are writing a report, verify everything from the source of well-known quotes to factoids that you believe to be true.

We would also benefit from understanding the baseline abilities of the brain as they can provide valuable clues to us. For instance, psychologist Alan Baddeley has shown that working memory can be impeded when we are tasked to do other things, as our mental resources are limited. That means that distractions and misdirection can prevent us from observing an event or recalling key information someone else would prefer us to forget. We may find a source using such deflections to prevent us from focussing on our questions and it is important to find strategies that will keep you focussed regardless of the games.

Psychologist Elizabeth Loftus has shown that word use alters our memories of events: the word collide will result in people remember slower speeds than the word crash. Other researchers have discovered that the phrase "the gun" will induce people to remember seeing a weapon, even if none was there, while the phrase "a gun" will not. False memories can be implanted

under a variety of conditions, from false childhood memories, to false memories about presidential candidates. When we interview people, we must ensure that we do not use loaded language, but be aware someone may have done so and you are working with a tainted source. You may find yourself in a situation where someone is using loaded language to cloud your memory. That is the reason we need to take careful notes, catalogue our data and establish the provenance of primary sources. Using audio and video recording on your own observations can help you square your perceptions with the actual data: you may notice that you have misremembered information and will now have to retrace your steps.

Spread of activation is the process of finding it easier to remember similar concepts when one of its category has been mentioned. For example, if someone says "bird", you will more likely think of "robin" than "soap." It is a natural tendency, but often it can be misused by people who wish to rig thinking to make it seem logical and the only possible choice available. If someone wishes to advocate for certain laws, they may bring up all the examples that fit into their narrative; so that others do not see exceptions that disprove their theories. You will often come into contact with people who present only their side and try to downplay and ignore information that refutes their ideas. You may also come across the proxies of such people who are followers by nature and have been encouraged to focus on certain information over others. When you find yourself in such a situation, it is important to bring up other concepts to see reactions and responses: if their arguments are not well thought-out, it will become evident.

Psychologist Martin Seligman has shown through his work that we are prepared to learn some tasks and lessons faster than others. The idea of preparedness suggests that through our evolutionary development, we can learn to associate fear with evolutionary threats such as illness and disease faster than more modern-day threats because we a primed to learn them. We will need to take into account if people's perceptions are driven by careful note of reality, or they have slipped into a more primal frame of mind. In times of mass panic, we need to consider preparedness as a factor. Similarly, we must take stock of our own more primitive tendencies when we are processing information: are we basing what we say on fact, or on some slumbering evolutionary fear that is irrational.

The last on this non-exhaustive list is psychologist Donald Hebb has shown that sensory overload happens when people become too paralyzed with fear or information. People may not be able to process information or perform

basic functioning. The danger may be easily avoided, but if they are too afraid, they will not be able to move to their devastation. We need to consider if people are being deliberately overwhelmed by someone who wishes to prevent people from seeing what is happening, or if a situation is so shocking, that there may be gaps in eyewitness accounts. You also may find yourself in a situation where someone wishes to overload your senses, and you will need to counter-plan to prevent you from noticing what is happening around you.

For an exercise, get a confederate to agree to startle you while you are watching a movie or show: they should not tell you when they will do it, but find ways of distracting you. Make certain this is a movie that you have not seen before and record the screen as you are watching it. After the movie is over and you were distracted, how well can you recall the scene that was interrupted and how much of a gap do you have? Write down what you saw and then play the recording—how well did you remember? Did you forget things, misremember them, or remember things out of order as you confused which actor said a certain line? If you wish, you may try the same exercise repeatedly until you are satisfied that you have devised a method of paying attention, even when your attention is broken by other happenings.

We can take several of these key findings to glean new insights: for example, we know from Baddeley's work that working memory can be tampered with by distracting people: the more they are distracted, the less that they can recall. Hebb showed us that an increase in fear and anxiety means a decrease in cognitive ability, even for basic actions. Taken together, a fear-monger can prevent people from being rational thinkers if they are overwhelmed with extraneous factors. Even if others cannot recall certain events or see a threat as being bigger than it was, if we understand the dynamics of the environment, we will know where we need to dig to find the information we need.

What these two streams means is this: a skilled manipulator will, usually by instinct, find ways of deflecting our attention by presenting a larger threat. If we do our research and we are prepared, we can counter manipulative techniques by putting information in context. If we stayed focused, we can observe the dynamics of the behavior of the distractor and then we can see if this is this person's regular ruse, but we can also pose strategic questions to them as a means of an experiment: how will this person react when we do not respond the way this individual has anticipated? Will they shame us?

Call us stupid, insensitive, or immoral? Will they make threats as they storm off?

We may wish to begin by responding neutrally to get a baseline reading of the person, then decide if we wish to change course, rephrasing what they have said to seem as if we agree with them and then offer a counter interpretation of the situation to see how they will respond. By varying the kinds of questions you ask, you are, in fact, taking an experimental approach to your work. Make note of strategies that are successful for you and build your expertise from there as you add to your repertoire by studying the works of other experimental psychologists who have other building blocks you can use to devise a more precise strategy of how you will approach your assignments.

Finding the key traps of evasive sources

Very often, you will be dealing with elusive and evasive sources who are veterans at manipulation. They have positions of power precisely because they can read their marks and can use their weaknesses against them. They may try the same tactics on you, but remember: these are arrogant individuals who do believe they are more cunning and intelligent than their marks. So long as you keep calm, focused, brave and humble, their ruses should be easy to spot.

Nevertheless, it will be a battle. They will devise ways of controlling your thinking and your habits. Here is a list of potential traps a cunning source may use to keep you off balance:

1. *What is the source secretly trying to teach us?:* This will be the foremost obstacle you will need to contend with: operative conditioning. Will you be rewarded if you ask softball questions? Will you be punished if you push with hard ones? Sources may play tricks: some will bribe you with graft. Some will charm you with praise. Some will belittle you with insults. Some will pretend to tell you a secret, hoping you will leak it. Once you understand the secret lessons, you will be able to break away from the unnatural habit to see what is their game: do they want you to present them in a certain light? Are they trying to hijack your report by framing an issue to their liking? Do they try to shame you or present themselves as smarter, richer, more moral or more successful than you? Once you have determined the secret lesson,

begin to consider how to avoid learning it entirely. Do not be deferential: they have no respect for you.

2. *Is the source trying to get us to form unnatural habits*?: You may not be aware that your behavior has altered. If someone is making you uncomfortable, you may alter your behavior to please them, taxing your mental resources as you focus on yourself rather than the task. A good exercise is to record yourself interviewing someone and observe your behaviours. Next, ask someone to conduct a hostile interview with you and then see how differently you are behaving and thinking. Finally, ask someone to praise or even flirt with you in an interview and see how your behavior has altered. Compare all three interviews and make notes in which interview setting you excel the most: you may find you do your best in combative settings, or that you can harness information as you bypass a pandering source. Note where you have made mistakes and under what circumstances.

3. *Does the source use labels to make us submissive?*: Does the source remind you that he is more educated than you are or has an impressive title, or does the person make a fuss of your title and achievements? If so, the person is pivoting to establish a pecking order: either one to make you feel self-conscious and inferior and the other to disarm you as you under-estimate their cunning. By ignoring labels as seeing eye-to-eye with people, it will become easier to assess them as you keep focus on the task at hand. Remember, this may be your one and only opportunity to get information from them.

4. *Does the source try to get us to agree to be polite?*: If so, they are disarming us and trying to blunt us to dodge uncomfortable questions. Instead of saying, "I agree," use alternative phrasing, such as, "I understand." Do not feel obligated to sympathize to appease a source: let the facts show reality instead.

5. *Does the source try to present themselves as an authority over us?*: They may have a title, but they are not your authority, as they are accountable for their misdeeds just like everyone else. Regardless of their expertise, you will still need to vet and verify what they tell you. Keep firm and cordial boundaries and do not let them hijack your thoughts. If what they say is true, the facts will support their words.

6. *Does the source overwhelm our thinking?*: We will need to step in and be firm. We continue to ask our questions and not become distracted. Do not argue and relinquish your control. If they take

offense to your line of questioning, simply state that if the situation is what they say it is, the information they provide will dispel any misconceptions.

7. *Does the source try to make us fearful through primal fears?*: Does the source use sink or swim logic and then couple it with an appeal to authority? If so, they wish to present information using a certain narrative. Here, it is crucial to press them for hard facts and numbers, as you also press them to tell you how these numbers have been verified and how (not if) the measurement can be faulty and misleading. In times of war, various factions will exaggerate the number of their soldiers to make themselves seem stronger, but down play the number of casualties they caused. Often, there are no reliable tests or ways to determine the statistics: there may be false positive, for instance, or there may not be a test or measurement available. If you are being made to be afraid of a primal fear (sickness, violence, death), that is your cue to find verifying information and ask the hard questions.

8. *Does the source try to manipulate our perceptions and memory?*: You will need to pay careful attention to what is being said and presented to you. Showmanship and fear-mongering can alter your perceptions. A flirty source wishes to put you in a good and aroused mood, while an authoritative one wishes to make you feel small. If a source is playing a role, make note of it and try to determine if this is their weapon of choice and under what circumstances do they use it.

9. *Does the source try to manipulate our thoughts and emotions?*: Some sources will intrude on your thoughts and feelings, but making negative comments about your attire, the ways you question them and even the outlet which you work. It is a way to establish a pecking order which is rigged to make them seem as if they are smarter and of better quality than you. It may work the opposite way of trying to make you feel superior and less vigilant so they can control the interview as you will not think they are smart enough to do so. Do not let your ego blind you to ruses of this nature: by treating the source as being on the same level as you focus on what they tell you, it will be easier to see beyond the games and find the information that you require.

10. *Does the source try to rig your thinking through a spread of activation?*: Sometimes if someone brings up a concept, it may define how we think of other concepts. An adept manipulator deliberately uses certain examples and analogies to rig our thinking

to stick to certain grooves and not consider alternative explanations or way of thinking. For example, someone may wish to make a sink or swim fallacy seem logical, by showing examples where people who took risks were harmed for doing so. They wish to rig thinking and if we rely on a confirmation bias, we will be unable to jump off their hamster wheel. We must turn scenarios around and look for exceptions to expose rigs and artificial confines. Be aware that sources you talk to may have already been lulled in the same way and their perceptions were re-focused by someone who shaded information to draw a specific conclusion.

11. *Is the source too rigid in their fixed assessments?*: If the source believes in a narrative, regardless of evidence that refutes it, your source is not a reliable or credible one. It is imperative to determine their beliefs and find refuting evidence. Present the evidence in a nonconfrontational way and see how they handle it. If their theory is not falsifiable or they try to explain away contradictions, they are relying on dogma and narrative, not facts.

By considering how to approach your assignments, you can better prepare for unexpected challenges; however, should a new approach disorient you, make a separate report for your files. What happened? Why was this approach problematic for you? What did you do wrong? Was there room for improvement? Did you manage to use or find a novel way to counter it? If your work is to be studied for academic reasons, this will allow those studying the methods to find ways of countering a psychological attack the next time.

Using the experimental model to cover conventional information

Whenever we can observe, compare and contrast, we should do so to gain context. After all, a papercut may seem tragic to someone who has never experienced an amputation without anesthesia. We have two extremes, yet you may find someone try to sell you on the idea that their papercut trumps the person who had to remove his own crushed limb without medical luxuries to survive.

There will be those sources who "sell": their ideas are superior to anyone else's; their products are revolutionary and their company is the most powerful one in history. The hyperbole is often given with soft "evidence": they cherry-pick information and then present it in the best light as they use

subtle hints to make you see reality through their filters. Your job is not to fall for such feints and ruses: your job is to find facts in context.

If an investment advisor claims to have found a special method of making clients wealthier than his rivals, we may interview happy clients, but if we compare those results to others, we may discover the methods are illegal, such as using a Pyramid scheme, such as Bernie Madoff had done before getting caught and leaving clients penniless. He had charmed them and used a greed scam to beguile them, as he promised effortless riches in short order.

Whenever we begin to investigate an event or person, we need to consider whether they are adept at massaging optics. They may be direct and honest, but there may be other factors at play: if we can discount one factor, then we look elsewhere. In toxic environments, we need to pinpoint the source of toxicity: is it a slavish adherence to rules, for instance? Is the environment run through patronizing, shaming and fear? We look at other environments to see what is happening on order to know how to approach toxic sources: once we have established the source of the dysfunction, we must then examine that source as closely as we can, again by comparing and contrasting with other similar circumstances. How do other recessions or depressions compare to the one we are examining? How is this situation different than times of prosperity or stagnation? How have changes in the environment accounted for the overall shifts?

While it is important to immerse ourselves to understand the workings, we need to also come up for air lest we begin to miss important hints or begin to justify and empathize instead of looking with a critical lens. If you are doing a report on a serial killer, for instance, the person may tell you about the abuses the person endured. While it may be tempting to explain those actions in the way they have been presented, it is also a good idea to interview those in identical circumstances who never resorted to murder: what are the differences? What about those who came from a functional family background, but chose to kill? We are avoiding a confirmation bias as much as mistaking narrative for fact.

There will be times when your background serves as a contrast: if that is the case, then note your similarities and differences: can you explain why you chose a different set of thoughts and behaviours? If so, include the information in your dossier: your insight can be invaluable.

Method Research and the experimental model

Method research is experimental by design: we are directly interacting with the environment that we are investigating. We may volunteer in a soup kitchen to see how the poor are being treated, or we may work as an intern at a technology company to see how the company functions. Sometimes, our own personal circumstances will bring us the story: for instance, we may be diagnosed with cancer and now we are going to research how patients are treated as we are being one of the treated. The possibilities are endless and the number of experiments we conduct is limitless.

Before we begin, we need to determine what kinds of information we wish to explore, what we believe the answer will be and what we need to do to find it. We will devise our experiments before we begin: if we believe women in a workplace are treated worse than men, what do we expect to find and why? We would first observe the work environment and then try to find ways of testing our hypothesis. If we are male and we believe females are more scrutinized, we may deliberately make the same error a female colleague had made and see if we are held to the same standard, or is our gaffe ignored. We compare and contrast, looking for makeshift opportunities and performing natural tasks. If we are female and we report a real case of wrong-doing to our supervisors or human resources, will we be taken seriously? Have any men made complaints? What were the results?

Note that we do not sabotage or deceive: we are not feigning an illness and behaving melodramatically. We are not trying to bring attention on ourselves; we are blending in. We are not trying to disrupt the environment: we are working with the natural flow as the point is to observe the organic reality of it. We are not stealing trade secrets, finding gossip, or rigging events: we want to know the natural functioning of a single place and then understand why they happen as they do.

With a powerful new tool, we can more precisely measure the information we are given in real-time. We create the primary source. We are not manufacturing news: we are finding it as we are verifying it at the same time.

So far, we have looked at gathering information, but now it is time to learn how to write the reports that tell the public what is happening around them.

CHAPTER TWENTY

DOSSIER

Journalism traditionally presented their work as *stories:* these were narrative-driven pieces that used the mindset of authority to inform audiences. Print, radio and television thrived with such a structure: relying on authority and experts as it used shaming, outrage and pride to confine audience responses and they were the gate-keepers who determined what was newsworthy, who was to be seen as a hero, villain or victim. When the Internet rose to prominence in the 1990s, there was a shift from authority to anarchy: social media removed the need for information gate-keepers and regular citizens moved away from journalism and used outlets such as Twitter, Reddit, YouTube and Facebook to present their own information and opinion directly. Citizen journalism began to take hold as circulations and viewership for traditional journalism declined. By 2020, the COVID-19 panic had devastated the old model of journalism even further as it was no longer seen as an authority, nor did fair better in a communications anarchy. Its methods were hopelessly out of sync with a rapidly changing world as its narratives no longer aligned with reality or mass perceptions of audiences.

The alternative method was not created to either model of authority or anarchy: it is, an empirical form of alchemy: you are to take the chaos and problems and transmute them into useable and useful reports that people can use in their careers and personal lives. You are not fear-mongering, but brave-mongering. You are presenting facts gleaned empirically, but presenting them in an emotionally-literate way: it is not Us Versus Them, for instance; it is Us Versus Us, or Us With Us. We do not ask people to blame or excuse others, but understand the situation. We are not trying to create heroes; we show how different people collided and interacted in a particular point in time. The facts paint a picture of reality and we give the facts the stage to do it. We are leaving narratives to the fiction writers; we are here to give information for people to ponder.

This chapter will give us a chance to become familiar with the idea of creating dossiers in a general sense. We will also look at how to write and record specific journalistic dossiers in detail in Chapter 26. We need to begin to align our thinking in a different way. For now, let us become acquainted with the concept.

Before we begin, we need to understand our own place in our work. It can be tempting to take leaps or try to skew information to force audiences to come to a single conclusion. We do not know our audience and should respect them enough to leave their thinking to themselves. Do not write about things that you know nothing about, nor should you try to put a sunny or gloomy spin to hide your lack of deep knowledge. In dossier construction, part of your reports will require by default to note any information that would have been helpful, but was not available. Sometimes a source is evasive; other times, there are NDAs, censorship, or laws preventing the release of information. Sometimes, no one has thought to look or create a study or file on what we are seeking. Be upfront with what could not be found: it will paint an accurate picture of reality where audiences can see for themselves what information is being denied to the public.

How to present non-narrative reports

You are presenting new information to an audience who knows less than what you know at the time. You are being part educator and part experimenter and your job is to inform without emotional or intellectual manipulation or skulduggery.

You are giving the facts and how you present them will be to your discretion: you may use headings and sections explaining the breaking news, such as the resignation of a prominent CEO or politician, describing why they are resigning and the events leading up to it. You may wish to use a chronological timeline with an interactive map showing where key players were and how things changed and moved during critical time periods and include interview recordings or transcripts as well as video footage and photographs. Your dossier can be simple or complex and may include supplemental information, or be a simple written report or video recording. If you are using video footage or photographs of key players, do not pose them in contrived settings or have them make an attempt at amateur thespianism: they do not need to mug for a camera to make a point.

You have leeway as to which style of writing you choose to employ: an epistolary approach provides primary sources in lieu of your explanations. If you are covering a series of recent robberies, showing surveillance footage, a map of which areas were hit and when, eye witness interviews and police reports gives an accurate picture of what has happened. You may choose to condense information and provide the same information in a more traditional form, noting the dates, times and locations and how each robbery was carried out. There is the Matriarchal approach showing how various players experienced the same event or newsworthy circumstance with overlaps and tangents; so that audiences get a diverse and textured understanding that the same event had different consequences for different people. You are painting a textured picture of reality which requires careful attention to detail and factual explanations of how the same event affects different people and groups in vastly different ways.

How to write dual-purpose local-global stories

Many times, the news that you cover will have different meanings for different people and groups: a local event hits an area directly, such as a factory closing. People may migrant to different areas and the price of housing may go down, but the impact in one area will send waves of changes to other areas. If a large factory closes, any smaller factories that depended on the larger one for business, will close as well.

Many times, your focus will be on the local. You will still need to give context, but your mandate is how this area is impacted by a specific event. The facts you need will be locally-driven and your geographic territory will be smaller.

However, there will be other times when you will require to expand your focus. If the problems have spread to other areas, or you are asked to present a more substantial report, then you will need to explain both the local aspect of each region afflicted, but also how the *whole* is affected. It is a *gestalt* dossier where the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts, but each part will require your attention.

You will need comparable information for each region, showing the similarities and differences, then you will discuss any interactions, before pulling information together and explaining how the collective has been impacted.

For example, suppose a swindler has obtained fraudulent mortgages for young couples in an entire state before they were exposed. Perhaps this fraudster concentrated on those living in smaller towns. We can see how some of these victims were fooled and then harmed before looking at how each town was affected by now having these individuals lose their homes and contending with a damaged credit rating, which may impact employment opportunities, insurance rates and ability to get a loan. How have local governments responded, if at all? How have the banks dealt with the matter or the courts and police?

Then we show if there have been any interactions of various cities: have some taken a more proactive response? Have some ignored the problem? Finally, we can look at the larger region: has this problem translated to a bigger one? Perhaps not, but regardless, we show whether the problem ends at a personal or local level, or if it begins to impact a state in a significant way, such as state governments passing new laws because of a loophole that made the swindle a viable one, for instance.

Traditional journalism would take a global issue, such as the death of a celebrity and then put a "local spin" on it: if a famous actor died by a particular disease, then a reporter would go out to see if a local person also was afflicted. Here, it is the *opposite*: we note a local problem and then see how far the waves reach. If we begin with the global, the reason is that the problem was a large one with ramifications for smaller regions, but we do not look down on the local: we look where societal shifts have begun and follow the trail.

Your dossiers will chronicle those shifts and vibrations: has a series of car thefts resulted in large increases to insurance rates? Have condos in a city lost their value because residents could no longer afford those increases in insurance? Do tax incentives work? Who benefits from them? How and why? Our dossiers follow the trail and draw a map for audiences to be connected and engaged with their environment.

How to create public dossiers

There will be two kinds of dossiers you create: private ones for your records or for academic institutions to use in their research to improve the journalism product and the public ones that are the new reports. Let us focus on the latter.

A dossier is a researched public record with useful and verified information that explains a newsworthy event. A dossier is not a disposable piece of information: it is meant to be used and reused by a variety of people in different settings, from the general public to historians to researchers to academics. Dossiers are meant to be compared to others to note shifts, changes, differences and similarities. They can also intersect with other stories to create a Big Picture so audiences can compare and contrast data, find overlap and put information into context. They can be used in databases for easier reference and create libraries and archives. They can be teaching aids and be used as textbooks and academic course supplements.

In short, we are creating the building blocks to accessible knowledge. We avoid using jargon when we are creating dossiers. These are meant to be understandable to a general audience and be useable for a variety of purposes: a researcher whose specialty is in another field should be able to read or watch a report and use the data and have it as a starting point.

The point of a journalistic dossier is to inform on the facts of an event, group, individual, or issue. These must be of societal importance. We are not looking into making a better soup than our neighbor or gossiping about the love life of a celebrity, nor are we instructing people which lipstick is fashionable or which trinket your child will want as a gift. We are not applauding groups or worshipping heroes or winners, either. We are confining our scope to what is not working, why it is a problem and what needs to be done to solve it. If a stretch of road has more accidents than others in town, that is an issue for a dossier. If there is a surge in the jobless rate, that is worthy to report. If a lobby group is pushing the agenda of the company it is representing, that is also an important piece of information to report. If a politician co-owns properties with a lobbyist he supports, that is tantamount to know. Whatever someone wants hidden, we seek to find what it is and what is their advantage to keeping it secret.

The creation of a dossier takes careful consideration: it should be clearly labeled: what is the date, subject, your methods of investigation, as well as your hypothesis. You may wish to write a short abstract for easier reference. While similar to an academic journal, it is not possible to be quite the same: you are not working in a laboratory: you are using applied psychology in the field as you are covering newsworthy and breaking news.

You will need headings and explanations, as you mention the issue or event, the facts surrounding it and key people involved, as well as the problem or

issue resulting from the event. You will need a reference section at the end
and appendices if you are including raw data and other transcripts. These
dossiers may be no longer than a page long, or they may twenty pages or
more. If these are videos, they may be a few minutes in length or an hour,
depending on the topic and whether it is an investigative or experimental
piece. If you are covering a particular beat, you may wish to make notations
if this is an ongoing report (using Arcs to denote how many you have done
in chronological order) and how many reports you have filed on behalf of
the outlet. This allows for easy reference and classification later on.

