

Therapeutic Journalism

Therapeutic Journalism:

*Presenting Information
with Emotional Literacy*

By

Alexandra Kitty

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Presenting Information with Emotional Literacy

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To librarians. Thank you for your wonderful and helpful natures
and for being the guardians of a better world.

*I know what you're thinking;
You got a mind and it's stinking.
You know why?
You got a transparent cranium, a see-through head!*
—*See-Through Head, The Hives*

Do I dare disturb the universe?
—*T.S. Eliot*

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.
—*Aristotle*

It is not snowing to cover the mountain, but for each beast to show its tracks.
—*Old Serbian Proverb*

*If you scare people enough, they will demand removal of freedom. This is
the path to tyranny.*
—*Elon Musk*

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PREFACE

I can't stand impersonal medicine, just looking at the patient's findings, typing a report, not even asking him if he has the money to be treated, and prescribing therapy or doing a scan...What kind of therapy is that? You need to know something about him to cure him.

Dr. Branimir Nestorović

When I was a teenager, my family and I went on vacation every winter to Florida, and while these were thrilling escapades, there were two instances where I openly wept in our hotel room watching the news: and both times would alter my life in unexpected ways. One news report on *60 Minutes* showed the suffering of a young Serbian mother who had gone mad with grief when her only child vanished during the Yugoslav Civil War, and as no one would help her find her missing child amid the chaos, she threw rocks at UN convoys, giving her the nickname The Madwoman of Srebrenica. It was her neighbour who slaughtered the boy and she was photographed later cradling his found skull. The woman's pain was naked for the world to see, and yet the reporter missed the point entirely: how does humanity allow convoys to barrel through without anyone aboard stopping? How dare we call someone a madwoman?

The second story was no less traumatizing. It was a local report about a 12-year-old boy who witnessed the murder of his mother at the hands of his father. The couple were estranged and the woman left the abusive marriage only to be slaughtered in front of her three children. The 12-year-old was the eldest, and the reporter interviewed the boy on television right after the murder. The boy was weeping aloud, and yet the reporter thought nothing of pushing a microphone in front of a traumatized child. So moved was my Canadian family that we called to see if we could do anything – but as the children had grandparents, there was no need, and yet while the story needed to be told, this was not the way to do it.

There is no ethics without emotional literacy. Without emotions, the human mind can justify murder, destruction, abuse, censorship, oppression, rape, propaganda, and tyranny. It is shocking how quickly people can lose their way and their perspective if they suppress or outright abandon their emotions. Without emotions, we cannot grasp reality or truth, and yet

emotional literacy is not something we focus on teaching j-school students – or most other professions, save for a smattering such as Social Work and Psychology.

But both those stories stayed with me for decades and both were in different ways the seeds that blossomed into this book you are about to read. For all those people traumatized by news reports either as an audience or newsmaker, this book acknowledges your suffering and is an antidote. Yes, you have been harmed. Yes, you were abused. Yes, you were maligned. Yes, you were exploited. Yes, your emotional rights were violated. But may those scars heal and not define you, confine you, or be your final thought before you die. This book is made to remedy that insensitivity that has plagued the profession to create a therapeutic alternative that fosters understanding as it balances individuality as well as unity.

One final note: while this is an advanced book on empirical journalistic methods, it is hardly a terminal discussion. There are far more advanced and more complex techniques, and as therapeutic journalism is flexible, evolving, and pluralistic, the journey to this fascinating new world has just begun.

Alexandra Kitty

SECTION ONE:

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS THERAPY

CHAPTER ONE

PAIN

Hermann Göring: Why, of course, the people don't want war. Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece? Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia, nor in England, nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship.

Gustave Gilbert: There is one difference. In a democracy the people have some say in the matter through their elected representatives, and in the United States only Congress can declare wars.

Göring: Oh, that is all well and good, but, voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.

Gustave Gilbert, Nuremberg Diary

In many ways, 2020 broke the world's spirit and its collective heart with a single word: COVID- 19. The global press coverage was psychologically crushing with red death tickers and incessant reports from media outlets, social media feeds, and even commercials without anyone in communications wondering what kind of damaging impact they would have on children, those fighting depression, or those in domestic violence environments.

The emotional abusiveness of the press was relentless, skewed and disturbing. A January 22, 2022 column in the *Montreal Gazette* had a so-called journalist write about his vacation in Florida while many Canadians were now homeless or one paycheck away from financial disaster as a direct result of ineffectual government policies, but the uppity diatribe was an exercise in virtue-signalling and fear-mongering:

It's lunacy by Canadian standards, but an eye-opening experience. For starters, everyone's out and about, filling bars, restaurants, movies, gyms, and jam-packed sports arenas.

Stores and supermarkets don't require masks but some cashiers and customers wear them, though often under their nose or chin — Florida-style. It seems a way of announcing: "Look — I'm masked!" when they're not.