Structure versus content in dossier construction

We must be aware that in information dissemination, there are two
considerations: the content of a report and the structure of the report.
Content is the information we give, but structure is the method we
disseminate it. We can report on the arrest of a corrupt mayor, for instance,
but how we present the information will give people different ideas about
the same event. In a patriarchal narrative of traditional journalism,
audiences may see that they can remain passive as they read a morality tale
and come to the conclusion that society has been just and someone else
solved the problem. In a matriarchal style, we can see that the costs of the
mayor's corruption resulted in higher taxes, giving infrastructure contracts
that produced spotty work that now needs more money to repair, has
resulted in a toxic work environment at City Hall where productivity is
down and the city's credit rating has gone down as taxes have had to
increase, as have the number of lawsuits against the city which will cost
more to fight in court or settle out of court. In an epistolary style, we can
read police reports, listen to interviews of key players and read documents,
such as emails, that show what the mayor had been doing without detection
as the structure of the institution was highly flawed.

We must take care with both the content of our dossiers as well as our
structure. Often, content is stratagem-based, while structure is strategy-
based. Content can deceive and manipulate, if we are not careful. Loaded
language, sophistry and logical fallacies can skew perceptions. Colour can
overshadow facts. Narrative can confine thinking. Deception can thrive in
poorly-constructed content. It is the reason that we stick with facts without
commentary: we do not want to tell people how to think about things. We
give them the fodder for thought.

Structure, on the other hand, guides how we see the content. The patriarchal implies there can only be one correct answer or logical conclusion as it implies absolutes. The matriarchal shows the various answers and conclusions and shows relativity. The epistolary shows how reality unfolded and left its trail behind. The combination of content and structure adds different levels of depth to your dossier. You are not confined to use a single method, and you may be the one who invents a new structure of presenting information. You are encouraged to experiment and then test your novel structure with others and see the results. Your work will evolve and shift and that is a sign of success.

An important note: you need to put information in context, regardless of the type of dossier that you produce. Things do not happen in a vacuum; we need to know how some event or environment differs from those without the crucial variable. We can see instances in other research what happens when there is no proper comparison. For example, there was a study conducted in California where a psychologist had interviewed children of divorce for a quarter century and then had made the leap to suggest these individuals were depressed and anxious as a result of their parents divorcing; however, the psychologist did not interview children from homes where parents didn't divorce, children from domestic violence, or children who lost parents to death, trauma, or abandonment, making the information useless.

When we understand how one reality differs from others, we can begin to orient ourselves to know what needs improvement and what should be left alone. There are different kinds of dossiers depending on your purpose: some are modifications to traditional journalism, while others are novel and more aligned with applied academia. Let us look at each in turn.

Conventional Dossiers

A conventional dossier has much in common with traditional journalistic news stories or items: both are the relaying of information on newsworthy events in the areas of crime, politics, economics and societal shifts, for instance. Unlike traditional stories, dossiers use empirical methods, experimental design and do not rely on narrative to relay information. Dossiers are well-researched and verified through more rigorous means. They do not rely on opinion or folksy logic. They are not parables. Dossiers have their own cataloging system and they are more transparent in provenance and methodology than traditional journalism items.

Dossiers are a document of honesty: if there is important information that we cannot obtain or determine, we reveal our unanswered questions in our work. If our initial hypothesis was wrong, we say so without apology. We may fill in gaps with other related stories in a different Arc, but there is discipline in how we present information.

From the beginning, you will outline the event and whether it is a disruptor. Has someone been murdered? Has someone embezzled money? Has there been a Ponzi scheme? Is the government debating into creating a new law? Has there been a constitutional challenge? Once we state the problem, we give the most important facts an audience will need to know, from the extent of the damages, to the cost to rectify the matter to who is responsible and why. What you are doing is creating a map of the reality, and giving factual information that helps solve the problem.

Conventional dossiers come in two basic forms: short-form of short, breaking news where the focus is on informing the public on immediate events and longer, investigative pieces, where there is deeper significance to the information. Both require empirical standards of investigation, but the strategies will be radically different. You may even be dispatched to cover breaking news and will have very little time to devise a strategy. You will still need to gather information and verify it before presenting it to the public. You can always go back and follow up with more information in a secondary Arc or supplemental attachment later on.

In shorter pieces, it is unnecessary to have or state a hypothesis. If you are covering a single art heist, for instance, the relaying information is sufficient; however, if you are writing an investigative piece on the same crime, you may have a theory as to who was responsible, how it was carried out successfully and why the gallery was vulnerable. Is this a common occurrence, or do other galleries have the same problem? Why was the art stolen or damage and are there ways of finding those pieces? Your report will interest the public, but it will also be of great use to those who are in the business of art, such as sellers and galleries. Your reports should teach people about their everyday world and inform them of what are the problems they are facing in a way that does not sensationalize or downplay reality.

Method Research Dossiers

Method research is the journalistic equivalent to undercover work, with major differences: we are not trying to entrap anyone: we are investigating a structure or environment from the inside as we walk among those we are studying. There are no deceptions: we use our real names, and we do not lie about our credentials, but we are examining how various places and institutions function. Here, we are looking at the systemic elements and basic mindsets of those involved in a process. Is the system rigged to favour certain individuals over others? How is success or failure measured? What are the moral assumptions of the ecosystem under investigation? For example, we may be comparing the mindset of leaders in the public sector to those in the private sector. One may not need to be aware of funding sources, while other is consumed by it. One may have more time to meet deadlines than the other, which means their measurements for success and failure will be vastly different. How they promote internally will be different. How they spend money will not be the same. Their knowledge base will be radically different. We may wish to spend time in both environments to see how each handles the same employee work ethic differently.

Here, our dossiers will explain the background, what are the problems and obstacles to be examined, what experiments were conducted and what the journalist did during that time. The results in each experimental condition is presented and put in context. What we need to do is explain the issues and show what ingrained problems have plagued the group, how it has created problems and what could be done to prevent the toxicity from causing further crisis.

For example, during the COVID-19 panic of 2020, many world leaders, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his provincial counterparts issued orders for schools to be closed and for children and families to stay home, but for many children, they were subject to abuse, neglect and malnutrition as their only source of food had been in schools. Child abuse experts and child psychologists had not been consulted and the most the Prime Minister could muster was to tell children (assuming they had access to the television or Internet) to call a help number if they were crisis. How children could do this in their own homes as they were being monitored by their abusers wasn't clear. The assumption that children would have access to phones, or wouldn't be locked in the closet was astounding: there were no safeguards or methods for children in peril to find

safety and many of their neighbors would refuse to help them as they wouldn't open their doors to outsiders.

Had we had those working in that circle, they could see precisely how such a detrimental policy came into being: there had been a sharp increase in the number of domestic assaults and many people were in greater danger of permanent injury and death from domestic abuse than from COVID-19. As there had never been an emergency preparedness plan in place, the government was caught unaware and unprepared and then allowed too many to fall through the cracks. Had we those who studied governments up close see the inner workings, they could have given us a precise picture of reality: that the government was not prepared for a crisis, whether it be illness or a natural disaster.

Method research is the way to study the eye of the storm and then translate one environment to a public whose lives are shaped by others. We provide facts and context as we draw a picture of how this one place or industry has been gripped by systemic problems that it refuses to acknowledge is a problem. Because we are in the environment, we are, in fact, running ourselves as a test subject: did we get caught in those assumptions? How did we handle problems? We are not just observers: we are workers within the environment as well. If we take a job in a palliative care centre, we are doing the same job as others. We go through the same motions and have the same things on the line. Like Nellie Bly, a journalist who had herself committed in an asylum to see their conditions and took a job in a sweatshop factory, she was a method researcher: she relayed the troubles to the public who were not aware these problems existed.

Here, we are doing more than recounting facts: we are giving our own perspectives on our experiences and how they relate to facts of the report. We explain what we studied, how we devised our experiments and the results, but we also discuss how it was to be a part of that machine. Did we experience or witness abuses? What were the circumstances? What were the consequences? We document things carefully as we allow audiences to understand the mundane reality of dysfunction to show them the signs of problems and how to spot them in the same position we were in: as part of that system.

Nucleus Dossiers

Sometimes you will be doing an in-depth examination of a single event and following its consequences on various groups and institutions for years. A spread of activation in psychology refers to one concept priming us to remember similar concepts. For example, a mass shooting in a high school will have ramifications for years: from a spike in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to changes in the laws to anxiety levels and political discord. From real estate value to unemployment to copycat violence, there will be a chain reaction and your job will be to chronicle how one event alters the landscape and shifts the centre of gravity. Once upon a time, people in the area were upset over jaywalkers and the next, they are too afraid to send their children to school.

These dossiers are arced: They cover a fixed period and one flows into the other, or intersects: does police funding in the area increase? Will psychologists in the area be asked to provide more services? Why or why not? Will local bylaws change? You will talk to victims and follow some of their lives as you compare and contrast the lives of those who were injured, but survived and those who escaped unharmed. You will interview parents of those children to see how they have changed over time. Teachers and police will also be part of your research, but so will the shooter, should the person survive and their friends and family. What happened? What went wrong? How did this person slip through the cracks?

We are examining the anatomy of a tragedy, but after the initial event, we begin to branch out: each arc closely looks at a different aspect to see how they interact with one another. Do the victims go back to their mundane lives? Do they seek media attention? Do they become activists or do their careers become determined by their trauma? Perhaps they will become prosecutors or doctors. We can compare and contrast to other similar events to see if there are common threads and elements: what is the psychology of violent tragedy? Should we expect to see a rise in substance abuse? Is it better or worse than regions that weren't hit with the same tragedy?

These reports follow-up on major events, from new laws to natural disasters. These are ideal for people living in the impacted region as they can be made aware of what is happening and what their various levels of government are doing. People in nearby regions will also see the changes and can take preventative steps, using your reports as a guide. There may be activist groups who proclaim to be conducting studies: however, if their methodology

is flawed, their findings have no value. Do not be tempted to use their rhetoric in lieu of genuine research in your work. Should there be empirically sound academic studies, this will be a rich source for you to use, but you will need to vet and verify information as you show how a single event alters the reality of those hit hardest by it.

Academic Dossiers

Finally, there are your internal notes and findings that are not made public to a general audience, but are crucial for archival purposes for you, your outlet and for academic research. We preserve files for further study: was there anything you wish you had been able to do differently? Were there certain obstacles you alone could not overcome? Scholars in the discipline need data to devise research and experiments to improve journalistic methods and create better empirical, experimental and analytical standards and your post-mortems can go a long way into finding new avenues and methods of journalism.

So, for example, you are in a war zone in a foreign country where you may know the language, but the customs and Shibboleths are not well-known to you and you are uncertain if what you have been presented may have been staged for your benefit to make a rival faction look more savage than they are. In that case, you would make notations that the lack of knowing those various cultural idiosyncrasies impeded your work and it took more time to verify information in an already dangerous area. Or perhaps you were shown mass graves and you were told these were victims of one of the warring factions, but as you may not be familiar with the alphabet they use or the religious symbols, you are uncertain of what you have been told is the truth, especially other factions are also claiming those are their dead. We would outline the attempts at deceptions and how long it took to verify information. Those studying how to improve the journalistic product now have raw data that they can use to devise and improve methods and strategies.

It will not always be troubleshooting that you report. If there has been a new trend in evading reporters, it is imperative to note this in your Academic Dossier. If you have stumbled upon or came up with a different way to interview someone or find information, make a notation. If you were given fraudulent information, that should be included as well as how you discovered the source's deceptions. What you are doing is writing news for people whose job it is to study how to create news.

You will write your name, the dates you worked on your report, the names and dates of the published reports related to this dossier, as well as the subject of those reports. You will then itemize and explain your problems as well as any solutions you devised. If you have questions or ideas, add them at the end of your report. This is a document or recording that is equally important, but its audience is a different one that will use the information you have provided to improve future methods of information-gathering.

Your digital dossier, whether it be print, audio, visual, or a combination of all of the above, is meant to inform an audience, without a narrative or bias, of what is happening in the world. It should be organized, vetted and have the same standards academics use so that they can also make use of your information, not just a general audience. You may find yourself offering two versions of a dossier: one for a general public and one for academics studying the same field who wish to supplement their laboratory work with one that has been gathered in the field, otherwise known as the real world. Your laboratory is the outside world and your dossiers should be accessible and easy to understand, but informative, timely and cogent. You can present analysis and ideas, but you will need to state the scope of your work and extent of your knowledge.

Your are giving context and providing original research, including primary sources and supplemental reading, understanding that what you provide in one report can be used for others; and sometimes you will spend years on a single subject, using one base piece of information and weaving a web, always following the trail from that single point and expanding on it. Your reports will intersect and overlap and, in many cases, this will be coalesced and made into a book. With long-term projects, you are showing the evolution and progression of some events and the domino effect of others. How did things spiral and regress? What were the consequences of a single event? With dossiers, these become clear as each one looks at the same nucleus from multiple perspectives. These reports will be used for meta-analysis as well as for background for future journalistic studies.

Dossiers are a powerful method of informing the public: they are a way to show the landscape of reality without imposing a narrative or point of view. They are matriarchal and epistolary in design and can show how single event impacted different groups in different ways. We expanded ideas and possibilities, and we allow the facts of reality speak for themselves.

In the next section, we will refine and apply the concepts we have learned so far in the book, as we understand the cycle of journalism: it is to educate, but also to learn in a never-ending cycle.

SECTION FOUR:

EDUCATION

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

This final section of the book is for both students and educators: here, both of you will learn together as a unit, whether this is your first foray into a journalistic alternative, or of you have taken or taught this course many times. This section will show how to see the world students in a different, matriarchal way as you reorient yourself to a radical centrism lens. This is not to alter your thinking or reprogram you as you will have your own wants and needs, but if you are reflecting on the reality around you, it is helpful to learn how to turn empathy into an empirical measure. In this final leg of the course, students will be instructing professors as much as professors will be instructing students and both should learn as you are guiding one another in this mosaic known as a classroom.

You will learn how to effectively use applied psychology to gather and evaluate evidence, separate lies/propaganda/spin from truth and understand how to adjust perceptions to measure reality. In other words, you will learn how to be many people in a single person.

How to see your own flaws in perceptions

Our perceptions are flawed and there are ways to see how they vary from person to person. For example, everyone in the class take the same colour swatch and find an exact match and bring the matching swatch into the classroom for comparison. Were the matches identical in hue? Most likely, there were large variations in what people believed were the same colour.

The McGurk Effect is another example of how our perceptions can easily fail us. If we hear a voice saying "ba ba", but see a video of a person's lips moving to say, "pa pa", we will hear "pa pa" instead of "ba ba". We can place one hand in a bowl of hot water and another hand in ice cold water before placing both in room temperature water: suddenly, the sensations switch. When our every perception has limits and can be easily deceived

and disoriented, we must come to grips with the fact that we have perceptions that do not always align with reality.

When we are researching an event or issue, we need to find out as much as we can from a wide variety of diverse sources to see patterns of facts. When we account for facts from multiple perspectives, we begin to see how different perceptions and interpretations alter the meaning for the same facts. For example, find one social indicator, such as a region's employment rate, average price for renting an apartment, or number of people afflicted with a brain injury. Now find three different experts, advocates, activists, or even lobbyists for each socioeconomic class: the wealthy, the middle class and the poor and ask for an interview on the subject of what are the implications of this one fact. You will find that each one will have a completely different interpretation of the same information. Each will perceive this piece of data in vastly different ways.

We can take this experiment even further: find three elected officials whose constituency is made of each of the three main socioeconomic classes and interview them about what this piece of information means: it will be interpreted in different ways as well, even if those elected officials all are in the same political party. This is the reason why you should strive to find a variety of sources and not just based on income: when you widen your scope, you find that multiple perceptions will give a more accurate portrait than relying on a single one.

Perception is flawed, but we still need a way to account for the differences. You may interview people who have never left the city of their birth and have strong opinions on a group of people on another continent. You will need to establish how much experience a source actually has; however, you cannot always discount sources on this criterion alone as that act itself can skew and bias your report. You need to establish how much a person knows and apply the information to their sphere of experience. They may have facts, for instance, but not context. A person may not have experience of a particular event, but they have insights and observations that nudge you to opening your own perspective to ask better questions of other sources.

Cataloguing sources according to their strengths and weaknesses can be extremely helpful for investigative reports: what are the perceptual strengths of the source? What are the weaknesses? Do they always perceive women as being inferior intellect to men? Do they perceive the poor as being inferior to the rich? Do they always blame a single person, such as a

politician, for all of the world's woes? If so, they are less reliable as they have rigged their perceptions to always look for ways to reinforce their own personal biases. They have a built-in confirmation bias that shuts out the refuting evidence.

When we understand a source's perspective, we begin to understand their perceptual biases, strengths and limitations. Sources may have talents for seeing elements others cannot, but may miss other elements because of it. When we use several sources, we can fill in gaps and in the case of overlaps, we now have texture as different people see the same things in different ways.

But it is not just experience that influences perceptions, but also biological factors that can interfere and shade how we see the world. From hearing loss to brain trauma, our perceptions can be influenced by depression, phobia, anxiety and even narcissism. They can be altered with drugs or alcohol. There are organic disorders that can prevent individuals from seeing things as they are, but often, the importance of an event is not the actual reality of it, but how it was perceived by others and their responses to it.

Stress is also a factor in how we perceive events around us: if we are caught in a gunfire, our perceptions are radically different than if we were in the same environment under peaceful circumstances. For an exercise, have two different prepared rooms where there are several large objects scattered around in low lighting. In both rooms, you have exactly three minutes to remember the objects, their colour and their placement. In the first room, there will be no distractions. In the second, there will be loud, grating music, a highly unpleasant odor, too hot or too cold conditions and flashing lights as well as people dancing and causing interference. Now, try to recall the objects in both rooms: which one did you have a more accurate recollection? In the Serenity Room or the Annoyance Room?

Our perceptions can also be primed to expect one item and be oblivious to others. For example, if we are exposed to information about things that are associated with winter, we will have an easier time of finding objects associated with that season than trying to think of an object associated with the summer. In reports, we may miss important clues because we are exposed to one set of elements, but it is the unspoken ones that are crucial to understanding the reality of the situation. If you are writing a story about the economic health of a region, then make the effort to see if the same information applies uniformly: some people may benefit, but others may be

being harmed by the same fact. You will need to find texture and account for different variables in your dossiers. There will be sources who are perfectly aware that there are differences, but will try to pressure you into seeing their side as the most correct, or the only correct answer. Avoid the temptation to downplay or ignore others: include the highs and lows to show how a single variable has different consequences: there may be rigs and loopholes that benefit one group of people far more than others.

Perception is not reality. When we comprehend this truth, we can devise ways of accounting for perceptual differences. Often times, people do not know and how to separate unconscious influences from conscious ones and we need to be aware of these differences when we are interviewing sources. Over the years, there have been attempts to separate conscious from unconscious memories with varying degrees of success, such studies in process dissociation; however, we are not examining people as a clinical or experimental psychologist, but as an applied psychologist. What we need is to determine which factors are shading a person's perspective: is it a lack of direct and diverse experience? Do they merely follow rote rules? Have they been traumatized, or have they lived charmed lives that has sheltered them from knowing darker elements of reality? Is it their age or frustrations as their lives did not bring untold riches and successes? Are they dependent on others to take risks for them?

We are looking for facts. When sources give interpretations of facts, we risk not seeing reality as it is. There is not a single "truth" attached to a single fact: there are many. We cannot list all of those truths, just the most relevant ones to the report and it is the reason why we do not dictate to others what information means: we cannot possibly know what it will mean to everyone.

Faulty perceptions and interpretations will surround you with every report and often, you will strip away the various spins to present purified information. You are creating a jigsaw puzzle, but one where different people will look at the same Big Picture, but see vastly different realities. This is not a failure, but a sign that you have done your job.

Traditional journalism had tried to constrict and confine what facts mean and had not understood its true mandate. For example, here is an uncritical story of a flawed non-scientific study as reported by CBC in Hamilton on March 5, 2020:

But the report points to a wide range of positives after just one year.

Its findings are the result of a 70-question, anonymous online survey made available to basic income recipients in Hamilton, Brantford and Brant County. A total of 217 former recipients participated, according to the report.

Forty in-depth interviews with participants were also completed in July 2019.

Nearly 80 per cent of respondents reported better overall health while taking part in the program. More than half said they were using less tobacco and 48 per cent said they were drinking less.

…When it came to mental health, 83 per cent of those surveyed described feeling stressed or anxious less often and 81 per cent said they felt more self-confident.

An improved diet, better housing security and less-frequent hospital visits were other outcomes respondents pointed to, along with 66 per cent who said they formed better relationships with family members.

Anonymous self-reporting based on feelings and unmeasured variables is neither scientific nor offers any concrete facts. There is no control group and no verification of statements to prove whether respondents truly became healthier. For example, respondents reported being healthier, but they could offer no proof of this claim. Did the researchers provide physical examinations to these people? No. If there were physicals done before, during and after the study, we could then know for certain the effects, especially if we had control groups of those who did not receive the benefit and those who did not require it and, in fact, it is puzzling that such measures had not been taken as the original point of the province's Basic Income experiment was to see if citizens were better off with it. A more informative report from the CBC would have questioned why there wasn't testing of health and in the case of those who had children, that their academic performance wasn't measured as well.

However, if we were to examine a Basic Income study using the alternative to journalism, we could ask participants to partake in various studies, before, during and after the trials. We would not measure all of them, but ten would be sufficient for our purposes. We could compare and contrast various perceptions, as we compared those perceptions to measured factors such as health, habits and education. Just because a government or institution does not look at the empirical factors, does not mean we follow their lead. We can create our own primary data and work from there.

The above study was a poor one for many other reasons; it did not control for the Halo Effect, nor do we know if these respondents were instructed by outside vested interests to present a narrative, such as an activist group or even political operatives of a rival party. In many cases, such groups rig perceptions to inflate numbers: a rally may bus in people who are unfamiliar with the cause, but are there for other reasons. Social media has also employed such measures to drown out opposition with false shaming and personal attacks. Our job is to not to allow others to distort perceptions: we are there to expose such ruses to give a true picture of reality. In other words, reality may be saying "ba ba", but the lips that move are rigging perceptions to believe it hears "pa pa." We must break down each element and determine whether perceptions are being deliberately manipulated.

Despite the spin of the above study, the problem of the respondents seems more of poor financial literacy and substance abuse issues that had eaten away at the recipient's already limited funds. The study did not eliminate personal responsibility from being the primary problem of those who answered the study, meaning that perhaps classes in financial planning and health may have a bigger benefit than basic income. A true study can eliminate factors; however, this cited study proved nothing save there were discontent people who were at the mercy of a change of a governing party.

Just as statistics and accounting, the mere dissemination of official-looking numbers means nothing as anyone can present whatever narrative they wish. When those individuals face lawsuits or criminal charges and must testify under oath, only then do the true numbers come out. The difference is consequence, and we cannot forget the distinction. The perception is deliberately manipulated with fabrications and pseudo-science, but the reality is the numbers presented are fiction. Shell companies seem real, and staggering numbers originating from vested interests seem beyond question; however, it may be a complete sham.

Traditional journalism never questioned perceptions. It also deferred to authority without question. We cannot follow the same path: we must question and challenge perceptions, even if an authority or mob decrees it to be true. The alternative model does not serve as credulous stenographer, nor does it rely on public sentiment to guide it: whatever you have discovered to be fact is to be reported. If we are given data that indicates something, such as sickness or economic factors, we still need to verify if these numbers are accurate. In that case, we take strategic biopsies of different areas to see if we can find that to be the reality of the situation.

For instance, many times, governments will boast about the number of jobs created under their watch. This boast may or may not be true. We can look at various employment sites and see the offerings for that day or week: what kind of jobs are being advertised? What is the rate of pay? How many new jobs are being advertised? Many times, you will see precarious offerings without security or benefits and even advertising for rates below the minimum wage. There may be jobs, but there is high turnover as the working conditions are untenable. The perception is not reality.

Using applied psychology to gather and evaluate evidence

Throughout this book, you have been made aware of various studies in experimental psychology and how they relate to journalism. For instance, the use of heuristics is common practice: we often employ a rule of thumb which worked for us in the past, and we assume it will work again in the future. This method differs from an algorithm where seemingly all possibilities are considered before a final determination is reached. Both these methods are highly flawed and both make assumptions in their inherent strategies.

With this dilemma in mind, we need to consider perceptions carefully: perceptions are flawed: heuristics and algorithms are only as accurate as the quality and accuracy of the perceptions. There are hidden facts and considerations, if not known or properly grasped, remained unaccounted for in our equations, meaning there is no workable solution.

For example, if we are fixated on certain rules or beliefs, we do not see other parts of reality. If we are obsessed with how much better other people are doing than we are, we miss opportunities and then bitterly complain about our lot in life. If this fixation is presented to a traditional journalist, they will run with a narrative about the unfairness of the individual's plight. The alternative reporter, however, begins to listen to the source's facts and perceptions: is this person fixated on a single belief? What information is missing? We may begin to ask about other aspects of this person's life story, only to find no matter what the situation, they are fixated on their face-saving misperception.

Then there is the question of *availability heuristics:* we believe something is more common if we can remember more similar instances than if we cannot. This can be extremely problematic when dealing with sources: if they are in constant contact with an issue or have heard about it from others

as it is a posh topic of modern conversation, they will present their information as if it were common, or even an epidemic. It is helpful to determine their position and their exposure.

The conjunction fallacy is a common error in perception: we believe a joint occurrence of two events is more likely than an event on its own. This is, in fact, inaccurate. The probability of one event happening is greater than if two events happen at the same time. There will be sources who make such errors by overestimating the likelihood of two events happening together because those two events are closely associated with each other. To disabuse yourself of this fallacy, take a coin and flip it ten times: what is the likelihood of getting heads?

Now take out another coin and flip both together ten times: what is the probability of both coming up heads at the same time?

In many cases, you will be given narratives from sources of certain events and it will be helpful to *act out* the scenario as described. If they claim they witnessed a kidnapping, try to act out the event yourself: do things align as described? You may need a cohort or two to go through the same motions and go to the same place to act out the scene: are there any gaps, contradictions, or impossibilities? By going through the motions, you are placing yourself in someone else's shoes and trying to see if timelines are possible and viewpoints were logical.

You will need to evaluate evidence using a variety of means: reading interview transcripts out loud can also help you as does writing the facts on a whiteboard in front of you. From looking at aerial footage to using maps and even using figurines to place people in their reported places, finding ways to corroborate what you are told can go a long way to prevent you from falling for lies and hoaxes.

There are many other impediments to perceptions: for instance, the propinquity hypothesis states that people prefer those who are physically closer to them than those further away from them. It is the way of nationalism and in-group formations. A person may rave more about someone who is closer in proximity to them than those who are further away. There will be times when knowing an office layout is crucial to knowing how much of praise or criticism of a colleague has to do with actual acts, or by how many meters the person's desk is to the source.

Do not hesitate to visit the actual places of key players: from where they work to where they live and even where they go to unwind. There are truths to be gleaned and hidden connections to find. You may be told a heart-wrenching tale of woe, but when you begin to interview others, a very different picture emerges. Do not become beguiled by forgetting about the halo effect or fixations. You will need to look for signs of misperceptions and then find ways of seeing the reality from them.

How to separate lies/propaganda/spin from truth

In journalism, we need to verify what we are told. We must question folksy middle-class logic and presidential decrees as both use bluffs and feints to hide information. If we are told so many citizens have an illness, how does the expert know this to be true? What is the source of measurement and how reliable is the test? Statistics are often bandied about as an absolute truth, when, in fact, it is a rough guess. Numbers are often used as a weapon to hide the truth: in war, the number of soldiers is often inflated to scare the opposing side. In times of chaos, numbers have no meaning and no loyalties. Wherever there is fear-mongering, there is a gross misuse of statistics, meaning we need to find our answers in other ways.

Whenever we are given numbers, we must first ask about the structure and method of the actual measurement or test, if it is prone to false positives and inaccurate readings. Do not shy away from pressing for this information. What gets counted? What gets excluded? Why? Can there be groups of people missed by the very nature of the test? For example, many people file police reports, but not all of them are taken equally seriously. If some reports are ignored, then we are missing critical information: for instance, if there has been a rash of parking lot thefts, not all of them will be investigated, if any. In that case, when we hear crime statistics as going down, is the reason because there is less crime or less attention paid to certain crimes?

If the measurement is flawed, it cannot give an accurate reading. For example, one clinical test studying the severity of Tourette's Syndrome had counted people as having mild Tourette's, even if the test-taker scored zero. This is not a reliable or valid measurement as not everyone has the syndrome. We must be aware that there may be several tests, all with varying degree of use and accuracy. When we begin to look for numbers, we must ask and research about the various measurements used and the problems associated with each.

In each case, missing or inflated numbers are a form of deception: we may believe a small problem is a crisis, or a crisis does not exist. If crimes are ignored or unreported, the problem still exists: we may have to go into neighbourhoods to talk to people or monitor various social media sites to pick up on information that hints at problems that exist, but have not been acknowledged.

There are other forms of quiet deception, and our job is to separate truth from lies. If we are interviewing people who said they experienced or witnessed the same event, but their stories are too similar and they use identical phrasing, their lack of variance is a red flag that they have rehearsed their stories. If there are too many emotional triggers with a forced sink or swim ultimatum attached, it is also a clear sign of deception. Whenever there are big threats presented, there will be those who are manipulating the optics to gain mass compliance. If people are too specific on some recalls, but too vague on others to the point verification is impossible, we have someone who is trying to deceive us. If we are attacked for asking questions, we know there is a darker reason for their verbal assault and shaming.

We are looking for verifiable information from sources: if they claim they were attacked in a certain area, then we need to find out as much factual information as we can. When did it happen? Where? What were the circumstances? Who was involved? What was the sequence of events? In these cases, you should ask questions in a chronologically forward fashion before re-asking backwards: if there are too many discrepancies, it may be because the person rehearsed the story one way, but hadn't another.

Ask for confirming details of the place in question. Look for timelines and locations. Concentrate less on frilly colorful details and more on hard data. Look for corroborating information. It is normal for people to have misaligned perceptions out of fear or anger, but do not allow their misperceptions to be the facts of your report. People will make excuses, lie and make dire threats and predictions: these are deflections used in order not to press for real data and then asking about the measures of that same data. Sources will bluff and resort to insinuations of your intellectual mettle and moral fibre. Ignore the taunts and keep pressing for verification. You are not trying to be sensational but honest.

Understanding how to adjust perceptions to measure reality

As journalists, we report the facts. We do not tell people what facts mean. We are not cheerleaders or hecklers: we are reporters. We do not advocate or act as publicists or activists: we have respect for the public to make use of what we tell them.

There is a reason for our neutrality: we cannot presume a single fact has a single meaning for everyone. There are injustices, but our job is to report on the problems, not then constrict thought by determining why an injustice is an injustice. Our perceptions can impede progress: if we do not know the true extent of a problem, we cannot find the proper solution.

We are not followers, but we are not leaders, either. We are not told how to think, but we do not tell others what to think, either. We relinquish both control and safety to gain the freedom to explore the nature of reality to find its deepest truths. We are beholden to no one and we can explore how perceptions become misaligned with reality.

For example, you will often come across people who are strictly me-centred individuals: they cannot place themselves in other people's situations. They merely care if a situation benefits them and have no concern if the situation harms others in any way. This does not mean what they tell you is not true, but their perceptions of information will be primed to find the ways they can benefit from it, or they may always perceive a personal benefit, even if it does not exist.

Your job is not to affirm their beliefs or validate them: you are there to extract the facts from their perceptions. For example, a new government program may be announced, and they may praise the benefits of it to you in their capacity of expert or recipient, for instance. You do not merely relay their perceptions of it: if it was just announced, the program's efficacy cannot possibly be determined before its implementation. It is not to be presented as positive or negative: it is to be verified: what are the limits and exceptions to the program? How much does this program cost and where does the money come from? What regions does this program benefit? Does it apply to anyone or only those in the ridings where the ruling party won seats? What are the exceptions, rigs and loopholes of this program? Who makes determinations on its qualifications? What are their qualifications? Is this program vulnerable to abuses? When we begin to look for facts, we

can present an accurate picture of reality: the facts will show what is beneficial, neutral and detrimental and many times, what is beneficial to one group may be detrimental to others.

When we create a report, we are educating the public and reconstructing reality to explain why certain events have transpired or are currently unfolding in the way that they are. We do not point fingers of blame or throw tantrums with simplistic conclusions in a complex world of interdependence: we present information that has been vetted, verified and has accounted for the misalignment of perceptions with reality. We consider how different perceptions can impede others from seeing what is truly happening: many citizens are not aware of the criminal behaviour of those in their neighborhoods and believe they live in safe and peaceful areas, only to be shocked when there has been a mass shooting or domestic violence ending in murder. The signs were always there, but perceptions blinded people from seeing it as they wished to present an image of success to others. When we look at the same area with a lens of reality, we can learn to spot the simmering dangers before they explode. For example, cults, hate groups, and terrorist recruitments happen at the high school and university levels, but they often are not obvious to those who do not consider it to be possible. When we make no assumptions and look around, we may see posters and flyers in strategic areas, strangers who loiter around in the shadows and a change in certain student behaviours. We have found a problem worthy of reportage, even before the troubles have started.

Finding problems is not difficult: you may find an area and begin to observe. For an exercise, find a place to observe for a week. Sit in the same spot for an hour and watch the people around you. What do you notice? Is it the same people coming and going? Are there certain clusters of people? How do they behave? Why? What are the patterns of movements and behaviors? Are there leaders and followers? What changes and what stays the same? What are the potential problems and vulnerabilities that you notice? What perceptions do you believe are faulty here, preventing people from seeing the problems you have noticed?

But there will be times when it is not the faulty perceptions of others that we need to worry about: it is the willful manipulation of our own perceptions that may prevent us from seeing reality, including manipulating our own neurobiological responses to prevent us from thinking rationally or empirically. The next chapter looks at the most extreme of these situations: war propaganda.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE WAR MANUALS

During the COVID-19 panic of 2020, people had one or more of the following fears: getting ill and dying, government oppression being dictated by a dark cabal or "Deep State" and economic depression. It was a panic-induced rig to fear something that was uncontrollable.

With conflicting information, inaccurate measures and extremist governmental measures, there was chaos and uncertainty, but there was no reason for fear. Traditional journalism, already in shambles from years of audience declines and lack of innovation, were decimated as they roused panic that caused the stoppage and bankruptcy of their remaining audiences and advertisers. Had they presented verified and vetted information and constructive ideas; the global spiral could have stopped. Instead, they were resorting to a peculiar form of war propaganda and made global fortunes worse.

COVID-19 was a unique form of war propaganda: a large killer threat was said to have menaced the world; however, as there hadn't been an agreed upon villain, citizens were allowed to think of their own target to blame and the net effect was lost. The virus was the weapon, not the actual enemy, after all. War propaganda is used to completely stop individual and independent thought and is rigged for people to fear an enemy to the point of giving up all safety, rights, freedoms and comforts to stop the enemy's rampage of death. Instead, people blamed everyone from China, Donald Trump, Bill Gates, George Soros, their government, the Illuminati and their neighbour who didn't wear a mask while gardening alone in their fenced-in backyard. Had there been an alternative to journalism, there would have been many hard questions asked and deep research to bring bravery, not fear to citizens.

As a journalist, you will be bombarded by various forms of propaganda: from war propaganda to political skulduggery, to public relations manipulations. You will be presented narrative, optics, sophistry, gossip, rumors and spin that you are expected to present as factual information, yet

your job is to report on information, not muddy the information stream with someone's self-serving lies and innuendo: after all, you are helping rebuild the vessel of journalism with your hard work and innovations and to allow others to hijack the vehicle as you toiled is not helpful. It is your name on your work, and it should be a reflection of you, your research and the content of your character.

Therefore, it helps to know how to spot propaganda, particularly war propaganda. There are several ways of combat in various spheres, such as political, economic and geographical and it is important to know how to bypass and override these systems. Let us look at war propaganda, see why it is particularly insidious and how to combat it through conventional stories and method research.

The mechanisms of war propaganda

The point of war propaganda is to seize public thinking and perceptions. People are to be blinded from reality and the alternative solutions readily available to problems. A crisis is created, a villain constructed and the public is to be prevented from rational thinking as they are told they are under threat of certain death. It must work quickly and immediately. If there is time to think, debate, or offer an alternative point of view, then it cannot work. It must work on the educated and the uneducated alike.

Propaganda requires the manipulation of the mind through the body to create sensory overload and motor overflow: if people cannot think, then they cannot challenge. There have been many studies over the years to show how fear provocation effects cortisol levels, neural firing, adrenaline rushes and hormonal levels. It is beyond the scope of this book to list them here, but we can look at a couple of studies and cases where propaganda was devastatingly effective.

For example, the fear of spiders, mice or snakes is unnecessary in modern life, yet psychologists Hugdahl and Öhman's 1977 experiment demonstrated that subjects who were paired with an electric shock of fear-irrelevant stimuli showed less anxiety and were less likely to develop acquisition of a phobia than those who were given shocks viewing pictures of fear-relevant stimuli, such as spiders. To our primitive evolutionary ancestors, those were the animals whose infected bite could kill and we are primed to fear those threats, even if antibiotics and sanitation have taken care of that problem. Martin Seligman's 1971 theory of phobia *preparedness* proposed that we

are primed to be afraid of things our evolutionary ancestors required to avoid to survive.

Then, it should not be surprising that people fear diseases and it does not take much to push people to irrationality by using it as a threat. We have other biological fears that make little sense, such as the fear of an enemy annihilating us, but as we are animals of war, we can be easily terrorized by larger threats, such as an invasion, but less afraid of street crime or car accidents which will kill more people in the long-run.

War propaganda hijacks critical scepticism and radical centrism by forcing people to defer to authority—as well as force people to pick a side. It is an in-group to be trusted and an out-group to remove as a threat. Whenever the majority are asked to relinquish their own decision-making powers by an elite minority, we can be certain war propaganda is at play.

Your job is not to help a propagandist spread fear and irrationality. You are to question every assertion, logical inconsistency and lie. When such a gambit is played, it is powerful and immediate: it is a one strike sucker-punch meant to disorient a public into submission and agree to hard measures to "save" the group. The threat may be real, but the offered solution is usually violence, sacrifice and deferment to an authority who are few compared to the citizen population. Furthermore, there are usually more peaceful and rational solutions available, but it is harder to control a public who are not afraid than ones who are cowering over a phantom threat. The fear of the unknown is an important element of war propaganda: the more information you provide, the less frightening a threat becomes. Your job is to find facts that counter a narrative of fear; however, if you can foresee such a feint before it strikes and prevent it from infecting the information stream, you have prevented the fear from manifesting in the first place.

In the case of war propaganda, the best antidote is not to report on the narrative presented: use facts to counter the narrative to temper its blow and by exposing such ruses, you have blunted a public threat in the first place.

The neurobiological factors

War propaganda is meant to stymie independent thought. If the masses are to be controlled, they must be herded in a single direction and this will be done by triggering neurobiological responses. As psychologist Donald Hebb noted, a witchdoctor casting a death spell on a person who believed

in those powers would often die on cue. Sensory overload is a powerful tool, but only if the individual gives other permission to control their behaviour. The same witchdoctor making the decree on a non-believer will not be successful.

For example, in one 2004 study, researchers showed the endocrine system alters when the individual is under great stress as women experiencing domestic violence had significantly different cortisol levels and hormonal levels, as well as higher instances of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression. When under threat, our bodies are formed by the environment.

In another 1987 study, researchers discovered that those with panic attacks had elevated plasma prolactin at the climax of the attacks as it correlated directly with the attack's severity. Plasma cortisol, growth hormone and heart rates were also elevated. Finally, in a 2012 study, while men and women had increased hormone levels when victorious but increased cortisol levels when defeated. To alter thinking, one must first alter biology. In one classic study, subjects were given an injection of adrenaline, but were led to believe it was vitamins. They then sat with someone in a waiting area, unaware the individual was an experimenter confederate. If the confederate acted angrily, they believed their elevated levels also indicated anger, but if the confederate showed jubilation, they believed their emotions were one of elation. Even when our biology alters, we take cues of the behaviours of others to interpret our own.

Stressful messages change our internal systems and when we are bombarded with such emotionally manipulative narratives, we can think less. Our memories become constricted and we are unable to pay attention or think. It is important to recognize false rushes and pressure propagandists use and then devise counter-strategies to thwart them.

When you are creating a dossier, it is important to note any pressure tactics, shaming, or manipulations you are being subjected to by others. Do not give in to false deadlines or responses: you are in a position of power and negotiation. Do not be tempted to behave as a subject in a Milgram conformity experiment: here, you will have to push back, turn over rules, be unpredictable and most importantly, place the pressure on the propagandist to prove their claims by *your* gold standards, not theirs. By pulling off their veils layer by layer and challenging their simplistic narratives, you are running directly into the eye of the storm to see the atom of truth and the nature of the reality.

War propaganda will fall into several categories: death by disease, starvation, violence and elements. Whatever triggers fear, as the mass killing of children, sexual assault of women and the enslavement of young men, will be used as a means of frightening people and deferring to those who proclaim to have the solution. Your dossiers should flag cases of propaganda and hate-mongering, as well as the use of fear and the sorts of measures being used to gain compliance and "safety." If reports are all alike, it is a sign that a PR firm has been employed to litter social media and other communications outlets to spread the panic. One of your dossiers will be the gambits used to gain citizen submission. You may wish to get volunteers to have their various neurobiological levels professionally tested as they listen to the reports and narratives: if they are experiencing stress and fear, interview them about their responses and whether they believed in the proposed measures before the stories. Use empirical methods to clearly demonstrate how regular citizens are under siege and what is happening to their own bodies. By drawing attention to the manipulations, many will be able to break free from the grip. Here, knowledge of the truth—both external and internal—is real power.

How to bypass war propaganda

Not giving into fear, anger, hatred, bigotry, or jealousy will be your best defences to inoculate yourself from propaganda. Better still, reading past case studies of war propaganda will help you learn to spot the signs. Reading academic literature on how emotional triggers set off certain neurobiological changes is also essential to countering the effects: if you know what different emotional states feel like, you will immediately recognize them when they are triggered.

For an exercise, you will expose yourself to six emotionally unpleasant stimuli: jealousy, pity, fear, anger and greed and vanity. Each one is to be run separately, once per day. You will look for ways to interact with such stimuli: for jealousy, for instance, you may spend time with someone who you greatly envy and then actively encourage them to tell you about all of the things you envy about them. Or, you may read articles that will trigger the appropriate response, such as acts of hate crimes. Or you can watch films or documentaries, such as horror movies or documentaries of dangerous people.

You will immerse yourself for two to three hours in this environment and then you will write a quick one-page essay right after you have triggered your emotional state:

1. *Jealousy condition*: What sentence would you give a famous and attractive billionaire if the person was caught cheating his rival? Why?
2. *Pity condition*: Your student comes to you without their final assignment crying and ashen but evasive as to the reasons why they have not done the work. What will you do and why?
3. *Fear condition*: If you were allowed to change the law regarding the treatment of violent offenders, what would you do and why?
4. *Anger condition*: If you could get revenge on the person who hurt you the most, what would you say to this person right before you did and why did you choose those words?
5. *Greed condition*: If you won the lottery, what would be the most expensive item you would purchase first and why?
6. *Vanity condition*: If you were to enter a modelling competition and won, what prize would you expect based on your looks and why?

Leave these answers unread for a week and then read them. Do you still feel the same way? How have your ideas changed? How much of these ideas were yours and how many were influenced by the emotional immersion? Now write a one-page response to each one, explaining why your position changed and how these messages had altered your thinking. How did these stimuli manipulate you and how would you counter such messages the next time?

Finally, asking some of the following questions when dealing with emotionally-triggering events will help you orient yourself before you fall prey to propagandistic ruses:

Is this story about two groups with tensions, unrest and violence between them?

Is the story manipulating your emotions?

Are the heroes personalized or the villains seen as a faceless mass?

Is violence and sacrifice of freedom implied as the only possible solutions?

Is the solution too simplistic?

What public relations firms have been hired to spread their narrative?

Is there a sense of urgency and shaming of sceptics or those who wish for more proof?

Have critics been dismissed as naïve or conspiracy theorists?

Once you have determined that there have been real attempts at manipulation, that will become an integral part of your report: who has tried to overwhelm your emotions? Who has put pressure on you and why? Do not take anyone's word as gospel: independently verify as much as you can: it is absolutely critical that you challenge deceptive narratives as lives do hang in the balance. You will need to visit places in question to verify that the narrative aligns with reality. You will need to interview people and often, you will look for files, trade publications, as well as intelligence periodicals to see if there are signs of deceptions. Look for exceptions, contradictions and vested interests. Look for any lobbyists or PR firms hired to frame an issue. The more information you have, the better equipped you will be to spot lies and propaganda before they are planted in the public mind.

Method research and war propaganda

Unlike conventional methods, method research is the way of discovering how institutions and group dynamics actually work in the real world. You may use it as a starting point, understanding the lay of the land before leaving to write investigative pieces using conventional techniques, or you may be doing it as your primary way of gathering data. In either scenario, it is too easy to over-empathize with the groupthink and then active immersive observation.

By understanding the reasons for war propaganda, we see its purpose is to prevent individuals from being able to think as their various backgrounds and experiences are suppressed. It is the way of forming unnatural habits that the propagandist triumphs. By learning to spot sensory overload and motor overflow, we can recognize propaganda, inoculate our bodies from responding to it as we strengthen our minds to see why we are being manipulated in the first place. By learning to ask the right questions and making note of our own internal changes, we can bypass the sucker punches

and begin to throw a few probe punches of our own as we keep our guards up.

When you are in the field, you will be susceptible to groupthink and must be aware of the propaganda they may be using to hold the group together. What are their biases and beliefs? What rituals and jingoes have they been encouraged to use? What is there to gain by inciting the in-group? How is loyalty defined by the leaders and indoctrinators? What fears are being triggered? Is fear or hatred the weapon of choice? Are martyrs and heroes defined in a particular way? How are out-groups being belittled, disrespected and demonized? Are *you* beginning to sympathize with the false narratives? How is it working and why?

Make careful notes of the chain of command and their hierarchy structure: who is in charge of frightening the in-group? How is compliance gained? Are people bombarded with incessant messages that they cannot escape? What sacrifices are being demanded? How are citizens being divided? Are they being separated and isolated? Make careful notes of interactions and how you are being treated as you conduct your experiments. Make a careful note of your own internal neurobiological levels and when they are being triggered. You will be the baseline measurement and it is important to compare your responses to those around you: are the leaders being sheltered from making sacrifices? Who in the group is exempt and why?

Regardless of the kind of journalism you are employing, be sure to look at which lobby groups and PR firms may have been hired: for instance, in the US, the Justice Department has its database of foreign countries who have hired US attorneys, lobbyists and PR firms (known as Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA.gov); however, it is possible to work around this rule, especially if you are dealing with a foreign country without such laws, or it is a domestic interest who has hired them. If you are being approached by a publicist or operative, you will disclose it in your dossier. If you are given any materials by a similar agency, you will be transparent as to the source.