The article promoted psychological unwellness and terror of the mundane, advocating that the world should live in fear as an uncontacted tribe:

... Restaurants are fully open and peeking into some, they're mobbed. Waiters can choose whether to wear masks, and at least half don't.

In ever-friendly America, some customers even shake hands with their waiters before leaving, to say: "Thanks, I'll have some germs for dessert."

It's easy to spot Canadians at restaurants, as we're the ones properly masked and nervously sitting on the terrace, even in the rain.

The piece ended with advocating autocracy:

... It's a tale of two worlds. Like most Canadians, I still think collective safety trumps some individual rights.

While once upon a time there were journalists who risked their lives covering wars and battles, this reporter was afraid of basic freedoms while on vacation, even though in Florida there were no dead in the streets during his frolicking in freedom and hedonism as the newspaper received generous government funding as its own circulation was collapsing all while it insulted and alienated its own citizens. If any column shows precisely why traditional journalism failed the planet, it was this one. The insensitive piece was emotionally illiterate, ideologically oppressive, and devoid of any factual information or insight. The coverage was a war on bravery and happiness, and a life without either is a life of unnecessary pain.

The casualties in this war are severe. In a single year, the statistics of the casualties would be staggering: drug overdoses increased, as did suicides, domestic violence, and homicides. As the medical journal *Pediatrics* noted in March 2021 about youth from the ages of 11 to 21:

Rates of suicide ideation and attempts were higher during some months of 2020 as compared with 2019 but were not universally higher across this period. Months with significantly higher rates of suicide-related behaviours appear to correspond to times when COVID-19-related stressors and

community responses were heightened, indicating that youth experienced elevated distress during these periods.

With that heart-breaking reality in mind, how could we have prevented such an emotionally scarring tragedy? With lockdowns and parents unequipped to handle unprecedented impositions, millions of children were already experiencing a variety of hardships and travails: yet there was nowhere to turn. Journalists do not write or report for those in their teens or younger: they have no voice and no say.

And yet Fortune 500 C-Suite and governments had complete control and say in 2020 and hogged the spotlight with decrees as many people became destitute and terrorized. Journalists appealed to authorities and forgot about troubled youth and women who were disproportionately hit with lockdown restrictions, from small business owners to employees, and yet the world's wealthiest – despite mass global shutdown of production – saw their fortunes grow by over 54%.

Those companies lobbied governments around the clock and around the world as they also hired the world's most powerful public relations firms to push their messages on an already frazzled global audience. For example, Facebook (which is also part of a larger lobby called the Internet Association) spent almost 20 million dollars on lobbying in the US alone in 2020 – but also made regular rounds lobbying states and provinces, including Canada, the UK, and Australia. Families who faced eviction based on the consequences of COVID-19 policies could not, yet journalists did not seek to create a balance for the inequity. These were people who were overtaken with pain, trauma, grief, and fear, but had no media training, lobbyist or PR guru to give them either a voice or pointers.

And if it wasn't public relations, C-Suite players hired various former intelligence interrogators and operatives, such as Black Cube to train them how to present their messages to the public. Worse, toxic leaders are rarely removed, but given coaching to keep them in power. It should be no surprise that the world's richest became even richer while the rest of the world became poorer in a single year. One side of the equation are prepared and can have teams who can reflect to cultivate an environment, while the other side has no such assets and react to the environment.

But governments also had an unfair advantage in psychological combat. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had no less than ten psychological-base government departments, also known as “nudge units”: behavioural psychologists employed for the express and overt purpose to indulge in

mass behaviour modification, with such acronyms as MINDSPACE to drive the point home that there would be open and strategic manipulation of the public. The Behavioural Science at the Cabinet Office was tasked with inducing fear as part of government strategy and used counter-insurgency techniques to frighten the public with daily briefings – all while keeping their reports of such doings open and online, though few thought to read them to see the extent of this siege of terror. Canada and the US also made public their various “nudge units”, and NATO had their own June 2020 report on “Cognitive Warfare”, which had the following passage:

Hacking the individual

The revolution in information technology has enabled cognitive manipulations of a new kind, on an unprecedented and highly elaborate scale. All this happens at much lower cost than in the past, when it was necessary to create effects and impact through non-virtual actions in the physical realm. Thus, in a continuous process, classical military capabilities do not counter cognitive warfare. Despite the military having difficulty in recognising the reality and effectiveness of the phenomena associated with cognitive warfare, the relevance of kinetic and resource-intensive means of warfare is nonetheless diminishing.

Social engineering always starts with a deep dive into the human environment of the target. The goal is to understand the psychology of the targeted people. This phase is more important than any other as it allows not only the precise targeting of the right people but also to anticipate reactions, and to develop empathy. Understanding the human environment is the key to building the trust that will ultimately lead to the desired results. Humans are an easy target since they all contribute by providing information on themselves, making the adversaries’ sock-puppets more powerful.