War propaganda is a serious assault on both citizens as a group as well as the individual. It used as a misdirection and a form of control: the point is not just to harm an out-group, but to use the in-group as the weapon. It is imperative to be vigilant and not react to emotionally-triggering information or narrative: remove the emotional triggers and investigate each claim line by line. If what is said is true, the facts will show it, but often, there will be

lies, spin and exaggerations, which not only is damaging to peace, but also makes real acts of atrocities pale in comparison and will be ignored for the more sensationalist lies. Your job is not to be a conduit for propagandists, but to be the foil, spoiler and challenge. If you have done your job correctly, you are the one war-mongers and tyrants will fear and loathe the most. Giving them a taste of their own medicine without playing their games is the truest sign of a genuine journalist. Let truth and reality guide you even in the darkest of events.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Evolutionary Tendencies

Civilizations often pride themselves on the intellectual progression of their citizens: how many have doctorates and the incredible breakthroughs and inventions their in-groups have discovered. These are venerable goals and you are reading this book for your own betterment. There is nothing wrong with those noble goals. A civilized society wishes to expand its knowledge and wisdom and education is the primary way to do it.

However, our intellectual refinement is not a way to erase evolutionary reactions, thoughts and behaviours. Fear responses bring an increase in heart rates, cortisol production, along with many other physiological changes which impact decision-making and overt actions. Shout "Fire!" in a crowded area and a stampede rush will transform even the loftiest of degree holders into a frenzied horde. Starvation levels the playing field with unerring accuracy. The level of parental confidence also has predictable responses. As much as we wish to believe that out evolutionary tendencies are dormant, the truth is they merely slumber until they are provoked into unleashing their fury in an overwhelming manner.

As a journalist, you will need to become aware of your own inner Neanderthal just as much as you need to be aware of evolutionary tendencies of the people all around you. Propaganda thrives in manipulating those latent biological reactions, and you must be aware of the power of propaganda: not just to prevent exploitative agents from controlling you and your audience, but that you do not employ propagandistic techniques yourself. There are consequences to priming a public who are evolutionarily illiterate, immature to those primitive ways and can be overwhelmed by them. Before we discuss reporting to the evolutionary mind as well as the intellectual and emotional one, let us take a quick look at our different level of needs.

Maslow's hierarchy and journalism

To understand what audiences seek from their news reports, it is imperative to understand the zeitgeist and ortgeist and what drives it: if there is scarcity of staples, people will not care much for trivialities. News is about what people need to solve their most pressing problems. The very purpose of creating a dossier is to give people a precise and vetted report that serves as a map to them to find what they need. You may be creating dossiers for children to warn them about the dangers at school. You may be creating one for women who have left abusive relationships and now need to keep themselves safe and rebuild their lives as they navigate through the court systems. You may be telling people about a scandal at a workplace or a violent offender roaming the streets. When you pinpoint what evolutionary level you are covering, you will have a better idea and sense of what information is the most pertinent to that audience.

One of the most reliable guides is psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation. Maslow had created a hierarchy of which drives would ensure our survival depending on outside factors: at the bottom of the pyramid came physiological needs such as food, water, heat and sleep. Safety came next on the pyramid. In the center of the hierarchy came intimacy and belongingness, then self-esteem and at the top was self-actualization, such as creativity reaching one's full potential.

The bottom of the pyramid is the most important need and if the bottom is not met, then the others become unimportant. The bottom layer must be met at all times for civilization to evolve and prosper. It is, in a real way, the bottom line and should there be any threat to the bottom, it becomes the most important news item to relay.

War propagandists understand this hierarchy very clearly, as do advertisers: the difference is propagandists exploit the bottom rungs, while advertisers aim for the highest levels; however, they come together at the intimacy level for their own separate purposes. Your job requires you to be as aware of those exploiting those needs as much as the real threats to them.

Understanding primary and evolutionary drives

To be a capable journalist, one must be aware of primary and evolutionary drives that run through us all: we may have doctorates, but we will still be afraid if a gunman comes after us, just as the high school dropout. We need

to be aware of our biological drives and fears as they guide much of human behaviour.

For example, we tend to believe that people in our designated group are more trustworthy than those who are different than us: people believe, for instance, their racial group is less likely to cause them violence, while those in other groups are more menacing. However, it is the opposite: in FBI statistics kept on US murder victims, whites are murdered by others in the same racial group in over 85% of homicides, a consistent number, yet many hoaxes are believed when the opposite scenario is used. For instance, Charles Stewart, a Boston-area man, said he and his pregnant wife were shot by a black man. While Stewart was shot in the abdomen, his wife Carol was shot in the head and received the more severe injuries, even though she would have been the lesser threat. Police concentrated at finding a black suspect, but eventually discovered that Stewart killed his wife and shot himself to bolster his alibi. In another case, a young mother name Susan Smith alleged a black car-jacker stole her vehicle with her two young children inside. Their bodies were eventually found in the submerged vehicle; however, it was soon discovered Smith was the one who killed them both.

These hoaxes were believed as they sounded plausible to members of the in-group, even if they were less likely scenarios. In both cases, there had been glaring indicators that the killer was the family member: the husband and the mother. When we are investigating an event, we need to be aware of how primary and evolutionary drives are hidden factors in much of what we think, believe and do.

And it is here where many inconvenient realities haunt us, yet we must examine every avenue to find the truth.

For instance, when people are afraid, their physiological changes are pronounced: they can think less rationally and will look for someone to blame for their fear. The drive for in-groups is so in-grained that parental confidence is often a factor in child abuse with fathers becoming more abusive toward a child they believe is not their own than ones they are more confident is: it is those primitive and often irrational beliefs that can explain some of the darker human tendencies and our job is to understand that not every thought is a rational one.

These drives are particularly crucial to factor in during times of unrest: riots, wars, looting, mass murder and other forms of social breakdowns. When there is danger and violence, you will need to understand how individuals are behaving and why: is food scarce? Is death a likely outcome? Is there bombing? Is there martial law? Is there rationing? Is there civil unrest? Have the protests turned violent? Is there no electricity? These are severe stressors that will test humanity and many will see deceptions as a viable weapon for survival; however, you will still need to find facts and the truth.

If you are covering foreign unrest in a place where the language is not your mother tongue, your translator may have taken sides and is giving you a skewed narrative. If you do not know the culture or customs, your lack of understanding of the people's Shibboleths will result in you being seen as an outsider not to be trusted: this is primal thinking that you will need to consider. You will need to devise your strategy on not just what you know, but what you *don't;* if you do not have an understanding of the nuances of dialect, for instance, you will not understand the perspective or motives of those speaking to you.

If people are cold, homeless, hungry and frightened, how they react and see the world will be vastly different than if these same people lived in prosperity. It is all too easy to dismiss war-torn people as "savages", but this is prejudiced thinking that does not help you find information. What has happened to bring these people to this state? Where did it breakdown and why?

If there are rumours of atrocities, these may be real, or a gross exaggeration or outright lie used to rally the in-group. For example, during the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, the US was compelled to fight against Iraq in the liberation of Kuwait based on the story of a teenaged girl who claimed Iraqi soldiers stormed a hospital and took newborn infants out of incubators to die, even though by merely acting out the scenario as a soldier proved the story was nonsensical: yet traditional journalists believed it and reported it as fact. Our job is not to believe, but observe, listen and then verify.

Acting out scenarios is crucial to determining the veracity of such claims. Often, you will find the act was impossible, and it was used to bring irrationality to a group to rig an outcome. No matter how atrocious and horrific a claim sounds, or how emotionally convincing the teller of the information is—you will have to verify the claim thoroughly. Remove the emotional triggers, break down the narrative into verifiable elements as a

checklist, play out the scenario as a script and then begin to verify each element, making note of what is accurate, what is an exaggeration, what is missing and what is clearly a lie.

Primary and evolutionary drives can often prevent us from seeing the obvious: we must question each aspect of a claim by setting up a hypothesis that can allows us to confirm or refute it. When we begin to think in terms of "Maybe yes, maybe no", we are less likely to skim over a claim and take its veracity for granted: when we do so, we are giving into evolutionary indulgences. When we look at facts with critical scepticism, we rebel against them.

Intellectual, emotional and evolutionary intelligence

When we chronicle the world around us, we see that world through a variety of filters that weave together and seem as if they are a single lens that is a perfect reflection of reality. This is one of the biggest self-deceptions we indulge in. In the banal every day reality, we rarely need to question our perceptions or fret whether our interpretations of reality are faulty and misaligned with what is really happening, but as a journalist, you must train yourself to be aware of your own filters as well as the filter of others. You will deal with mothers who murder their children as they deem them an inconvenience and then tell you as a journalist that they are a nice person and a good mother and that outsiders lack the intelligence, morality and emotions to understand them. You will deal with husbands who murder their wives in cold blood rather than get a divorce and tell you the laundry list of reasons why she had it coming. You will hear many narratives so far removed from reality that you will wonder whether the person is deluded or a poor deceiver: but what they are is constructing a narrative to replace the reality which is rigged against their self-image.

You are under no obligation to indulge their self-assessments in the name of balance or "fairness": you are obligated to present the facts without the spin. They may call you biased, vile, or dense, but that is none of your concern: you are concerned with reality and truth and how to balance your perceptions and recalibrate them at the beginning of every assignment.

It helps to understand the various filters at play: intellectual intelligence is the way of understanding measurable data. What is the capital of Canada? Who is the Prime Minister of the UK? What law has been passed in the US senate? How many people live in Japan? What is the unemployment rate in

Australia this month? Whatever can be measured and verified is under this umbrella. You will compare and contrast such information to show context: if several nations take drastic measures to combat a virus, but their rates of infection and mortality are no better or even worse than nations who do not do the same thing, what conclusions can we draw?

Emotional intelligence assesses people's frame of mind, behaviour and truthfulness. We can empathize and understand someone's behavior. Method research is a powerful tool in walking in another person's daily life, for instance. We learn not to judge or condemn, but to weigh the probability that a person's account of events is true. Is the recent widow stoic because she is naturally inclined to be so, or is she relieved the spouse she murdered is out of the picture? When we look for nonverbal signs, we are relying on emotional intelligence. Often, it hints at avenues of investigation. For example, people who murder their relatives will use a variety of silent ways to distance themselves from the person: either by referring to them in the past tense or not verbally introduce the victim to strangers. They may go to the police to file a missing person's report, but say, "My husband," and not "My husband George." Other times, a murderer who had a past relationship with a victim may engage in "undoing", by putting a blanket over the body, or even placing a teddy bear in the arms of a child. A stranger rarely partakes in personalization, while a murderous relative may do so.

Evolutionary intelligence is the way to understanding our reactions under stressors that threaten life and mundane normalcy. How do people behave under pressure when they feel they are threatened? When someone is afraid of mice or spiders, they are reacting to evolutionary threats. When we understand that people are more afraid of catching a virus than losing their job, we understand their primal thinking patterns. In the case of the COVID-19 panic, people wore masks or face coverings that served as no barrier to the virus, but their primary phobia-triggered responses compelled them into an act of sanctioned insanity. Worse, the idea of social distancing became seen as a solution with banks having ATMs machines a foot away from each other, but had customers forced to stand six feet away from the machine, as if the virus could move only in a single direction. Primal thinking is out of sync with the modern world and yet it drives otherwise educated and rational people into rituals and practices that do nothing productive.

As journalists, we need to understand the cogwheels of perception and how all three can betray us at once. It is the reason we seek diversity: not everyone has the same understanding of events: if we compare and contrast

insights, we are more likely to find the textured reality of the landscape. Intellectual individualism creates illusions of differences in many cases: we may believe our in-group is superior to others: we believe we are individuals, while the out-group is a single, faceless unit. Our perceptions are deceiving us intellectually, emotionally and evolutionally. When we are discussing our own in-group and conflicting out-groups, we need to calibrate each cogwheel: what are the facts to be defined, measured and verified? What are the emotional cues to test for each group? What do they have in common? Where are they conflicted? What primal triggers prevent proper negotiation and resolution?

Dealing with in-group and out-group manipulations

Many times, you will encounter two opposing groups who are clashing on some matter and the dividing line will be very clear: young and old, rich and poor, teachers and students, employers and employees and criminals and victims. Often one group is oppressing the other, and the reasons for the divide are obvious, but other times, both seek complete control and wish to get as much spoils for themselves at the expense of the other. While there will be times when you see that both sides are alike in structure of group adhesion, the content of their arguments will be different. Sometimes you will see no discernable difference between the groups: either both will seem to have equally valid points and other times, both will seem hopelessly shrill, selfish and conniving to you, yet both will push for you to see their side as the victims or heroes, but the other side as villains.

 Your job is not to take sides: radical centrism will have you hovering above the fray or walking among them both. You will look at all sides with critical scepticism, looking at the strengths and weaknesses of both. You are not the judge or mediator, even if you see there could simply be a straightforward negotiation among the parties to quickly resolve the matter: but often, the point is not to negotiate, but to deliberately stymie talks as leadership seeks disharmony and misdirection to control the in-group. To resolve the conflict would no longer give the in-group reason to submit or obey the leader. There must always be a battle and a cause and even when one side has more resources than it needs, it will always claim it needs more.

Similarly, political parties do not negotiate: an opposition party will denounce everything the ruling party has done, just as a political campaign paints rivals in the most unflattering light: it is the way to distract potential

voters to be frightened of the other choices enough to appeal to the candidate for salvation.

Your job is not to get involved in the quagmire: it is to find the truth of the reality and report it. The smoke and mirrors must be found and removed: is the reason for the conflict genuine or manufactured? What is there to gain by the impasse? What is at stake? What is the structure of thought of the conflicting sides? What evidence is there that conflict is inevitable?

In-group versus out-group bias will be a common theme you will encounter and with it, you will find common traits: in-groups will present themselves as morally superior than the out-group. They will deem themselves more intelligent and worthy than the other side. They will put a face on their best and brightest to you and in cases of war, go on at length about their fallen heroes, personalizing them to you.

But they will not extend the same curtesy to the out-group: they will always find fault with them, disparage them, place them on a lower rung of a contrived pecking order, villainize them, have evidence of their treachery and deceit, dehumanize them, gossip of about them and in cases of war, present them as a faceless mass who are hopelessly evil.

The power of creating an in-group and out-group dynamic is not to be underestimated: psychologist Brett Silverstein, demonstrated in his experiments that it took little coordinated effort to create in-groups and out-groups. Random subjects were assigned into groups and then asked to compare themselves to out-groups on looks, intelligence and other ranked factors. Almost all in-groups studied rated themselves higher than out-groups. It does not matter membership of an in-group or their motive for being together, people are naturally inclined to see themselves and their members as superior to others.

When you are covering conflicts, you will not be serving as a judge or mediator: you are the observer and evidence-gatherer. You will be given narratives how the out-group is bad and how the in-group is good. Countering the binary Us Versus Them instincts will always take conscious effort: there will even be times when a group praises you as being part of their in-group to bring you into their web—or they will shame you as being part of the out-group to control your emotions a different way.

You will not be presenting a narrative in your dossiers, but fact, meaning, the Us Versus Them structure need not apply. It will be Us Versus Us: you will observe the structures of all groups and see how they are similar and different. You will report on the facts of the impasse: their reasons and how it came to be. You will look at resources and what is at stake: how much money or power is up for grabs? Who stands to gain and how?

But you will also look for other similar situations as part of your work: you will need to compare and contrast the conflict with numerous other factors. For example, if there are striking workers demanding more pay, then it is a good idea to see what is there average salary and benefits and how it compares to those with the same job in other regions and even other countries: are they being paid below average—or above? Then we can look at the company's bottom line as well as the salary and bonuses of those in charge: how much more does the C-suite make in comparison to their lowest-paid worker? What is the standard of living and what is the profit-margin of the company? No side can expect not to be scrutinized: we may find a poorly-managed company with a lavishly compensated C-suite, but the striking employees are also lavishly compensated. The facts may show a company on the brink of bankruptcy, but with feuding sides, neither seems willing to focus on the viability of the corporation. The facts will show clearly what is happening without taking sides or falling for an Us Versus Them narrative.

We must be aware of our evolutionary instincts: to look for danger, fear threats and look for members of an in-group who we believe will save us as they are superior than the out-group enemy. While intellectual and emotionally literacy is helpful; so too is *evolutionary* literacy. You must learn to guide yourself by instinct and to keep an open mind, even if the environment is not so inviting.

For the first of two class exercises, you will all sit on the floor for the lecture without electronic devices, pen or paper, in the dark, without any comforts, food, or aids. Your instructor will give you a lecture of their choosing on a topic unrelated to this course. You will then be given a pencil and paper to write a short test as the instructor reads you the questions without repeating them. Afterwards, you will write a short paper on your feelings on the lecture: how resentful were you of the situation? Did you feel as if the instructor had been unfair? Did you and your fellow students begin to feel a bond and discussed the event afterwards? Did you feel an Us Versus Them

dynamic forging, even if your instructor *was* part of your in-group on the account the exercise was devised by the author and not the professor?

For the second exercise, your instructor will randomly assign each of you to one of three groups: the Dress-Ups, the Dress-Downs and the Markers. If you are in the Dress-Up group, you will come to the class in the finest outfit you have. Be as well-groomed as you can be. If you are assigned to the Dress-Down group, you will wear your shabbiest clothes and brushing your hair is optional. The Dress-Up group will be given a frivolous topic to give an impromptu presentation, while the Dress-Down group will give a presentation on an important current event and be given a half-hour to research it. The Markers will be listening to both presentations and judging each group on their general feelings of each group, the topic and the presentations.

After the presentations, the Markers will give their assessments to the class: do you believe the assessments were accurate? Now the first two groups will assess what the Markers have determined for each group: in what ways was the assessment fair or unfair, and why?

Finally, both groups should discuss their feelings of their assessments as they determine how the other group's perceptions were different. Was there any agreement? Did you believe the other side was more or less harshly judged than your own?

Your job as a journalist is to see past the Us Versus Them narrative constructions to find facts. You are also balancing various literacies: the intellectual literacy of verifiable data, the assessment of reality and perception that emotional literacy brings and the understanding of the structure of behaviour that comes from evolutionary literacy. All three literacies are equally important and help you find different aspects of the same reality. By observing your environment and asking questions, you will see how human instinct can cloud our judgment as often as it clarifies it. Look for environmental stressors and do your research: what kinds of neurobiological changes and emotional shifts come from war? Abuse? Hunger? Fear? Once you can find the ways that you or your audience can be manipulated, devise strategies to reveal them to show reality as it is and not what a manipulator is presenting for personal gain and profit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

NARRATIVE LIBERATIONS

Much of propaganda hinges on narrative. It is the use of *selling* ideals to a public who often lack expertise, knowledge, experience, or even emotional maturity. They are forever in a world where they are a blameless and faultless hero who perpetually blame others for their own failings, look enviously at those who have succeeded in even the most mundane of milestones and inflate their own egos as they look to elevate themselves at the expense of others. Our job is not to judge people's delusions, but to account for them in our work. Everyone may be the hero or victim in their own personal narrative, but the reality will be more complex at the very least, or a diametrical opposite at the very worst.

To give in to illusions in an attempt to appease others is an exercise in futility: people have their own narrative beliefs. They may always act out of fear, anger, greed, jealousy and hatred and they may be actively looking for excuses and people to blame. They may always spin a situation to find fault or to explain why even the more horrific turns are positive. Your job is not to correct their narratives: your job is to give facts and ideas about reality. You are rising above the din of life to present information to people. You are not to justify their views or try to correct them. While this aspect of a reporter's job may seem frustrating at first glance, there is a reason behind it.

This chapter will explore how we are to present information through alternative structures from Matriarchal to epistolary and how to think critically to find information by challenging various narrative feints and assumptions. As we will see, resisting the urge to present traditional narratives liberates us as it allows us to present information that challenges misinformation while respecting the intelligence of our audiences.

But for us to understand how to do this, we must first understand various structural models of narratives.

Patriarchal Structures

This structure has been the international standard for fiction and nonfiction and in traditional journalism, has been used to process information and present it to the public in this manner. Let us look at how it is used in fiction before showing the nonfiction version of it.

It is the traditional form of telling stories: it is focussed and singular in its approach. There is the hero protagonist who is in the right. He has a quest as he learns truths, skills, knowledge and wisdom as he goes along. He seeks something, such as a title, a wife, a trophy, a new place to live, a degree, new friends, a new life. He cannot just get this coveted item or status symbol because there is a villain standing in his way and this villain is evil, while the hero is good.

The protagonist is the One and has a supporting cast who are not as moral as he is and not as winsome and while they cheer on the hero or at least begrudgingly admire him as they are jealous of his success, their failings get them into trouble and the hero must take time out of his busy schedule to save them. Some will become victims, including his love interest whom he loves, but is also less awesome than the hero. She will fall madly in love with him and may be in need of some heavy-duty rescuing because she is less able than he is.

Anyone who is against the hero's plans is evil. They are inferior to the hero in so many ways, that the hero will hit upon the weakness of the villain, using it against him and the antagonist is defeated, the hero gets a love interest and the coveted trinket as he or she lives happily ever after.

Stories are linear. The protagonist gets top billing. He is right, and anyone who is not enthralled is to be defeated: there will be a final showdown and the antagonist will get punished for meddling in the hero's noble quest. It is Us versus Them, and anyone outside the mindset is to be distrusted.
A hero is a hero because he is always right and a villain is a villain because he is always wrong.

This has been the general structure of stories for hundreds of years. It is simple, effective, easy to understand and makes rooting for a hero instantaneous.

There are numerous problems with using this structure in nonfiction. First and most importantly, life rarely complies to these predictable standards, meaning we must shade information to make it "fit" with the narrative.

The unstated assumption that one side is right and one side is wrong. There is no wiggle room to consider whether the hero is being guided by prejudice, arrogance, ignorance, selfishness, or narrow-mindedness.

It also disallows us to consider the flawed nature of those we see as heroes. Does the person not have flaws like everyone else—flaws that make him like the supporting characters? Why is his approach one where he must convert everyone to *his* way of thinking—or else he will resort to tactics that involve defeating and humiliating the villain?

Is everyone who doesn't applaud the hero someone who is malicious?

These stories are primed to see the world in confrontational and monolithic terms. Problems can be resolved only if someone subjugates another who opposes their approach. It encourages an authoritative methodology: we understand others to defeat them.

Patriarchal has its limitations and in an age where diversity of voices is becoming increasingly important for progress, the Patriarchal structure is currently lacking.

In traditional journalism, most is presented in a patriarchal structure: it is a single story with designated roles of hero or winner, victim, villain and oddball who is not to be taken seriously. We can see why this structure is deficient: many times, clashing sides are partly right and partly wrong. Other times, they are both behaving villainously. Those who were victimized may have troubling elements to them, but their fate was cruel; however, journalists had often hidden those details and when they became public, people then turned on the person. The texture and nuances of reality become lost in translation and people expect life to mimic the patriarchal narrative.

Ergo, is there an alternative to the Patriarchal that reflects reality more accurately?

There is another method (but hardly the only one) and it is Matriarchal Storytelling.

Matriarchal Structures

Matriarchal storytelling is about weaving different perspectives to paint a different portrait: people intersect through various articles to that we can see their places in events, for instance: sometimes as the central focus; sometimes as a supporting one and even at times, an antagonist. We understand people through the eyes of others: you may be a hero to your mother, but to the employee you felt you had to fire, you are a villain, but to your spouse, you are a supporting character.

That means issues are *interconnected*: we can follow a single person, knowing he or she is not always going to get the main focus.

It is also not always about Us Versus Them, but often Us With Them. It is not about a hero applauding himself, but about connecting to the world in an ongoing manner. Life is about phases and eras and the Matriarchal chronicles both. People can have multiple lives without losing the flow of the report.

We can follow multiple issues at once and read them out of order and the combination of reports alters our understanding depending on which reports someone reads and in what order they are read. Who we believe is an antagonist in one report or series of reports, we discover was a secret hero in another.

Diversity of subjects allows for multiple perspectives and the more egalitarian approach gives the reporter the ability to incubate stories and branch out auxiliary events in separate files.

What we have is a more intricate and complicated system of relaying information and ideas, but with common points, such as flagship players, concepts, cities, events and organizations, readers can orient themselves with ease.

We also can see the progression and evolution of all of the above. We can see the origins of a company, career, problem, tradition—or even crisis. These do not have to be presented linearly—just as you as a journalist collects bits and pieces and must put them together to see the big picture, the Matriarchal does the same.

While reports can now interconnect, they are presented in such a way that each is a standalone dossier that can be understood completely on its own, but when read with others, new patterns and information emerge.

The Matriarchal does away with a pecking order and the insistence that a protagonist and antagonist must always oppose each other; in fact, they may come together, or, at least, negotiate as they agree to disagree. We can see conflicting agendas begin to mesh and see resolution that does not always involve antagonistic solutions.

We must learn to be focussed on weaving various threads to see the big picture. While the Patriarchal is about hunting and focussing on The One, the Matriarchal is about gathering and focussing on The Infinite.

We often forget we are not always in the right, but that doesn't null and void all the right that we did. We learn to accept that we need to learn as we change and grow and allow others to do the same, even if their paths collide with our own. We learn to own our mistakes without being confined by them: if we own those mistakes, we can transmute them into the right answers and solutions for us and others. We can make comebacks and amends, or we can start again.

The Matriarchal opens new worlds from the old and allows the harmony of different voices—bringing together all of our senses to experience our world in a new and informative way. It is a system that allows for unconventional issues and events to be chronicled. It is the mosaic of happenings where we learn to adjust to different rhythms without skipping a beat and learn to see things from the perspective of others. We shun narcissism, judgement and labelling, for understanding.

It is not a competition or pecking order: it is not about dominance or wearing a paper crown. It is not about validation, vindication, or false victories: it is about the chronicling of various realities to find the common truth.

Just as there is not one wrong or bad way to solve a problem, there are many ways to solve a problem the good and right way—and the Matriarchal allows multiple players to have the spotlight as we can map out interactions to see how problems began. We see diversity and different thinking patterns and understanding what happened from various points of view.

We intersect reports so that audiences can follow whatever lines of inquiry are relevant to them. If two nations are at war, we can present information from *various* points: from each warring side, their neighbors and allies of each, for instance. If there was a homicide, we look at how to or more lives collided in tragedy. We first look at one of the parties, then the other, then finally bringing the actual event to the forefront. Did the killer make previous threats? If so, was there a restraining order? Were police informed before? What happened afterwards? If there have been an environment poisoning as a result of a company's behaviour, we look at how it happened: what did this company produce? Why did they not take precautions? Were the inspectors or agencies? What about incident reports?

This means that we do not ignore the perspectives of those who refuse to grant us interviews: we must find *other* ways to reconstruct their perspective. These dossiers can be done separately or as parts or *arcs*: if events took days or years in the making, then we opt for the latter method of arcs as they allow us to explain important details in a separate report. If we are merely discussing a breaking event, then sub-headings with the former will suffice.

The Matriarchal allows us to examine people and events as they are: we do not try to tell a "story" as we feel compelled to demonize or deify people to make a narrative work. The C-suite executive of a company that caused an environmental disaster may have been a genuinely effective philanthropist who is well-respected by peers and family, but his stewardship to prevent tragedy was the issue that led to his downfall. The Matriarchal may give valuable hints as to how someone like that let his duties slide to severely.

When we wish to highlight the complexity of events where there is conflict or multiple players, the Matriarchal is the structure of choice. While we can use a narrative-free version of the Patriarchal for simpler reports, we must take care that we do not slip into narrative conventions; however, there is a third structure we can use in lieu of the Patriarchal.

Epistolary Structures

Finally, there is the epistolary Structure of communications. This style is what most journalists experience, but take for granted. When you are gathering research for a piece, for example, you find various sources before analyzing, synthesizing and then disseminating it to the public. It is the bits

and pieces that you use to see the big picture. What you are gathering is, in fact, an epistolary style.

Even traditional journalism gathers information through epistolary means: the difference is that the reporter then present information in a patriarchal style, but the final product does not resemble the bits and pieces of the original research. If we were to present everything we gathered to the public without synthesizing it, what we would present is an epistolary structure.

If you opt for the epistolary style, you are providing no commentary or synthesis: you are presenting a dossier of all relevant information you have gather the way you received them. How you present the information is crucial: you may present information in the order in which you received it; chronologically based on when the information was created; in order of importance; or in some other way that highlights importance information and interactions.

An Example of Epistolary Structure

The following is an example of such a dossier: for instance, suppose we are doing research on accusations that a criminal lawyer has been negligent in their work and our research clearly shows there is merit to the accusations. What we need to do is show audiences what has happened, but also how this behaviour was allowed to happen unchallenged. In other words, an epistolary style allows us to present where evidence of wrongdoing as occurred and when, as well as why it happened and how.

We could, for instance, begin the dossier with a transcript of the court case that sparked the accusation or investigation. We identify the court case and then print an excerpt which highlights the questionable conduct:

> (ONTARIO)
> SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE
> BETWEEN:
> HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
> -and-
> CHARLES SMITH
> ---

Before the HONORABLE MR. DORIAN WEBBER, without a
jury, at the Metropolitan Toronto courthouse, commencing at
10:15 a.m.

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PROCEEDINGS AT PLEA

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APPEARANCES:

Robert Ford, Esq.

And Ms. Bina Singh For the Crown

Mr. Frank Morelli For the Accused, Charles Smith

\---Plea proceedings heard at 10:15 a.m. in the matter of *R. v.
Charles Smith* ---

MR. FORD: My Lord, Charles Smith is before the Court. There
should be an indictment for one count of fraud under five
thousand dollars. Ford, initial R. and Singh, initial B. appearing
for the Crown and Frank Morelli appearing for the defense. If I
am not mistaken, there will be a plea of guilty to the sole count
on the indictment.

THE COURT: Where is Mr. Morelli?

MR. MORELLI: Super sorry, Your Honour, but I was late
because I forgot about today's case. I haven't prepared anything.

We have our opening piece of information that highlights exactly the issue
we are about to present. We can present *other* transcripts where the lawyer
in question was ill-prepared.

If there was a tribunal hearing regarding instances of misconduct, we can
show these as well:

Details of the allegations:

Contrary to both subsection 49.3(2) of the Law Society Act and rule 7.1-1
of the Rules of Professional Conduct, the Respondent has failed to cooperate
with Law Society investigations regarding nine separate complaints about
his conduct by failing to provide a prompt and complete responses required
by requests made by the Law Society's investigators, including:

(a) written requests made in February March, April, May, July, August,
September, October and November 2019 and made in person in July 2019,
regarding Case 2019-242566;

(b) written requests made in April, May, June, July, August, September and October 2019 and made in person in July 2019 regarding Case 2019-242566.

We see that the attorney in question does not respond to a governing body's requests, and a pattern of behavior emerges.

This may be the beginning of our dossier, but we can also include our interviews of various people who were impacted by the consequences of the actions:

> CHARLES SMITH: I was a victim of identity theft, and I reported this to the police when the credit card company called me to see if I had applied for a credit card. Before I know it, I am arrested for fraud and I don't know what happened. I retained a lawyer, but he never prepared my case and then showed up hungover and late for the plea hearing. I wanted to fight the charges, but he said it would be better if I pleaded guilty. I couldn't afford to fight it in court and no one believed I was innocent.

> MARY HOOVER: Morelli told me it would be easier to cop a plea than try to fight the embezzlement charges. I swear I was going to pay it back, but the company found out and fired me. So, I go in ready to enter a plea and Morelli isn't there! He stumbled in fifteen minutes late reeking of booze. The judge wasn't too happy, and I withdrew my plea and got another lawyer. I was scared out of my mind.

Notice we do not downplay guilty clients from the innocent. In this case, it seems *neither* one fared any better with their legal representation. We pass no judgment on either client. We present information. We can include the police report of the identity theft complaint as well as part of an appendix to show we have verified information we were presented. We can add more to the dossier, such as voice mails:

> *Recorded 11:31 AM.*
> CHARLES SMITH: I'm not here; so leave a message.
> FRANK MORELLI: I forgot to send the documents for discovery, so, the Crown cancelled it. Real sorry about that. I'll send them what they requested, and we can rebook it. But I think you ought to consider putting in a guilty plea. It would be your first offence and the judge will go easy on you.
> END CALL

We can use memos, transcripts, police reports, filings, social media posts and other communications to paint a portrait. We do not need to editorialize: the more raw information we have, the clearer the audience can see what has happened. The audience can follow along and see what has happened. If data collected through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is redacted, we show it to the audience. We should present enough information to show what has happened and why it is troublesome, but we do not have to overload audiences with overkill, yet there may be times when overload *is* the story: for example, if someone in a position of power has had a hundred complaints against him by underlings and nothing was done to stop the bad behaviour, then by showing as many complaints as you could obtain illustrates the apathy of the company.

But be aware that there are those who can *manipulate* the optics of transcripts to give a false impression. For example, suppose you are reading a transcript of a legal discovery, and you come across a passage that looks something like this:

> Lawyer: Tell me what happened on the night of the car accident.
>
> Plaintiff: We were going…
>
> Lawyer: I didn't finish the question.

On face value, we are led to believe that the plaintiff was too eager to respond; however, the lawyer in question may have deliberately used a ploy where he asked a full question, there was a pause and then when the plaintiff answered, the lawyer then accused the plaintiff of interrupting him, when, in fact, the lawyer wanted the transcript to paint the plaintiff as impetuous and unable to follow simple commands. There is no way of knowing vocal inflections or the length of pauses as these are not recorded in such transcripts. After all, it is more probable that they lawyer is a veteran of such interactions, while this may be the plaintiff's first and only experience in a discovery. If the plaintiff has a lawyer who is not vigilant, the representative may not interject to make certain the transcript reflects the ruse.

We must verify and question information we receive and make certain there are not subtle things that we have missed.

Whatever style you use, or if you use a combination of styles, be certain you have enough information to show an audience what has happened and why it is important to know without patronizing them. Do not talk down to them

by saying, "This is why this is important" because why it is important for you may not be the same reason it is important for others. If you are missing key information, these presentation styles will make those gaps obvious and that also explains to the audience that pertinent information is missing and being withheld. We do not hide what we do not know.

Finding the right structure takes practice: you may wish to use an epistolary style and soon discover a matriarchal one explains a situation more accurately, particularly if there is more than one party at fault. If information seems to contradict others, include it as well: this is not a narrative, but a *dossier* giving audiences a full picture of a situation. For example, you may receive an inspector's report stating the soundness of a house was solid, only to have the same house collapse. The report in this case is crucial to showing the flaws with the inspection—or show that something happened *after* the report was issued. If two teachers gave conflicting assessments of a student, show both of them and then follow the lines of inquiry for each one. Both may be right, wrong, or somewhere in-between, or one may be more vigilant than the other. We do not try to make the facts "fit." We do not pander, hide, distort, or appease. We present information to show the complexities of the event or situation.

Using an effective strategy to present information is critical: which structure of presentation shows the situation the best? You may wish to try both, comparing and contrasting how the information presents itself. You may create your own structure for unique cases. In any event, if you produce more than one, it is a good idea to present it to others in an academic setting so that they can see the differences in how each is interpreted by an audience. Your purpose may be more than to inform a public: you may become a pioneer who creates a new structure to present information to others.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

VENNSPHERES

If we are working on a long-term report, there will be many interviews, evidence, data and other forms of research. We may have to go to certain places to verify that events took place as recounted. There will be an overlap of information, but the nuances, details and interpretations will vary and we need to reconcile those conflicting details.

There will be many times you suspect a source is deceiving you, or they have been deceived and are acting as an unwitting proxy. Other times, you will suspect the individual's filters will always be off as they have cognitive problems or a personality disorder. There will be people who have been brainwashed, gaslighted, terrorized, radicalized, manipulated and indoctrinated and they are not presenting their own views, but following a set script. They may have limited exposure or knowledge, but will try to bluff you all the same. There may be cultural, educational, or socioeconomic divides that skew perceptions and then there is good old fashion evolutionary triggers: you will often note the people will speak poorly of outsiders, but sing the praises of those in their in-group.

Loaded language and other external factors can damage memories and perceptions. In one 2002 study, subjects had to pick out a "suspect" they witnessed from a line-up; however, "confirming feedback had inflated retrospective certainty more for inaccurate eyewitnesses than for accurate eyewitnesses, significantly reducing the certainty-accuracy relation." Researchers of that study recommended double-blind testing for such tasks to prevent external influences on eyewitnesses.

Those are rigs that we take for granted and rarely question; however, your job is to challenge every rig, but it may seem difficult to do so; however, there are ways to organize your thoughts and this chapter will be your guide to do it.

Venn diagrams: a new approach

A Venn Diagram (also known as logic or set diagrams) shows logical relations among a select group of elements. These are usually shown as overlapping circles, with larger concepts printed within the circle and the common threads between the overlaps. For instance, one circle could be labelled "Dog", while the other "Cat": their overlap in the centre could be "domesticated animal." These are often used in mathematics, but we can also use them when we are working out various social equations for our stories. We can keep a track of their feints, ruses and common strategies, as well as their clientele: what are the common threads? Could you learn the pattern, language and strategies by mere sight? When we begin to graph and map common threads, we can see the real machinations behind the information that is given. When we keep visual files with annotations, we can go beyond heuristics or algorithms: we look for the hidden or even subconscious factors to notice what even those in the environment are not aware exists.

We can trace back to see the evolution of manipulations from key players and map alliances and rivalries. If one company is raiding the talent of another, we can see patterns of what one company is seeking and then begin to compare and contrast what that raided talent brought to the table. With Venn diagrams, we can see the overarching strategies of corporate and political games and see how a player thinks: what is their overall goal? What sort of pawns do they covet? How are other players responding? Is there a secret race? Where does the talent come from—have they truly been culled—or was the plan to enter another company, find out its lay of the land, innovations, secrets and strategies and then return when there is enough intelligence to be used? Does the talent have common threads, such as the same alma mater or memberships?

Venn diagrams allow us to map the behind-the-scenes happenings to make better sense of the façade being presented to outsiders.

For example, many political operatives and public relations firms have specialties in strategies: there are crisis management firms, firms that help massage the optics of nations with human rights' violations, or celebrities who have cut their teeth with smaller firms and the larger firms raid them as they are powerful precisely because they do not take risks. We can find common threads and map them together: we may not be able to see those commonalities at first glance: but Venn diagrams open up those insights,

even with sparse information. We can find lines of investigation or discount erroneous theories. What we now have is a working blueprint of any environment.

So powerful are Venn diagrams that they will be a common tool for you to use when you are unfamiliar with an event or environment: is someone a likely power broker or a mere figurehead to hide the true player? Is the supposed Titan of Industry a mere grifter or mouthpiece? You can plug in any variable of your choosing and map out information from the top sources to the chattering of maids, nannies, seamstresses and other workers privy to information on a different level to form Venn diagrams to see if information overlaps. Venn diagrams are versatile and expose the sleight of hand skulduggery of fraudulent con men who control the optics seen by the masses and the elite alike; however, we can flesh out Venn diagrams in even more insightful way, but first, let us refine of elements we need to explore first.

Sphering the circles

Circles are two-dimensional renditions and touch only the surface. Behind the circle is a sphere: what this means if we are looking for connections, we must also look for *deeper* connections. Suppose you are investigating a company where you suspect the C-suite of fudging data and cooking the books: we can look with a forensic accountant, but that is not enough: perhaps the ones running the scam all graduated from the same graduate school and work together as they form a wall in the company where people cannot touch them as their alliance has built a fortress. It is not enough to look at the financials: you will need to investigate those players building static as a distraction. They may be using a shell company to funnel money, or laundering it through a variety of means from buying real estate, using high-priced art as a currency, or channelling it through smelters, all tactics which are common ploys for organized crime.

We then look for multiple common threads: how did these players first meet and where? When we can trace their origins, we can investigate how they began their gambits: they will have been less refined with smaller takes, but we can begin to see patterns: who is the leader? Where did they work before? How did they operate? What is the division of labour? We can layer the common threads to see how the human machine operates: we can see where there is disagreement, betrayal and deception: if others have left a group or joined, we can see the reasons why: how have the group dynamics

changed? Who is likely to be a source for us to see the inner workings of the group?

If we see the common threads, we can find other related groups who have interacted or spun off from the original. In a matriarchal reporting system: we can focus on more than one player: we can study the leader of a group, but then look at others who also have other roles: where did they come from and how did they get here? What common threads brought them to the group—but what was the differences that made them have their own role within it?

If we are doing profiles on each player, we are fleshing out their personalities, background, connections and deeds, but then we related this person to a larger group and then we can explain the mechanics of their division of labour and goals. We can see divided loyalties quickly: we can form educated guesses and then test our various theories if we can visualize the dynamics at play. We see groups, but also individuals. We can create computer simulations of connections, we can draw them, but we can also use physical spheres (from Styrofoam, for example) to map out connections to have a visual presentation in front of us. We are creating a symbolic solar system where each connection is a world of its own: but then we see how those worlds interacted in the past to bring problems to citizens in the present.

For an exercise, try mapping out your family, including at least one aunt, uncle or grandparent: who is the leader? Who are the followers? Who are the mavericks or the spoilers? How do they interact with one another? Are there alliances and factions? What is the rate of communications connections: who talks to one another the most? The least? Having done this exercise, have you gained new insight about your place in your family? What is it and how did mapping your family show you a hidden element that you failed to notice before?

Understanding human interactions using Vennspheres

Journalism is applied psychology and the main focus of your work is how human interaction created a problem that needs attention. To understand the motives of others, you will need to understand the psychology of human behaviour. So far in this book, we have looked at many primary theories that will come in handy in your work, but there are other places you will need to explore to increase your understanding.

You should familiarize yourself with both the *Diagnostic and Staistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and the *Crime Classification Manual* (CCM) for basic guidance of what are the signs when people have psychological problems or commit crimes; however, these books evolve and are not foolproof. The CCM, for instance, has its own confirmation bias as it strictly studied convicts who were found guilty of their crimes and does not examine false positives or negatives, nor does it compare normal behaviour to the criminal. Yet, these are important manuals to use in your work: you may often attribute certain traits as an expression of rude or self-indulgent behaviour, but the individual has impairments compelling them to act a certain way. Conversely, you may be covering a criminal act, but the individual you are interviewing as a victim or witness, may give signs that they are either fabricating the event, or are the actual criminal.

When we take the time to understand our sources and the main subjects who we are investigating, we need to see how their behaviour was driven by their thinking and the consequences of both. A charming thief will groom their victims to trust them, and they will lure their prey carefully. For us to see the interaction of predator and prey, we need to know who they are: many times, the victim also has psychological vulnerabilities, and that is the reason they were selected as the target.

However, you will need to be aware of various dynamics and psychological filters shaping perceptions. While it is beyond the scope of this book to name every factor in play, you will benefit by looking beyond mere presentation: how do people treat their friends, family and colleagues? Do they work better alone or in a group? Have there been any past complaints against them? The more we understand a person, the more we can understand how they interact with other people and groups. If a person is affiliated with a group that has been the victim of violence, abuse and a high death rate, their trust level with other out-groups will be low; however, by mapping out the factors which makes a person behave in certain ways, we can learn to see how various factors influence behaviour. For instance, First Nations women in Canada have disappeared or have been murdered at an alarming rate to the point a government inquiry labelled the deaths tantamount to a genocide: if that is our starting point, we can look at how this group have been failed by various governmental agencies and what have been the consequences.

We are building worlds interacting with other worlds: the more textured and fleshed out the profiles, the more we can see interactions at play. When you are cultivating your expertise, you will update and add information as you file your reports and when you have reached a dead end, you can go back to your previous files and see if there are hidden leads you can follow to pick up the trail. You are building on past work: and if a colleague's work weaves into yours, both of you can then build a bigger unit from the information you have gathered.

Understanding deceptions

In your job as journalist, you will see no shortage of lies, hoaxes, scams and propaganda: there will always be people pointing out problems to you, but many times, they have a vested interest in doing so: they may have exaggerated, fabricated, or created the problem to sell a solution or gain control of people who now feel frightened and helpless.

However, lies are clues in themselves: once we see what a lie is meant to hide, steal, or manipulate, we can follow the line of investigation. We liberate truth from lies: for example, many people feign illnesses, such as cancer to fleece people: if we see there are inconsistencies in narratives, we can discover truths.

For example, in 1996 in Toronto, a woman claimed she was dying of cancer and was mugged of her purse which contained both her medication and all of her money. She received donations from the public and said she could not show her name or face as she was in hiding from an abusive partner: but the anonymous woman gave a press conference in the shadows. However, people watching the conference immediately recognized her, despite the cloak and dagger and it was soon discovered she fabricated the illness and the mugging as she had an addiction to pain killers and could not get more pills any other way. She had a police record in the past for fabricating a sexual assault as well.

She used the fortress of pity to hide the real reason for her hoax. When we try to verify information, but are repeatedly stymied, it is a real sign the narrative presented has little to do with the truth.

To see the timeline problems and logical inconsistencies of accounts, we can see what information overlaps as true—but also what overlaps as false. In the 1980s in the US, many citizens reported that their can of Pepsi had

been tampered with—by the time the investigations were over, *not a single case turned out to be true.* The problem was simple: Pepsi manufactured its soft drinks in various factories across the US and it would take extraordinary measures for a person or group to sabotage multiple places of production. Worse, claims of what items were found in the cans widely varied, making little sense. People had hoped to attach themselves to a class-action lawsuit and took a gamble. Here, by looking at the various stories and how those events could have happened as described, it would become very easy to see that there were too many conflicting and contradictory reports and the logistics of such an undertaking would have not been possible.

Deceptions can be mapped along with motives for lying and what has actually transpired. Vennsphere mapping can not only reveal deceptions, but at the same time can line up the actual truth with the lie used to hide it. If a killer fabricated an alibi, we can pair the deception with the time gap: the lie is meant to cover up the truth of the killer's true whereabouts. Does the person have a confederate? What is the cohort also lying? What is their mutual gain?

It is a good idea to keep a file on the various deceptions you encountered: the structure of the lie, the content of it and what it tried to hide from you. For example, here is how we would record such an interaction:

Deception	Structure	Content	Motive	Truth
Age of source	Envy-based insult	I am 29	To gain scholarship	45 yrs old
Success of company	Prowess bragging	$5 billion	Fleece investors	Ponzi scheme
I am innocent	Misdirection	Alibi	Escape conviction	Bribed alibi

The more information you have, the easier it becomes to see the lies and how they relate to the issue at hand. You may discover certain sources and subjects are serial fabulists and those cases, your report may shift to what the individual is doing to require so many deceits to function.

Understanding psychological manipulations

Deception is a form of psychological manipulation; however, there are other kinds of methods of unbalancing people and pushing them away from vulnerabilities and the truth. It is equally important that we catalogue the kinds of manipulations we experience, along with the ones used on sources who may be honest with you, but have been exploited by others, and it has now become the focus of your work.

There are multiple ways to disorient people to prevent them from focussing or finding the truth. We often hear the phrase "gaslighting", which simply means a predator places the focus away from himself in reality, but constructs a narrative that is rigged so that the prey must look inward and see real or perceived defects.

Bullying, insults, accusations and tantrums are common ruses, but so is flattery, promises and manufactured crises. Whenever you are presented with irrelevant information, accusations or narrative, you must begin to refocus your attention on discovering the *reasons* for the gambits.

As we have seen with the *36 Stratagems,* ruses are created to take away focus, energy, resources, observations and abilities from where they can discover weaknesses of a target. If the stronger competitor or victim believes they will be overwhelmed, is wrong, or destined to lose, the weaker party can reach their improbable goals. It is the way societies function: rules are created by the minority of a population—in this case, politicians, yet the majority will follow along: if the majority of society ignored those rules, there would not be a way for the elite minority to enforce it as they would not have the resources or manpower to do anything about it.

Most times, citizens prefer peace to chaos and will obliged based on goodwill and faith; however, often, the minority is a grifter or a cult leader who has indoctrinated more people than those who are not doing the indoctrination: the minority rules and often, they do so through bluffing, puffery and deflection. If there is a loss of goodwill or the spell of control is broken, the minority is then at the mercy of a majority. When a Ponzi scheme collapses, the majority who were fooled by the minority have lost their resources: had they seen the problems sooner, they could have used their majority to expose the deceitful and manipulative minority.

However, the dynamics are complex: often, the manipulative minority prey on a majority's darker impulses, such as envy, vanity, greed, cowardice, laziness, ignorance, bigotry, gullibility, arrogance and pity. Mapping Vennspheres can reveal these dysfunctional dynamics: how did this person or group managed to capture the imaginations of a collective that should know better than to believe they are superior to all others?

In these cases, you will map the interactions and the motives for each side partaking in them in the manner that they did. Was it a get-rich-quick scheme that promised the person would be the most successful of their circle

of acquaintances? Who is the predator? Who is the prey? Or is this a case of two predators trying to deceive one another? Many times, when your attention is summoned, you will be told specific narratives to paint one predator as a blameless victim. This is a form of manipulation employed so that the person can gain or *regain* the upper hand. In many divorce or custody proceedings, exasperated judges have condemned both parties with their prolonged and vicious gambits that eat away at time, resources, funds and court time. Yet both sides may come to you to present themselves as hapless victims of their estranged spouse.

In these cases, mapping the interactions becomes crucial: what do court transcripts have to tell about their games? What do people around them have to say? Have they behaved the same way to other relatives, colleagues, or friends? What is at stake and why are they both engaging in risky strategies that never resolve—or is the point to prolong the outcome for a reason?

As journalists, we must understand the dynamics are not always clean or simple. It can be predator and victim, but also predator and predator, or prey and prey, with one or both prey trying to bluff as a predator to keep the other side from seeing their weaknesses.

If you suspect that a source or subject is playing a manipulative game with you—make note when it occurs: what question did you ask? What piece of information unsettled them? What are they hiding from you and the public? By connecting their ruses with their background and the facts of your report, you will be able to compare to find hidden truths. Vennspheres make the hidden obvious, but if you still cannot see it, ask someone in your outlet for their perspective. It may also help to send in reports to any academic institution studying your notes for their perspective: the point of you doing so is to help devise better and new methods of finding the truth in a molasses of deceit and manipulations.

Understanding sleight of hand

Though not as often, you may be presented with claims of supernatural powers, such as mind-reading, prophesy, or the ability to communicate with the dead. You will have to devise ways of uncovering ruses. A knowledge of stage magic and cold reading is essential here. Look for contraptions, listening devises and confederates.

Other times, the same techniques apply, but not to declare supernatural powers. There are charismatic types who appear to be *winners:* they claim to achieve hyper-success or offer solutions to problems. They seemingly can work a crowd, solve the problems of strangers and are preternaturally gifted.

When you are presented with such individuals, you will need to vet their backgrounds to look for contradictions. You will look for confederates: many people have ghostwriters or background assistants who are silently doing the work the winner claims they are doing alone. Their fans are manufactured as these are paid actors or social media bots used to inflate the numbers and the excitement. They may doctor photographs, use deceit in their videos, make claims that are too good or too bad to be true and use doublespeak to parse their words. They have a gift of the gab, can be flirtatious and have no qualms taking resources away from people with their narratives and overblown claims. They actively pursue media attention and pepper their accounts with empty superlatives.

These are individuals who use sleight of hand ruses to achieve their goals. They are in a position of weakness and prey upon those with resources and a need for a specific narrative.

You will map out the winner's background and tactics as well as those of the winner's supporters. Why is this group vulnerable to a few stunts and feints? What brings this treacherous union together? Has the winner played this game before elsewhere? If so, what happened? You will be mapping information to see connections, contradictions and overlapping concepts to find new stories hidden inside overt ones. By looking for tricks and stunts, you will find the motives of both sides and see what the winner is trying to obtain as well as the vulnerabilities that compel the false winner to take a gamble to get it in the first place.

Types of scams

You will often hear extraordinary tales from people who will insist that you cover an extraordinary feat, or some sort of windfall. You will proceed with caution, looking for inconsistencies, deceits and flaws in the narrative. When you are given information, ask yourself whether this data would be admissible in a court of law in a criminal case or civil suit. If not, why not? Remember, people are free to present any narrative or official looking report to you: it does not mean any of it is truthful, accurate, or genuine.

To introduce you to the kinds of common scams that you will encounter as a journalist, here is a quick list of common con games:

1. *Greed scam:* The narrative promises the victim untold riches if they invest their money with the predator. The grifter assures the victim that there is no risk. There is also the subtext that the pigeon is deserving of worldly riches as the con artist has special abilities and insider knowledge that defies the reality of the day. The con artist will pay older investors with some of the money acquired from *new* investors. It is a classic Ponzi scheme, and often, ledgers will be manipulated or fabricated to present a robust picture of prosperity. It will be important to visit various sites to see if work has been done. Remember, older investors may receive initial dividends, but as the scam continues, there will be excuses of delays and setbacks to explain why investors are no longer receiving money.

2. *Pity scam:* This narrative presents a piteous victim who is in need of funds. The person may claim to be poor, ill, dying, or they will present themselves as an advocate for an individual or group who fall into that category. They will ask for money as they stroke the ego of the victim, praising them for their largesse. The person may feign illness or even homelessness, but if you follow them when they are unaware that they have a secret audience, you will see where they reside, and how they move.

3. *The End is Nigh scam:* People are made to be fearful that there is a plague, a vindictive deity, or some other disaster which will kill millions or billions of people. They will be given inflated numbers of casualties and a never-ending list of debilitating systems. They will also be given a *sink or swim* forced choice on how to "save" themselves. The remedies may be expensive, but forced compliance and obedience to authority will always be presented. People will be told to isolate themselves from others, and seeking social connection is selfish and "inexcusable." This scam hinges of fear, and is a form of war propaganda. In the case of homicidal spirits, prayer and rituals will be used as the remedy. When enough people conform, it will be claimed their obedience saved them, but there will always be an additional threat that the cataclysm can come back at any time. When presented with this insidious form of scam, remember that authorities will be presented as intellectually superior and saintly. Find inconsistencies with their narratives, question who is paying for their work, find which PR firms or lobby groups or involved, and whether there are paid operatives used to shame sceptics.

4. *The Chosen One scam*: Someone will claim a supernatural ability or a preternatural talent. There will be glowing testimonials: some will be confederates, but others will be gullible marks. There will be sleight of hand backstage tricks, and your job will be to uncover those rigs. If you can *replicate* their so-called abilities, this is the rare time to turn the tables with *theatre* of your own: if you can do it, then expose who you did it. Alternately, you may be able to thwart a rig, showing the person is not as gifted as claimed.

5. *Snake Oil scams:* Many medical remedies do more harm than good, and promising cures are often nothing more than a placebo or worse.

6. *Mind-reading scams:* There are numerous tricks to seem as if you can read minds. One is to use surveillance to listen in on people, but there are other confidence tricks at a grifter's disposal.

When you map out your facts using Vennspheres, you can see common elements, inconsistencies, and practiced scripts used to lure people into believing a hoax. By knowing the games predators play, you can form a plan on how best to expose them, using their own methods against them.

Using Vennspheres for your reports

Consider the process of creating Vennspheres as taking rough and raw information to begin to analyze and process it. It is not your final product, but a way to create it. It will show you where to focus, why and how. Irrelevant information gets removed, as you re-focus on the information that produces relevant information. It is your ever-changing draft. These are not traditional notes: these are the points you can visualize at once and if you can move them or even touch them, they become concrete units rather than nebulous hypotheticals. When you visit your doctor, you will often see visual aids of organs and bones that are movable and there will be times when the physician takes the prop and shows you what is happening to you internally. Vennspheres is a graphic representation of the layers and units you are contending with. Many times, you will become overwhelmed by the overload of information or by the chaotic behaviour of your sources and subjects. Other times, you will barely have wisps of a thread to follow.

In either case, you will be able to map out your best information so that you can follow trails: if you are reporting on a missing person who has been spotted elsewhere, you may try to retrace their steps, looking at their high

school yearbooks for leads on friends or associates, or speak to their family and former coworkers for leads. You may discover patterns of behaviour that gives you a hint of where to look: by mapping out their previous behaviour, you may notice predictable patterns to help you find new sources and avenues to explore.

How you devise your representations will depend on a variety of factors, from the nature of your reports, to the quality of your data and sources, to your own personal preferences. Computer-generated graphics may be more helpful, but even using a large whiteboard may allow you to interact with your data in a more personal way. Taping sheets to walls and writing different categories of data on the walls can also serve you will. Finally, a physical 3-D sphere with pinned paper and string may sound cumbersome, but it is still an effective way of forcing you to take the time to connect behaviours with facts. The point of creating Vennspheres is to force you to take the effort to *rewrite* and sort your information, pairing intellectual information with the emotional and the evolutionary. If you find another method, even if it would be considered eccentric or enigmatic, that works for you, do not shy away from using it. Your final report will not resemble your work in progress as you will be translating your Vennspheres into an easy to comprehend dossier.

It also allows you to see gaps and points which do not align with the reality of the environment and you can more precisely pinpoint what areas need clarification. These will often fall into one of four categories:

Points of corruption: Somewhere along the way, a source has misremembered a key fact and there may be a real reason for it that you will need to be aware of to find the origin of the corrupted piece of information. As we have seen earlier, memories can be corrupted with a single loaded word. If the source has deferred to an authority who has muddied the waters, perhaps deliberately so, then you will need to focus on the source of corruption as they may have a reason to try to hide and alter the information stream. For instance, if there has been sexual abuse of children, they have been lured, primed and groomed to keep silent through a variety of means. If a child breaks free from this cycle, they may still have contact with their abuser who will shame, bully and manipulate the child to seem less credible and may deliberately lead the child to misremember key details to later claim the child is lying, unstable, or confused. The child has no experience in spotting manipulation, but the abuser has plenty of experience manipulating and silencing victims. In this case, the point of corruption clearly shows the

path to the source of the trouble, and you can devise any number of strategies to expose the mechanisms of manipulation. Remember, chaos is a misdirection and can more easily expose vulnerabilities than one of a system of seeming order.

Points of interference: Sometimes gaps will come from a variety of sources, but the main reason for the gap comes from the same source. For instance, an NDA may be used to silence plaintiffs who have all sued a municipal government: these people all had grievances that may have been unrelated and these individuals have different lawyers, different suits and sued different departments at different times and places for different reasons. There very well may be incompetence or other serious problems which brought all of those suits to life, but the city may choose to settle these matters out of court and have individuals sign a non-disclosure agreement, meaning there will not only be gaps of information, but when suits are settled out of court, legal determination of guilt or innocence is lost.

In these cases, you will need to pick up a different thread: from looking at employee records, dismissals, or using method research to see what has been going on and why. Often, by reading the parameters of an NDA can give you enough leeway to approach your investigation from a novel angle, not covered by it. You may be able to create a crude map of how you will obtain information: sometimes by understanding the insurance policies a company has and why they have them to finding discarded ephemera. There may be a reason for the censorship and there are ways to work around them, but if you can find patterns at what point these are used and in what area, it will be easier to devise your strategies.

Points of deflection: You may believe that you have better or more information than you do, but your sources have steered you away from the information you needed by ways of misdirection; in this case, giving you information that they want you to have. For instance, you are told by a spokesperson that there is a crisis and resources have been taxed to the maximum; however, no hard numbers are given to you, only narrative and superlatives. You have been told a narrative, but without numbers of the situation during the labeled crisis we well as the baseline *before* the problem, you are not given any usable information. Traditional journalism would merely report the quote without verification, polluting the information stream.

However, the alternative does not play a game of telephone: when you see points of deflection, you will know your source has been *evasive* with you. There are ways to confirm or refute the assertion: you may seek company or government records to see if the numbers align with assertion. You can determine if the company is planning to ask for government funding or wishes to sell a product or service that is contingent on manufacturing a crisis. You can see what PR firms and lobbyists and have hired and why. You can look at changes in who holds the most stocks in the company and what they have to gain. By approaching the points of deflection from a variety of angles, you are signalling to evasive sources that their narratives are not facts and that you are willing to dig until you find what they are hiding.

Points of deception: Sometimes sources will lie to you. They will lie about being attacked, bullied, insulted, having illnesses, being wealthy, being poor and being moral or innocent of a crime. They will hide unflattering facts to push forth their narrative, and billions of dollars could be at stake. When you uncover deceptions, there is a truth that is being hidden inside of it. People lie to gain sympathy, pity, support, followers and money.

When you see one source with several points of deception, you will know the source is unreliable and most likely is hiding information that will expose what they are really doing or not doing. If you have several sources deceiving you, then you can begin to see what are their common threads and what is the mutual benefit they have for lying to you. Were they giving orders by a superior who fears a lawsuit? Is a rival close to overtaking them and they are in fear of losing their jobs, wealth or prestige? Lies reveal the weakest points of a house of cards and if you know where those points are and their relation to each other, you may be able to see the big picture and devise the simplest way of uncovering it. In other words, many smaller lies may be used to hide a big truth, meaning it is less important to expose all of the little lies, which may be time and resource-consuming, but instead look for the big truth that will reveal what the patchwork of smaller lies were trying to keep away from your prying eyes.

By being able to organize your information visually, you will be able to compare and contrast accounts and experiences. You will be able to see patterns that are being deliberately withheld from you, as well as hidden connections others cannot see as they are too close or too far away from the situation and do not have the training to spot them. You, as a journalist, will have the intellectual, emotional and evolutionary methods to spot them and Vennspheres is the overt way to find what you still need. If you cannot find

the information, despite your best efforts, mention whatever data is missing in your report.

Vennspheres in Method Research

When you are interacting daily with those who you are studying, observing information and observing experimental outcomes becomes crucial. You will be cataloguing your progress, whether you will be in an environment for a few days to a few years. New connections arise as old ones become severed. You will need to catalogue changes, progression and erosions.

People change. Technology changes. Society changes. Environments change. These shifts will all interact with one another, and the results can be significant. For example, if an employee is embezzling money, it will impact the company's coffers and may cause hard feelings or panic, which may result in key talent leaving the company as a toxic work environment is no longer worth tolerating. What you are doing is noting the shifts and turns and trying to visualize various connections. Are there alliances? Conflicting goals? Rivals or competitors encroaching on the in-group?

All of these interactions will reinforce each other, many times, in unexpected ways. Your job is to see how these interactions alter the landscape. Here, on your first day, note the environment and all of its elements. Make a diagram of your initial observations. On your final day, do the same thing for the final outcomes and record them. Go back to your first day's notes and compare and contrast them to the final day's observations: how different are they? What interactions brought these changes here? Then look at your notes as you progressed: did you accurately anticipate the final day with your ongoing notes? What did you miss and how could you improve your abilities the next time?

Vennspheres is the way to see simple connections to complex units of your story. You are finding how common thread bind people and events together; however, your final dossier will use simpler descriptions of the most salient connections. You will reduce the amount of information you uncover to what is the most relevant to understanding the content of the dossier. The Vennspheres act as sifter: revealing the most important elements of the issue or event. It is your tool to finding layers of events, people and issues that helps you visualize what pieces you have and what is still missing. The next chapter shows us how to create the dossier as your empirical journalistic report.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

CREATING DOSSIERS

In traditional journalism, reports are called "stories." These are narrative-driven reports that mimic the traditional patriarchal conventions of fiction in one form or another and made information vulnerable to personal biases, hoaxes, gossip, spin and even propaganda. They evoked emotion rather than rationality. There is no way to compare or contrast facts, understand how the journalist gathered information, see what information is missing or determine what other factors could be at play. For instance, the US press since 2016, had become obsessed with producing negative stories about their improbable President Donald J. Trump as he bypassed their rigs to win the presidency and countless outlets produced very little other stories, blaming him for every problem, while ignoring other players, such as bureaucrats, or state governors, who had more power over the domestic agenda than the president, meaning that the press did not understand their own system of governance. The monomania eventually translated into an obsession with COVID-19 in early 2020 and spread both panic and misinformation to the public.

Had there been a narrative-free alternative that had shown the situation as it was, there would not have been such global disruptions: businesses were shut down, basic civil rights were cast aside without debate and the incidences of domestic violence had dramatically increased, putting more people in peril than COVID-19 did. Banks with ATMs machine two feet away from each other, yet insisting that patrons stand six feet away in a line turned the response into a carnivalesque comedy of errors as panic-buying toilet paper became a peculiar knee-jerk response to the onslaught of fear-mongering. As more people were being abused in their homes as a result, police instead chose to issue tickets to the homeless for not following social distancing rules, as governments freed criminals early from prisons in the name of stopping the spread of COVID-19, yet threatened law-abiding citizens with prison should they have a gathering in their homes.

The panic was doing more damage than the disease. Doctors had suddenly asked parents of children with various non-terminal ailments to sign Do Not Resuscitate agreements, causing understandable outrage. If the fusion of anarchy and authoritarianism wasn't confusing enough, billionaires with no medical expertise such as Bill Gates and his wife, were fear-mongering and making decrees on vaccines, even though neither had medical expertise, but vested financial interests in selling it to the public, yet they were given prominent coverage all the same, while the press ignored crucial evidence, such as the sudden decline in hospital admissions and that overall deaths in countries such as the US, were lower than they were for the same time last year.

The unprecedented reactions were becoming less rational, yet was no empirical evidence to suggest that COVID-19 was going to wipe out humanity or was any worse than previous outbreaks, such as H1N1, Zika, or Ebola. The UK government had issued by March 19, 2020 that their assessment that COVID-19 was not a high consequence infectious diseases (HCID), yet the press ignored the most significant positive news, nor had the press bothered to read the medical literature that had said since 2016 that the off-label use for surgical masks served as no shield from getting an infectious disease.

The lack of critical thinking created an upside-down atmosphere where people were overstepping their boundaries of expertise without regard for the consequences. Doctors are not schooled in the global economy; politicians are neither economists, nor doctors and billionaires are not doctors or government officials, yet all had waded into the quagmire to make life-altering decrees without foresight, data they required to make it, nor had respect for the consequences of their unprecedented meddling. Journalists of the traditional ilk did not critically question people in authority, nor did they challenge their patriarchal narratives. Millions of children's education was disrupted, jobs were lost, food shortages loomed as farmers could not get workers to tend to the crops and fear became part of daily life. Worst of all, countries that did not partake in such extremist measures had no worse rate of infection than those who did.

It is for these reasons that journalism carried much of the blame for the implosion: fear was left unchecked, only to be exploited and had there been an empirical and logical approach to information, the public would not have been incited to completely alter their lives and become vulnerable to propaganda or panic.

Which brings us to constructing a dossier.

Before you begin to write or produce a dossier, you must be very clear in your purpose: the job is not to cause fear, anger, or hatred, nor is it to lull people into believing some benevolent They will take care of the problem and everything is well. Just because there are crises, problems and dysfunctions, that is not a reason to become irrational. People survive wars, mass shootings, natural disasters and oppressive regimes. You are the guide who paves the path to paradise with gold and the unit of gold is the fact and the light to show the way is the idea. Journalism is applied psychology and applied education and your subject area of expertise is reality and truth.

The job of the journalist is not to make people afraid, jealous, anxious, spiteful, enraged, entitled or angry, but to keep them vigilant to problems, rational, critical and primed to find solutions to problems. Here, journalists had completely failed the entire planet as they focussed on trivialities, sensationalism, fear-mongering and learned helplessness. The journalistic alternative does none of these things: it curates the problems in reality empirically and gives citizens the power of knowledge so that they can devise their own strategies and solutions.

The narrative-driven rigs and rituals of traditional journalism skewed perceptions of reality, but when businesses closed and the source of revenue removed from media outlets as a result, many of those outlets saw their own fortunes collapse in the bargain without seeing an increase in their subscriptions as their potential pool had lost their jobs as well. What was needed was a rational and not sensationalistic account of events: who were the most vulnerable? Who stood to gain economically and politically from causing panic? What PR firms and vested interests were behind the push for the loss of democratic freedoms? How does authoritarian measures and the self-sabotage of the economy be construed as rational medical advice—and why were politicians—the ones who were telling their citizens who they could and could not have in their homes—not following the same advice, as they crowded their planes and went to their cottage, going against their own demands?

Your work should enlighten, not besiege or deceive. Do not put a sunny spin on facts. Do not manipulate people. Do not use a confirmation bias, appeal to authority, personal attack, or sink or swim in your work. Your job is not to create resistance nor compliance. Your job is to inform.

We will now be looking at how to present a report for print, audio, video, electronic and mixed and emerging media and how to relay current newsworthy information to a general audience. In a real way, you are serving as an applied educator as well as psychologist, but also an applied detective. Before we discuss the parts of dossier creation, we need to examine three crucial structures first: Occam's Razor, Bloom's Taxonomy and Grice's communications theory.

Occam's Razor and the guide of rationality

The rule of Occam's Razor is a powerful, yet elegant one: the simplest explanation is most likely the correct one. When people keep explaining away the inconsistencies of their narratives, they are trying to hide the truth. In many cases of real-life hoaxes, had journalists bothered to press for answers from dodgy sources, they would have discovered the story was a fraud.

When you are going over your information to create a dossier, look for the *simplest* explanation: if a source keeps finding explanations for inconsistent information, or resorts to shaming you or uses emotional manipulation, it is a red flag that they are deceiving you either completely, or they are hiding a crucial fact that when known, would completely after the understanding of events. For example, one US band called Negativland, had taken advantage of a real-life news item that chronicled the murder of a family by their teenaged son. The band put out a press release stating the boy had an argument with his father over listening to one of Negativland's songs, which was a deception. They then falsely claimed that the FBI was after them and that a nonexistent agent was investigating them.

The agent didn't exist, but well over 100 media outlets reported the prank as fact and continued to do so until members of the band finally told them the truth. Not a single journalist bothered to find out about the ersatz agent, let alone try to call for a direct interview, nor did anyone talk to the police in charge of the homicide. Why would the band be questioned, even it their song was fodder for a family disagreement?

The yarn was too convoluted, yet the simpler explanation that the story was a publicity stunt proved to be correct. When you are working through tangled webs, look for simpler explanations that focus you on the most salient and relevant facts. Ignore the self-serving explanations and justifications as they are not relevant to the bottom line of an event or issue.

When you present information, use the rule of Occam's Razor on your own product: do not try to spin information, present it as it is. Use a direct approach and explain the event or issue as succinctly as you can. What is the absolute minimum information people need to understand the bottom-line reality of the problem?

If you find that you have more than one event or issue that are related, it is better to mention each separately and then explain their correlation to the larger event. The easier to comprehend, the more useful your dossier becomes and the greater chance it will circulate in the public.

Bloom's Taxonomy and dossier writing

Your dossiers inform, but they also teach the world about its reality and the greatest dilemma most do not grasp is that people are unaware of their own reality. They envy their neighbors who are spiteful to each other as they are on the brink of financial ruin; see children everyday and do not realize the horrific abuse they are enduring; they marry their eventual murderers. They work for companies that are nothing more than fronts for criminal activity and Ponzi schemes; they drink contaminated water and vote knowing nothing about the candidates, parties and platforms. They hold beliefs they have never tested. They personally attack people they have never met. They use unsound quackery to heal a terminal illness. Ignorance is a form of sanctioned insanity and this is the primary dilemma of a journalist: how do you disseminate information to a public who believes that they are informed when you have incontrovertible evidence that they know nothing of the subject you are about to present?

Preaching or nagging a public does not persuade. Presenting sensationalism, fear-mongering and simplistic narrative does not inform; however, if what we do is inform, what are, in fact, doing is *teach*. When we understand the world is our classroom as well as a laboratory, our tools present themselves to us and we know people are teachable.

Bloom's Taxonomy provides with a helpful guide in understanding some of the levels of learning. These levels can help you devise strategies in how you create and disseminate your dossiers and it is helpful to look at each level from the lowest to the highest:

Knowledge: This level is defined as rote learning and memorization that results in a person being able to list or recite information. This is the lowest level of learning as we do not need to know what the information means, only that it exists in a particular form.

Comprehension: You can explain or paraphrase information, meaning you have not just memorized a definition, you have an understanding of its most basic level of meaning. You cannot apply it, but you comprehend its definition. For instance, you may explain the definition of a car, but still not be able to drive it, fix it, or make it.

Application: You can use your information to apply or solve problems with what you have learned. You can calculate and make determinations based on what you have been taught. While a useful level of learning, we can push further than application.

Analysis: This is a higher level of learning where you can compare and contrast facts, as well as classify them and make models.

Synthesis: You can use what you have learned to create, design, improve, construct, produce and propose new creations, inventions and innovations. We are aiming to use this level in our dossiers, though analysis and application are also important aims.

Evaluation: You can make judgements, critique, verify, assess, recommend and justify. This is the highest level of learning that we have reached thus far. We strive for this level in many cases when we write a dossier; however, it is not always the necessary goal when giving certain reports.

When creating your dossier, think about its optimal purpose: what can be done with the information? Is it enough for an audience to comprehend their unemployment rate—or can they apply what they know to make demands of governments, businesses and institutions—or for others, synthesize the information for them to make opportunities of their own? You may not have time or resources to gather and analyze enough information to reach evaluation; however, by having clear and realistic goals, it makes it simpler to construct a dossier when you know what your primary purpose will be. Nevertheless, it is also helpful to present information in a way that is simpler to comprehend.

Grice's theory and dossier writing

Finally, we need to ensure dossiers can be immediately understood, even with a single exposure to them. Dossiers are not tests of literary creativity, but the bottom-line of a problem so that citizens know what needs to be done. Herbert Paul Grice's theory of personal communications is a helpful guide to constructing a dossier, as it pertains to effective conversation and the tone you take should be one that respectful and not patronizing to an audience. Grice's theory, its most basic level, outlines four qualities for good communications:

Quality: What the speaker says is the truth.

Quantity: What the speaker says is informative, but is no more informative than is needed.

Manner: What the speaker says is clear.

Relation: What the speaker says is relevant.

What this means for is you simple: do not lie or exaggerate. Do not include irrelevant details, frills, opinion, sermons, or colour. Make it simple to understand and do not go off on a tangent. If a tangent is important enough to know, create a supplement or footnote to your dossier. For example, you may notice that your country does not have any laws regarding a certain form of damaging activity, but it is not the central fact to know as the focus is on the problems of the activity itself; however, adding a supplement of other countries that do have such laws and the outcomes compared to your own are acceptable; or creating a second Arc to the report may serve a better purpose. You may find that you have information for more than one dossier, or you can break the dossier down into sections. Depending on time and space constraints, you may need to adjust how you present information, but at no time do we sacrifice brevity, validity, reliability, accuracy, utility and clarity in our work.

Creating a dossier

A dossier is not necessarily a written report: it can be a video or audio report. It can be an interactive online package. It can be used with multiple media and should a fifth medium arrive, it can be made to fit it as well. While they

share elements with a traditional news report, there are marked differences in how information is gathered, analyzed, constructed and disseminated.

These are not narrative vignettes or morality plays: these outline a current problem, the facts surrounding it, outcomes if known and any information left outstanding. These are numbered based on how many reports on the topic have been filed, as well as how many reports a particular journalist has filed with the outlet. These can be organized, collected, and they can be used with other dossiers for research purposes. For example, if someone is conducting research on how various companies deal with sexual harassment claims, the individual can gather dossiers in the same category to create a *meta-dossier* of previous reports to see overall trends, progression, regressions, shifts, similarities and differences.

With these purposes in mind, we need to consider who is the primary audience in need of the information, why they need it and how they are likely to use it: is it merely to keep abreast of what is happening around them? Have they been made ill and need more information than medical advice? Will they need to move out of their area, or can they do something to help their area progress? Are these parents unaware of the dangers of the school their children are attending—or are these children who need to be informed about their environment? Who is your target audience?

We do not ask this question to pander to them, but to find which information is most important as it is what impacts them, even besieges them. Your dossier's primary audience may be a neighborhood, a city, or even a country; however, what do these people absolutely have to know to be aware and be able to seek a viable and constructive solution?

What information is needed and in what order? What is the problem? How is it impacting people? How do we understand what is happening? What are the facts and evidence we need to know what we are dealing with at the present? What is the picture of reality and how does it compare with its previous state and those of similar environments? Why has this problem gone unnoticed or unrepaired? What solutions have been used, if any? What is needed and what is a realistic measurement of resolution?

If you are creating a written dossier, you will organize your information with headings and sections. You may choose to have notations on the sides of the pages in a different colour to add information, define terminology, or

provide hard numbers. You can add in quotes and passages from documents and for longer investigative pieces, a reference section.

For example, if you are reporting on a shooting, your dossier may look something like this one:

Steel City Shooting on November 1, 2020: Arc 1: 25 people injured, 3 killed, gunman arrested. Filed by George Singh, Story #24.

Part One: Incidence of Violence

The shooting took place at Metal Avenue at 5:36 pm in front of Platinum Diner. Video surveillance indicates that the gunman, identified as John Smith, carried several weapons and fired at a crowd of pedestrians. Twenty-five people were injured. Three people were killed. The names of the victims are included at the end of the report. Smith was arrested as he tried to run back to his car, a silver 2015 pick-up truck. The shooting took place for 38 minutes. The police investigation will cost between $450000-$750000 to complete. Witness accounts to follow below.

We can include more details, but this is the overview of the actual event. A news consumer should immediately be able to orient themselves on the main theme of your report: that a serious tragedy has occurred, the precise location. We know the extent of the damage, as well as how much resources it will take to fix the problem: news consumers will see the damage to human life, to surrounding businesses, as well as see how much resources will have to be diverted from other areas of civic life to deal with the problem.

Part Two: Eyewitness accounts

Jill Jacoby, 25, stood approximately two feet away from the gunman: Jacoby heard the gunman shouting that he lost his job and now everyone must suffer. She hid behind a dumpster as he fired. He shot several of her friends and while she used her mobile to call police, she was put on hold by the dispatcher (transcript of recording in Appendix).

We can include more than one eyewitness account. We can also include survivor accounts, police and any other relevant player in the event. Whoever has a direct involvement should be included. If their accounts can

be summarized as above, you can do so, but if you prefer to use direct quotes, you can include these as well.

Part Three: Questions Regarding Police Response

The first call to 911 occurred approximately three minutes before the shooting as one eyewitness, Angelo Suarez, noticed Smith walking with several weapons toward the crowd and called the police (transcript of recoding in Appendix). Several other witnesses, victims and store owners called 911, but police did not arrive until almost forty minutes later. The central police station is three minutes away (see map below). The Suarez transcript indicates that the dispatcher did not believe the account.

Questions regarding the delay have been sent to the Police Chief who has yet to answer.

There are two central issues in this story: the violent act of a killer and the delayed police response. Both of these problems are central to the dossier. We have investigated some possible reasons for a delay, such as distance and the answer is not satisfactory. We have evidence of a transcript that indicates another reason for the delay, but once other calls came in, the delay still cannot be explained. This indicates that more than a single Arc is needed to look into the problems.

Part Four: Names of the victims

We can categorize the injured from the murdered, include relevant details that directly pertain to the incident and if we wish, list how much money it will cost to heal each person. We can see the loss of life and the loss of resources. One act of violence may cost millions of dollars, and it cannot be fixed or reversed. If there have been funding cuts to hospitals, we now know that the diverted funds are going to the gravely injured and even now psychologically traumatized. In a further Arc, we can discuss how many people associated with this one act of terrorism have lost their jobs, need psychological counselling, took their own lives or got divorced as a result of a single trauma.

Part Five: Comparable Shootings in Steel City

There has now been a total of four mass shootings in Steel City. Below is a chart of the dates, times, locations, number of injured or killed, police

response time, profile of the killer and amount of resources it took to handle the crisis.

Now we can compare and contrast information: we may find that shootings are happening more frequently, but the response times for each are getting longer. We can outline where the killers got their weapons, how long they were sentenced, if they survived and other important factors as well. We can look at different dispatcher transcripts and how police handled each one. We can see if one Police Chief handled the crisis better than another. We can see if there is a geographic area more likely to be a target than others. We may notice the costs to dealing with these events are increasing, yet the funding is not helping solve the problem, suggesting the allocation is faulty. Or perhaps, funding cuts are occurring that may explain the problem.

Part Six: Smith's Background

Smith has had a history of arrests and psychological problems. Below is a list of his previous arrests and convictions. He was under the care of a psychiatrist until last year, when he severed all contact with the medical community. He was an employee at Aluminosity as a sales consultant until October 31, 2020, when he was fired for throwing his supervisor against the wall and threatening his life.

This information tells us what red flags were visible to various people. Smith may have become increasingly violent, and his spiral into murder is outlined with facts, not narrative.

Part Seven: Experimental Design

Three previous mass shootings were compared to the current one. Elements of the events, dispatcher and police responses and suspect background were examined. Locations of each shooting was measured from the location of the central station, as well any satellite stations if they were closer to the targeted area.

We can discuss the parameters of our experimental design. Sometimes they will be limited in cases such as this one and other times, we will have more control and need further detailed explanation. If you used a statistical analysis, depending on the audience, you may wish to include in your public dossier, but if not, you may wish to add them to a footnote for your records

if your audience is not likely to care if you used a Mann-Whitney U or a Kruskal-Wallace H.

Part Eight: Unanswered Questions

Here we can simply list information that is missing. For instance, we do not know why the police took so long to arrive and why Smith was not under some sort of institutionalized supervision. Did he have a parole officer? Was he let out of prison early and without psychiatric care? How did a violent man obtain his weapons? Did he obtain them legally? Steal them? Make them? We are letting news consumer know that at this point in time, we have more questions than answers.

We do not require an overly long dossier: but we are thorough. We do not need to fill up a report with irrelevant frills to pad things out.

If we are doing an audio or visual report, the same guidelines apply, but in this case, you would be using interview clips of key players and if it is a visual report, relevant footage. If you choose to do a voice over, do not merely talk over it: explain to the audience what they are seeing and its connection to your piece. The verbal and the visual should align to reinforce the facts you are giving; otherwise, audiences become focused on one or the other and lose valuable information in the process.

The mechanics of the dossier

You can begin with an abstract which outlines the main focus of your dossier. If you are creating a series of dossiers related to the same issue or event, each one is a different *arc*: these are to be labelled as ongoing, with the number indicating where it falls in the chronology. For example, if you are in charge of investigating accusations of money laundering in a technology company, your labelling can look something such as this:

Fleecetech Corporation's Money Laundering Investigation: Arc 25: Jury finds CEO Willis Nelson guilty of all charges. Filed by Jane Doe, Story #246.

News consumers will immediately know who wrote the piece and how many the correspondent created for the outlet and they can refer to past reports: if they are doing their own research, they do not have to hunt for

other references: you have clearly shown how many stories have been filed and they know that there have been 24 other stories related to this topic.

Within each Arc, there can be other sectional designations, such as below:

Part One: Jury Verdict

Part Two: Nelson Appeals

Part Three: Fleecetech Investors File Civil Lawsuit

Part Four: Fleecetech Employees Lose Jobs and Pensions

Part Five: Unemployment Rate Increases by 2.2% Since Fleecetech's Bankruptcy

Part Six: Unanswered Questions

Appendix

References

You may include interviews separately or weave them into your report. Each part should concentrate on a different key element of your story.

Method Research and dossiers

These will be similar to the conventional dossier in set-up: you have Arcs and sections that flesh out your findings; however, as this is a form of an undercover investigation, you will explain the purpose of doing so; what you did, a description of the environment on your first and last day, the experiments you conducted and your results. These dossiers will closely mimic an academic study and be less about news and current affairs and more about the mundane reality of a dysfunction, toxic, dangerous, or corrupt environment.

If there is use of NDAs, try to find an alternative avenue of entry and observation, where you will not need to sign one. You may need to sign one, but then find other ways of verifying information as you now have a clear roadmap. A dossier may look something like this one:

Newshound Newspaper Investigation: Arc 2: Reporters cannot file unflattering stories about Steel City. Filed by Veronica Hammond, Story #133

Experiment One: Filing a story on bribery of Counselman Gig Beck rejected.

I filed two stories with my editor on January 15, 2020: one on a videotaped argument of two Toronto city counselors Marg Mayberry and Fyodor Kerlinger and a second story about videotaped recording of developer Maurice Stacks giving an envelope of money to Counselman Gig Beck at the Blue Hen, captured by a patron using his mobile. While the first story was published without alteration, the second was rejected on the grounds there was "not enough evidence" and I was told by the editor not to "go near" Beck as he is a "good guy."

We can go intro further details: two comparable stories using the same evidence and the same number of facts were presented to the editor: one is accepted, while the other is rejected.

Experiment Two: Pitching a story on Mayor Hortense Grey's record of questionable hiring rejected.

During a newsroom meeting, I suggested two stories: one on the allegations of awarding contracts to Mississauga Mayor Melinda Zeke's son Duane to build a new sport's arena and one on Steel City Mayor Hortense Grey hiring several of his mistresses in prominent positions in his office. The first story was accepted on the grounds that the mayor of that city "called Steel City corrupt", but rejected the second on the grounds it was "tawdry" and the mayor is a "great guy."

We can graph the number of hits and misses to draw conclusions and we can discuss what the findings indicate. We can look into how much the city advertises in the outlet and whether the editor has a connections worth investigating. We can look at the news stories from previous editors to see if this was always an issue, or if it began with one particular editor, publisher, or owner. Finally, we can look at other media outlets to see their ratio of negative stories on their city officials as well.

Completing a dossier

Once you have completed your dossier, you should have notes about any issues or problems you had. If you have completed all Arcs in a series, a post-mortem would help in seeing what needs in improvement and what worked well. When your report is made public, worry less about the number of views or hits, but look at the overall reactions: did audiences understand the significance of the report? Did they become huffy or defensive that their narratives were challenged? A negative response is not your cue to turn panderer: if what you presented is reality and the truth, do not change course. In a world of billions of people, agreement is impossible.

Your dossier is a replacement to the traditional news story: you are to inform, but without the narrative, colour, or skewed rigs. Instead, the highlight is on information, empirical methods and admission of any information that still needs to be found. Include tables and diagrams for emphasis, but do not use it as a replacement for actual reportage. If there are limits and caveats to data, be sure to list them. Go over information once again to ensure names have been spelled properly and all relevant information is included. Once you have filed your report, you are free to update information, but be certain to highlight what has been changed, added, or in rare cases, removed, when and why.

The dossier is your currency as a journalist: it defines your ability and professional worth. If you receive academic feedback, take close attention to it. If news consumers have additional questions, log them and if you do a follow-up, mention who proffered the question you had not considered before. If you are given additional information, verify it and included it in the next dossier. Give credit where credit is due, whether it be a scholar, a news consumer, or a new source. Involving the public does not diminish your role as a journalist, it builds stronger ties and keeps the lines of communication open.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Experimental by Design

Traditional journalism shied away from the same empirical and experimental methods of academia to its own detriment. Its product was not useful to those in academia. We are not just informing those without expertise, but those with it. Our reports should be versatile and be usable for researchers for a variety of reasons, but for that to happen, we need empirical standards and measures. We are not passive observers, but active ones. We question everything around us and take nothing for granted. We measure as we find context, look beyond the façade and put our information to the test.

How do we use the Scientific Method in journalism to improve and revolutionize our methods? What are the differences between Method Research in field work versus conventional journalism? Let us look at the various tools at our disposal to be better gatherers of information to inform a public.

Research

The backbone of journalism is research. It is more than merely relaying what a politician said from a written script at a press conference, what a PR firm has crafted in a press release, or what a weeping grifter with media training is spinning for profit and gain: it is the discovery of primary information that has been vetted and found to be truthful, accurate, reliable, valid and useful. That a company decrees that it is National Pizza Cheese Appreciation Month is not a fact: it is a made-up piece of advertising paid for by pizza cheese manufacturers.

How you conduct your research will depend on your topic, time limit, resources and obstacles you are facing. You may need to file FOIA requests, use FARA or EDGAR to see pertinent information and look for established data that you could vet. You may need to conduct interviews, use databases or archives. You can review previous academic literature. You may even go

to witness events and environments yourself. These will be important processes to begin your investigations.

But it will not be the *only* methods of doing so: you will have to compare and contrast information as well as test it. Often, government statistics do not reflect reality and the measures used are faulty and rigged to see some indicators, while unable to measure equal or more important ones. For example, employments numbers are rarely accurate: many who are counted as employed are precariously so. Those working under the table are not counted. Those not actively seeking work are also ignored. How job openings are counted can also be problematic: some openings are for *show purposes:* these positions may have already been filled internally, but are still advertised publicly. Other times, candidates may go through numerous interviews, but the position goes to someone with a nepotistic connection.

Finding information is not a simple or straightforward task: it requires crafting well-formed questions and mandate before you begin. What is the key question you need answered? What is the Gold Standard that serves as the benchmark? For instance, if there is an increase in the number of car accidents, is it statistically significant from previous years or other areas? What is the measure for a change in circumstances and why is this shift important to know?

From there, we look for facts. Not narratives, not sophistry, not speculation, not gossip, not propaganda and not virtue-signalling or shaming. If it cannot be falsified, it is not fact. Often, people who do not bother with facts or research will offer their opinions, before trying to absolve themselves with the untested assertions that "no opinion is wrong." Perhaps, but then, if no opinion is wrong, it is not falsifiable and ergo, we do not need to include it in our reports. How many more or fewer people are being cured from a particular cancer is a fact. Why are some cancers more curable than others? Why do some gain more awareness, while other, deadlier versions, are all but ignored by the public?

We need to establish our own form of control groups to see what has happened to a certain group, individual, environment, element, or policy. Have things gotten, better, worse, or stayed the same? There are times when people *feel* better or received an improvement, but it is only illusionary: many medical fraudsters perform pseudo-treatments, giving stimulants to people who feel and increase in energy, but as their illness has been left untreated, they are getting physically worse.

In the 1920s in the US, for instance, an elixir called "Radiathor" was marketed as a cure-all. It was quackery with actual radium in the drink. Many people drank it to cure their ills, only to die horrific deaths from radiation poisoning. Most people who drank it sang its praises; however, the consequences of consuming it were certain death: many of the dead had to be buried in lead coffins and even decades later, their bodies had high levels of radiation.

Here is a case where belief was completely misaligned with reality and there are many ways to deceive perceptions. How often has there been social media bullying by mob, only to find the mob was manufactured through bots and paid operatives to contaminate the information stream to make it seems as if opposition was greater than it was? The mobs are a modern version of Radiathor, meaning public sentiment itself is rarely an important consideration: what is the condition of a person, element, event, or environment? Is it better, the same, or worse? Is this condition a good sign or a bad sign? How? Why?

There are times when an improvement is not a good sign: an increase in houses for sale may indicate that an area is losing jobs, and people are trying to flee. An increase in jobs may not be such a good thing if they are all part-time and with poor wages and bad working conditions. Sometimes what seems to be bad news is actually a positive development: there may be an increase in injuries of soldiers during combat or civilians during a mass shooting; however, technology or advances in medicine or armor has resulted in fewer *deaths:* the death rate may have decreased, and those injured now would have died in the past. Without context, we do not know if we are making steps forward or backwards.

Research will involve looking at the current environment and also looking at comparable environments to understand what the changes mean. You should go into an investigation with a testable hypothesis: this will not be a skewed, rigged, or ideologically-based decree. It will be a neutral question you will need to answer:

Unemployment rates have increased in this area since a factory closed here last month.

Domestic violence has increased when families were instructed to stay home and not go out.

The crime rate has gone down in this district because police have refused to file reports of young women who claim they have been sexually assaulted.

In each case we have cause and effect: we may find one or both to be wrong or right. There may be an increase, but the reasons are more complex or stem from another source. Through our work, we can discover the reasons. Perhaps the crime rate has gone down because the population of the area has decreased. If we set up the parameters, we know what we are looking for and where to look.

Information processing

As we are gathering information, we need to process what we have to make connections. We can use statistical analyses to see if the results come from a chance outcome or an actual phenomenon. We can compare success and failures to see which condition produces each result: there will not be a 100% outcome, but the weight of patterns of each condition gives us valuable clues. We look not to make a sampling error: that is, we do not cherry-pick respondents to rig an outcome.

We can use correlational studies to measure more than one variable to see the interaction of them both. If one variable correlates with another, we need to determine whether:

A causes B
B causes A
C causes both A and B
When C and D happen together, C causes A and D causes B.

We can also use Ex Post Facto studies to investigate factors that we cannot control in subjects, such as sex, race, age or socioeconomic status. Many method research studies involve an ex post facto design.

We need to observe all possible conditions to draw a conclusion, lest we commit the confirmation bias. When we are observing outcomes, we must look at each variable interaction:

		B	
		Positive	Negative
A	Positive		
	Negative		

We are processing information and looking for patterns and correlations in our data. We may be looking for causation and inter-related factors and there may be a variety of ways to determine causation:

Method of Agreement: What is the common element among a group of events?

Method of Difference What is the difference among a group of events?

Joint Method of Agreement and Difference: What are the similarities and differences? This will be your primary question in your work.

Concomitant Variation: When changes in one variable occur with changes in another.

Because we are not in a strictly controlled situation, we need to be careful observers of the variables we are watching. We still look at factors that can be varied and the ones that are held constant: for example, if the C-suite in a company are mismanaging the day-to-day business, they are the constant factor and their decisions are the varied ones. We are translating experimental design in a controlled environment to an organic one and then analyzing the results.

When we analyze our results, we strive for convergent validity: the interpretation of the data should be clear to everyone who is analyzing the information; if there is divergent validity (i.e., someone in the group does have the same interpretation of the results), then we need to see the differences in interpretation and reinvestigate. There may be hidden factors one news producer sees that the others have missed or there has been an issue with construct validity; i.e., the variables we manipulated were not the ones we should have. Make certain that you have defined or operationalized your terms in a meaningful way.

Your results should have validity, reliability and utility: validity is the extent that you measured what you claimed you measured. Reliability is getting stable and consistent results. Utility is the usefulness of the information you have discovered. You are looking for patterns and data: what has happened? Where? Are there multiple locations? Who are the players? How is this situation different than others? Where is the breakdown? Why did it happen and how?

We have used the scientific method: we have identified the problem, formed a hypothesis, designed our experiment, devised our strategies, conducted our research to test our theory, analyzed our findings and then written or produced a dossier. We should be able to answer our initial questions and clearly showed how we came to those conclusions.

Interviewing

When we are interviewing sources, experts and subjects, we need to take careful inventory of what information we need from each. You may need to conduct more than one interview with any kind of interviewee. It is a process of refinement.

Some sources can provide context and construct the reality from their past or current experiences with the environment. It is important to ask about groupthink, structure of leadership and control, rituals and Shibboleths, particularly if you plan to enter the environment with method research. How does the native behave? There are often coveted environments to outsiders, but insiders despise their jobs and resent their supervisors. You cannot assume an environment with prestige, power and glamour is functional. These sources can draw a map for you so that you know where to look and how to find what you need.

Expert sources can give insight into how the environment functions and its relation to other environments. They will know the history of it, breakout players and why this environment is significant. They cannot tell you about the mundane reality of it, however as they are not in-group members. These sources are vital to fleshing out the dynamics and while source interviewees can give you the finer details, the experts can tell you about the big picture. One is your microscope, while the other is your telescope.

Once you have a good sense of both the up close and far away, you can interview your subjects or newsmakers. These are not the interviewees you speak with first, but about two-thirds into your research. Peripheral sources should come before the main interviewee whether they are likely to agree with the main interviewee, or if they are a critic.

It helps to read previous writings and interviews, but your questions should be more probing and original. Do not ask throwaway questions: keep them short, and you should be talking about 10% of the time. Your interview subject should do the majority of the talking. Do not be afraid to leave gaps:

you do not have to fill in the silence. There should be a natural flow to your questions, using a spread of activation approach. If you suspect a source will lie to you, create questions that will test their truthfulness and ask questions in a novel way: asking the year someone was born is less likely to be answered as quickly as asking how old they are: a deceiver will expect the latter question than the former. Build questions that can test for honesty: if a person claims never to have gone to particular place, but you have evidence that have been there frequently, first ask if they have been there before asking them to respond to what you have discovered.

Compare the answers you have and then you will know what information you still need and what needs clarification. Classify the responses if it helps you focus: from most important to least, or by chronological order. Be certain you ask questions that can trigger precise answers and if a source is unable to properly give an answer, do not push them to guess: it is not a matter of how many questions the answer, but how many useful facts you glean.

Presentation

Memories are short, fleeting, malleable, faulty, prone to sensory overload and it is important to be aware of it. In an April 1971 study at the University of California at Berkeley, professor Andrew Stern had interviewed people who had watched television news and immediately asked people what stories they recalled: fifty-one percent could not recall a single story and this was long before the explosion of social media and cable news: there was less to have to recall, and news items were longer, yet the public could barely recall a single news item, let alone its contents.

When you are creating a dossier, you will need to be aware of this fragile connection to an audience: you do not sensationalize information, make it simplistic, or use any other ruse to get attention. You will need to find ways to gain audience attention and retain their memory.

If you are writing a dossier in print or online, colour-coding information is vital. Do not overwhelm an audience with too much information: present the most salient and vital facts and paint a portrait of reality with them. Where is the danger? What has happened? What needs to be done? Who is involved will be the standard answers you need to give. You can begin a dossier with an abstract of your findings and then present your information in a longer format, with a conclusion at the end. For audio or visual dossiers,

the less cluttered, the easier it will be to remember key details. Make information flow by having an opening that previews, a few key facts that explain the situation and a conclusion that summarizes. There should always be a *purpose* to the report: here is a problem and here are the facts that can tell us what needs to be done.

Your reports do not need frills, such as gratuitous graphics, trivia, or music. You do not ham it up with attention-seeking stunts. You do not hold props or vogue for the camera. Your inner thespian can find a place in amateur theatre: your journalist self needs to keep the public informed.

But what will work best for you will require trial and error: experiment with changes and compare and contrast retention and reaction. If you are affiliated with an academic institution, send your results with any observations in your post-mortem. More than ratings or circulation, your primary focus should be on comprehension and retention of information. If people find information forgettable, confusing, patronizing, insulting, or unhelpful, they will not be coming back.

Experimental design in method research

Method research is a different form of journalism in that the entire investigation is one or more experiments where the real-world environment is a laboratory and you are both the experimenter and the test subject. You are not gratuitously conducting experiments for the sake of conducting them: you are trying to pinpoint a problem, a faulty group mindset, or the cause for a breakdown.

You may have a cohort working with you. You will both conduct the same series of experiments using different experimental conditions: one may be the control group and you are the test group. Whether you are working alone, with a partner or even a group, coordination is essential: there must be as much consistency as possible, but the sort that accurately reflects the mundane environment of the place that you are investigating.

For instance, if you are investigating whether police are abusing their powers based on economic indicators, one person must present themselves as seemingly poor and the other seemingly well-to-do, but both must use the same circumstances: the same peculiar but legal acts in front of various police officers at the same distance. To use different tactics brings in an extraneous variable into the mix. If you are testing to see the racist responses

to the presence of various ethnic groups, the conditions must be the same and they must be natural: one reporter cannot do unnatural and contrived things to get attention: this will cause a serious problem: people may be reacting, but only because their subconscious knows you are feigning your behaviour and they are reacting to your insincerity.

You are not brining unnatural factors into the environment: you are testing the diversity of *natural* responses. It is the reason that you observe the environment first before you begin: you must see how people think and behave and then blend into the background, not stand out.

What to avoid

We must take care to avoid the contamination of personal bias, poor experimental design and extraneous variables in our work. We need to set realistic benchmarks for how much information we need, what facts we are looking for, what is considered vetted and verified and what determines if our hypothesis is right or wrong.

We cannot take any claims for granted, even if the person seems sympathetic, teary-eyed or helpless. We do not discount because someone seems off-putting or in person health: healthy people can fake illness and victimhood, while healthy-looking people may have a terminal illness and have been physically harmed. People lie to pretend they have been traumatized, and people lie pretending nothing is wrong.

We question statistics, narratives and arguments. We do not align with any ideological or political view in our reports. We are not conduits for political parties, corporations, special interests, or even the general public. We present facts and facts can point to multiple culprits on the opposite side of a line in the sand.

Our dossiers inform the public and institutions of what is happening in the world. You may believe that adults need nannies, or children can run around feral and you are free to believe it; however, when you are a journalist, you are a researcher and experimenter and you will discover that the world is filled with permutations, exceptions and shifting realities: there is no one rule that explains everything. What may have been true yesterday may no longer be true today. Your job is not to lecture, frighten, manipulate, virtue-signal, shame, bully, malign, advocate, rig, patronize or cheerlead: present

facts and ideas cogently and then let other decide how to use the information.

You will do your best to vet and verify information and present it in context: you will expand horizons, not confine or restrict them. You are showing what is hidden and what is reality. You will explain your hypothesis, how you gathered your facts and what the results were. What you found and what you didn't find is equally important. Do not pretend to know everything: just ensure that you are certain of the information you are presenting. With every dossier, you are changing the lives of many people: the humbler you approach it, the more positive the change will be.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PROFESSIONAL EVOLUTION

The empirical model of journalism is its own ecosystem: it is meant to allow the academic to shape the practical and the practical to shape the academic. We refine as we modify, removing elements that no longer work as intellectual evolution alters the landscape, add when we discover new avenues that brings us an improved method and refine as we see what works regardless of the circumstances. Everything produced in the process of creating a report, from interviews, errors, audience responses, to even editing, is fodder we bring back to scholars for them to analyze, refine and give feedback as they find new information from the old.

That means the information we gather and disseminate has a life the spans beyond informing the public and being a public, then historical record: it also takes another form when we use it as meta-data for those studying the profession to see what else can be done with it. It is meant to be used in different ways and its utility goes beyond informing the public: it is the foundation for future news producers build and expand their own information-gathering, verification and disseminating methods.

It is a science of people-watching. It is applied psychology, but is also an *art form*. You are curating the world to the world, as you explain the significance of events. You are creating a pointillism portrait with facts as every dot on the canvas. The layers build something that is both versatile and useful and each dossier is a palimpsest, reflecting what lies beneath the zeitgeist and ortgeist. Human nature is to react to things at face value in the now. A reporter's nature is to reflect as the past, present and future are all weighed and considered carefully from the inside and out.

Bringing everything together

Your primary concern is gathering facts—not just the ones presented on a stage—but the ones behind the scenes. Which publicist and political operatives are moving pawns on a board? Who is funding them? Why? Where are the lobbyists? Those are the *primary* questions before you begin your fact-finding journey. When you have a clear idea of the strategies of those who wish to present narratives, then you look for information as you pursue the most salient and relevant leads.

Once you know which kinds of information you will need, you will formulate your strategies for obtaining them. What are the sorts of roadblocks and obstacles is most likely? How will you overcome them? Who will you interview? What interview strategy will you use? Sometimes you will have days to formulate your blueprints, but other times, you will have to improvise as you go as events are unfolding rapidly and unexpectedly.

When you have done your preliminary research, you need to focus on your empirical methods: how will you deal with extraneous factors? How important is a protest march or a press conference to the scheme of an issue or event? Is there a way to determine if a march has been organized by a silent third party and which crisis management team set-up the press conference as a protective layer to prevent the darker truth from emerging?

Who or what is your control group? How will you compare and contrast elements? What experiments can you employ in the real world? Will you use method research at any point? How will you observe players and elements? What novel ways will you find hidden information?

The experimental part of your work requires you to execute your strategies as you gather information. What legends and rumours will you have to dispel and how will you do it? What is the nucleus of the issue? What is the centre of gravity and how will you find it? You are not a mere stenographer: you are *testing* various theories as you adjust, modify, refine or drop them. What is changing? What remains the same? The less you are adhering to narrative and the more you search for facts, outside forces will not distract you.

When you have information to explain an event, issue, person, group or problem, you begin to write or record your report or dossier: this is the documentation of what you have discovered. It is not a narrative, but an

explanation of what has transpired. You do no take sides, even if there is culpability or maleficence, as the facts presented will give news consumers the idea of what has transpired. There is no nudging or rigging: if someone has embezzled funds, there is no need to shade the person as a villain: the facts will demonstrate what has happened.

Often times, it will be tempting to take pity on some people or be disrespectful to others. Do not be pulled into games as the point may be to beguile and manipulate your emotions. If people have been dishonest, show the misalignments. You do not stoop to name-calling, as it has the opposite effect. At no time do you champion causes: by showing the facts, you have done your job.

After all of this work is completed and disseminated, that job is not over. It is essential to write a post-mortem on all significant dossiers or cluster of them. Any report that was exceptionally executed, novel in its obstacles and/or approach, or ones where you experienced problems and are unhappy with the outcome should be recorded. At what points did you triumph or fail? Why? Was as source deceitful or elusive? Did you improvise a clever solution? Did you discover a new way to work through a stubborn problem? Whatever makes the dossier singular, catalogue it for your files. This post-mortem dossier is an *internal* report for you, your outlet, but also for any academic or research institution that is affiliated with you.

You are creating *case studies* to be used by researches when they seek to study the profession, but also for students learning the trade. You are creating a meta-manual in the process and new guidebooks for the future. It also allows you and others to see trends, common problems and see new techniques and methods.

Each cycle works toward creating academic research to improve the professional product. It also makes research easier for you if you should choose to write books of the topics you covered in the past. You are creating a *library* from both the contents of the dossiers, but also for those who study the process of journalism. Nothing is wasted or overlooked.

Looking at the whole

By keeping records and post-mortems of dossiers, you are looking at the whole as you gain expertise. If you employ method research, that expertise becomes unique: you know the subject from the perspective of an outsider,

but also an insider. It in these cases, your post-mortems become invaluable to those doing academic research as well as those who do the same as you. It is also beneficial to keep a diary of your *feelings* and perceptions: what were the pressures you experienced? What did you notice? Did you feel gaslighted, bullied, manipulated by those you were studying? Were there exceptions? Who? How so? While these are more personal in tone, these will be valuable to you to stay connected with your work. You may choose not to release a personal diary, but it will allow you to look at the whole of the story: your perceptions will be very similar to those who live that life. You will understand the chain of events, as see how people become swept up in everything from narrative romanticism to mass panic. You will know how to see your own flaws and humanity; it is important to draw from it when you are writing your dossiers.

If you use more traditional techniques, you will still need to look at the whole: what is the big picture? Who are the main players and how did they get to such influence? How is the region changing? What are the rigs? What are the consequences? Your dossiers should be meticulous as possible as you explain the facts and ideas that influence people, whether they are aware or not.

Do not become short-sighted when writing or recording your dossiers: you may require to add supplemental data or footnotes should the issue become complex. A reference section is also essential. List everyone you have interviewed in a separate section. For anonymous sources, list them according to their appearance in your work (for example, Anonymous #1). The more information you provide, the easier it is for people to be able to orient themselves. Photographs and videos will also have their place and do not forget to use them whenever you can.

It is important to list questions you have outstanding: it equally illustrates the bigger picture, as there are places still left unexplored. You are signalling to the news consumer what is known, but also what is not known at the moment. This encourages people to offer information to you; so you can update your work, if possible.

When you update your dossiers, add in markers of *new* information and make a footnote of the date it was obtained, while preserving the essence of the first. You are not just reflecting the reality of what your are covering, but the reality of your work as well. Transparency is key to building trust

and rapport with an audience and even marked updates provide values information and clues from which you can build into new dossiers.

Taking the next steps

By now, you have written at least one major dossier. Go over it and make notations of what you do well and what needs improvement. You may wish to stay the course with your original work for subsequent courses; or you may wish to venture into another issue. Whatever is your decision, learn from your first dossier: it reflects you as much as it reflects the issue you work on in this course.

If you were timid or modest in your first dossier, make a bolder leap in your second. If you have not tried method research, make a point of doing it for the next outing. Write a post-mortem of your assignment, making careful notations of what you did right and wrong. Your instructor will have done the same, but getting feedback from others should help you see what you need to do to be a better news producer.

Even when you are relaying facts in a dossier, you are still the *voice* of your work. It is still your ideas: you chose which facts to use and how to present them in what order. You are ultimately responsible for your work: make a note of what you have mastered and what still needs work. Do not be afraid of criticism, but learn from your mistakes. Your next dossier should be a significant departure from your inaugural attempt.

A final word

Journalism is supposed to create the historical texts of tomorrow, but it is also supposed to serve as a signal for the world of today: there will be many troubling and even distressing events that comes to your attention. Not every ending will be a happy one, but as chronicler of those who have fallen, you are keeping memories alive to prevent the past from being forgotten. You are also reminding people of the future not to get too complacent or smug, nor should they try to distance themselves from people who came before them: you are creating reports for people to understand one another, regardless of the time or place they come. You are serving to connect the world with your work, regardless of how big or small the event happens to be.

You are planting seeds with each dossier: you are leaving a trace with every one. Your work will be used by others and frequently: if you want ways to make your work more useful, you may wish to experiment by adding illustrations, models, ephemera, transcripts and create a file. It may take the form of a booklet, folder, or even a perfect-bound book. These dossiers should push boundaries in presentation and style: but in such a way as you do not shade or rig data to push a narrative, but in a way that the facts harmonize together, explaining the complex and even the truly terrifying to people who may not know an issue existed until you informed them.

You are a cartographer of the present and will be delving into hidden and dark spaces, always coming back up for air and perspective. Do not forget to reflect as you work. For many people, you will be their window to the world and their guide to rationality. It is important to consider how you will approach every issue and event with care, but do not forget to find ways to be clever, ingenious, creative and innovative. You are a pioneer bravely entering a new way of journalism: it will be a memorable wild ride. Take care of yourself as much as your work as you guide others with your tenacity, spirit and courage.

APPENDIX A

A LEXICON OF TERMINOLOGY

Anchoring question: It is our primary question of our investigation. The question is the reason we are investigating an event, person, or issue in the first place.

Arc: The chronological categorizing of dossiers according to the specific investigating.

Atom of reality: This is the most crucial piece of information we uncover as we investigate an event or issue that becomes the centerpiece of our report.

Centre of gravity: Where the most important actions that explain an event or issue happen. Whatever transpires here has ramifications on other people, groups, institutions, nations and even the world.

Critical scepticism: Approaching an investigation by questioning and verifying every assumption, narrative and fact uncovered.

Curator source: A person who knows the inner workings of an environment and can explain how the system within it functions.

Default delusion: The mistaken belief that if one side of an issue is incorrect, the opposite belief must automatically be the correct answer.

Dependent variable: Is the element that the journalist is studying and measuring in an investigation.

Dossier: The physical report a journalist completes after an investigation. A dossier can be in print, online, audio, video or mixed media form.

Epistolary structure: Using ephemera, transcripts and memos without narrative or commentary in a dossier.

Factual extraction: Finding verifiable information from narrative, deceptions or evasive sources.

Hybridmental interviewing: Using different question types, methods and strategies during the process of questioning sources, experts and subjects.

Independent variable: Is the element either controlled by the journalist or can be controlled by someone the journalist is observing or investigating.

Information verification: The process of vetting information during an investigation to test its veracity, accuracy, reliability and validity.

Interpretation: How we explain reality and our perceptions of it.

Journalistic empiricism: The approach to journalism using experimentation and the scientific method.

Journalistic hypothesis: The working theory a reporter has before the start of an investigation that is to be tested to see if it is true or false.

Kanban board: It is a Japanese-based scheduling method for lean manufacturing by using cards to denote what has been completed and what still needs to be done.

Line of investigation: Areas and issues a journalist investigates during the research aspect of the creation of a report. There will be several lines of investigation in any given story.

Matriarchal structure: Following all key players as subjects of your main dossier as if they are all key players.

Method Research: The process of a journalist investigating a story by becoming part of the environment, observing subjects and partaking in the mundane reality as he or she conducts experiment.

Narrative shepherding: The attempt to constrict scepticism by rigging an account with sophistry, justifications, artificial roles, and shaming rigs.

Nucleus dossier: The most important dossier in the series of arcs.

Nucleus source: The most important source in your report.

Perception: How our physical senses see reality.

Post-mortem dossier: An internal document outlining your thoughts and observations of filing your investigative reports.

Radical centrism: True neutrality on the part of the journalist and the practice of not taking sides in disputes and conflicts of an event, environment, or issue.

Reality: The physical world that exists regardless of how we perceive and interpret it.

Social mathematics: The graphing of human emotions and instinctual drives to see their interactions, consequences and outcomes.

Truth: The universal laws that explain and shape reality independent of our perceptions, beliefs and interpretations.

Vennspheres: The schematic representation of the inter-connectivity of sources and subjects of a story and how their behaviours and action relate to one another.

APPENDIX B

A MATHEMATICAL PRIMER TO JOURNALISM

These are some methods of finding more precise information. Most are well-known methods, but the last is unique to this textbook. These are basic methods and are just a starting point.

Cartesian graphing: A basic coordinate system which labels each unique point in a plane by a fixed numerical set coordinates (on a two-dimensional graph, it is x, y; on a three-dimensional, it is x, y and z), on a perpendicular plane with fixed and equal units of measurement. Each is a coordinate axis that intersects at the coordinates (0,0).

At the most basic level, we can graph numerical values to see changes, patterns and shifts of gain or erosion. For example, if we are mapping how much tax money a government requires to operate on a yearly basis for the last decade, our graph can show annual changes. We can further graph other cities for a direct comparison.

Likert scale: This scale helps define intensity of elements and you may group responses of impressions any way required. An example of such as scale is as follows:

Expert understanding of topic

0	1	2	3	4	5
Nil	Poor	Mediocre	Average	Good	Exceptional

You may administer such a test to sources or witnesses during your investigations as well, selecting respondents who reach a minimum criterion as well.

Euclidian cluster analysis: Euclidean clustering groups elements which are close together. Create a threshold for closeness for these elements to be clustered together. An uppermost limit to the number of elements can be

assigned to any given cluster to see patterns and isolate elements that do not fit in any one group.

When you are working with a large number of facts but are not certain of patterns or a common thread, a Euclidian cluster analysis can show hidden interactions and patterns that were not previously obvious.

Spectrum of positive and negative impressions: This mapping method is a visualization of diametrical opposed groups or people who may have political clashes, are in civil litigation or fighting in war. We can study narratives that use the *same* facts see how the filters for each faction operate. One group may have mildly positive impressions, while another has extreme negative impressions. We can then look at why one side has more emotional reaction than the other. To take an example:

Jury selection methods

Defendant in lawsuit: Highly opposed; attorney believes it is skewed too much to white collar.
Plaintiff in lawsuit: Mildly supportive; attorney believes it is relatively fair, but worried about sex ratio.

Here we can see one side has stronger feelings about the same cluster of information than the other.

APPENDIX C

HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

The following a list of questions you will need to consider when beginning or story, or have hit an obstacle. This list is not an exhaustive one, but a starting point:

What public relations firm has been hired to advocate for the subject?

What advertising firm has bene hired?

What crisis management firm has been hired?

What lobbyists represent the subject?

Does the subject use proxies or political operatives?

Who has paid for the creation and dissemination of this piece of information?

Is this piece of information slanderous or inflammatory?

Who has the most to gain by disseminating this piece of information?

What is the evidence, if any, to back up the claims?

What key details are missing and why?

Is the source giving information, opinion, spin, or narrative?

Do the timelines given make sense?

Do the locations given make sense?

Does this source have media training?

Do researchers have credible credentials?

Does this source have the expertise or knowledge to give information?

Is the source using emotional manipulation of misdirection?

What information is an NDA hiding?

What does the subject have to gain by seeking publicity?

What financial interests does this source receive from seeking publicity?

What measurements have been used to determine an outcome? Are these reliable and valid measures?

What proof has been provided?

What forensic evidence has been provided?

Does the source employ propaganda?

Does the source rely on a pity or greed scam?

Does the source rely on fear-mongering?

Does the source try to provoke anger or hatred?

Are simplistic solutions proffered and who has financial gain if they are adopted?

Am I pressured to agree with a story in fear of social or authority shaming?

How rehearsed is this source giving a narrative?

Does the narrative rely on fairy tale structures and assumptions?

Does the narrative rely on racist or sexist stereotypes?

What are the unspoken conclusions from a given?

Does the source attempt to demonize or negate conflicting information?

Does the source explain away flaws in their narratives?

Does the narrative suffer from confirmation bias?

Does the narrative appeal to authority?

Does the narrative have a sink or swim assumption?

What are the sources biases?

Appendix D

Supplementary Exercises

Your instructor may choose other class assignments for the course: these will be the base instructions, but there may be additional modifications. Ideally, these can be conducted in a mobile classroom where students are exposed to real-world problems of those with whom they have nothing in common. Each lesson should place in a different venue with different experiments for students to conduct as applied psychologists. Every step is in sync with the laboratory. Students should receive unpredictable assignments when they least expect it, as they learn to be vigilant and on the lookout for real troubles and dangers, priming them to become confident news producers who can compare and contrast without committing the confirmation bias.

1. *Factual Extraction:* Listen to a pre-recorded real-life eyewitness account of a recent news event. Students may take notes, but are not permitted to have any electronic devices to verify the account. After they hear one account, they are presented with a second eyewitness account of the same event from someone who *disagrees* with the interpretation of the first account. After hearing both sides, they are presented with two divergent expert accounts of the same event: an activist and a government official. Finally, they have thirty minutes to devise their strategy of how they are going to frame the story and from their chosen angle, have to verify their information, as they receive secondary instructions of rigid constraints that would be imposed on them. Furthermore, students are placed in groups where the order in which they hear the information is different so that students can see how order of information receives impacts their perceptions of the event in a follow-up assignment.

2. *Learning to Spot Deception:* The designated assignment is for students as a group to act in a "scrum" as journalists do as part of their job and interview someone of the instructor's choosing in the

classroom, but the person is on speakerphone with the voice
disguised. This represents an anonymous source; however, there
may be more than one person who is now speaking, but students
will not be given confirming or refuting evidence. The students ask
a series of questions to an anonymous source under the assumption
the person is a "witness" to a historical event. The person may be
a custodian, or even the parents of one of the students. They are
allowed to ask whatever questions they choose and then discuss in
the class what they have learned. After the assignment is complete
are students informed of which, if any, deceptions that have been
employed against them, but they must find out what was truth and
what was a lie.

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