Yet it is not just COVID-19 coverage that needs to be scrutinized: every day in the news, we see the fallout of emotionally illiterate coverage. Richard Jewell, for example, was a security guard whose quick thinking saved lives during a terrorist attack at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta; however, once he was falsely accused of being the bomber, the press hunted him as they wrongly misinterpreted his actions as suspicious. While he was exonerated as the real bomber was discovered, he was relentlessly abused and mistreated until his premature death.

From the kinds of questions, journalists ask to their methods of framing issues, so much that we take for granted in the profession has ruined reputations, maligned innocent people, and brought avoidable fear and anxiety to the public. It is unnecessary, and has, counter to myth, not

resulted in increased readerships or ratings: in fact, hundreds of media outlets have closed in the last couple of years as trust in the profession has sunk to unprecedented levels: in one recent poll in 2020, for instance, a mere 9% of respondents said they fully trusted the news media. Nieman Labs also discovered how alienated the public was with journalism products in an October 28, 2021 article:

Thirty per cent of respondents said that they cancelled the news subscription due to ideology or politics. The publications that were most often implicated in this line of reasoning were *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, but other publications weren't exempt.

When journalists attack the people they vowed to serve and treat them as the enemy to be reviled and condescended to like delinquent children, it is a wound that cannot heal, especially as the very methods the profession uses are harmful by default. Worse, when those same journalists align themselves with elites, the divisions worsen. After all, it was former CNN presenter Chris Cuomo who said during a deposition on July 15, 2021: "There is no division between politics and media. We all know each other." Who traditional journalists don't know are the very people they purport to inform.

Traditional journalism is not empirical nor emotional; ergo, it cannot be ethical. When sensationalism, prejudice, name-calling and fear are the toxic ingredients in a news report, it is not news: it is an abuse of emotional rights. We should learn something new about ourselves and others to understand our reality after every report. We should not dread reading or watching the news, even if the news is bad: we should be able to boldly consume it as we glean valuable information and insight. When we are bombarded with fear-mongering, we are being subjected to real psychological and neurobiological abuse as we are made to feel helpless. Life is finite and it is fleeting: to be forced to waste time in unproductive panic when a rational and innovative solution can be constructed and implemented is another violation of both emotional and primal rights, and journalism is the ideal conduit of re-establishing those rights.

There are countless studies in experimental psychology that show us that negative messages impact our brains: from cortisol level fluctuations to sensory overload. When we are afraid, we become obedient, meaning our neurochemistry has been altered. There is no excuse for it, and when journalism is fused with psychology to create a superior form of both professions, it is then that we can finally become informed and confident news consumers.

So-called “fact-checkers” is a mere label without any empirical standards or training in psychology or empiricism, and are pollutants of the information stream. Newsguard and Snopes are not empirical, and thus, have no utility, other than using unfounded labels that malign and misinform, yet proclaim to be able to find “misinformation”, which itself is a propagandistic term that isn’t properly or empirically defined. Traditional journalism fails to see the obvious, as this reporter proved in a February 2, 2022 article:

In an effort to help tackle increased misinformation online, NewsGuard has launched its ratings system in Canada to help Canadians decipher whether the information they're getting is trustworthy.

NewsGuard is a service that provides ratings and credibility scores for news websites, and has been active in the U.S. and parts of Europe, including the U.K., France, Germany and Italy, since 2019.

The company launched the initiative in Canada last month amid what its managing editor described as a “critical time.”

This irresponsible reportage with an abusive subtext that news consumers are too ignorant and helpless to vet information on their own, has no reliability or validity; ergo, it has no utility. Note that not a single decree is backed with any empirical evidence, just patronizing and unfounded assumptions, a red flag of manipulation. However, this is the same media landscape where the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) was caught misrepresenting an interview with Daniel Dunhill in February 2022: fortunately, Dunhill taped the interview and released the complete raw footage, proving that the state broadcaster had violated the moral and emotional rights of an interviewee. Equally troubling, TorStar, one of the nation’s few newspaper companies, demanded millions more in government funding in 2022 despite their collapsing circulation, including asking for tax credits to train reporters “how to use the Internet.” It is interesting to note that the corporation did not ask how to undo the psychological damage done by their own fear-mongering coverage and liberal use of unscientific jingoism and blanket insults on their own citizens whose taxpayer money they were now demanding.

We cannot rely on old and shallow methods of decrees of traditional journalism which is arbitrary and rote in its ways, or the equally random “fact-checking”, which has even fewer standards than what it purports to police. Journalism must ignore the old paths which brought about its collapse and seek and more precise and therapeutic answer which helps

news consumers find the truth, connection with bravery to reinvent themselves and their surroundings to work with their own natural plurality.

This book will be your guide to a new form of reportage: therapeutic journalism. As political strategists and public relations firms spend millions to find creative and covert ways of playing with your emotions, there are simple and effective ways to counter these methods, which are simpler and more reliable. As a journalist, it is your responsibility not to defer to “authorities” or artificial “mobs”, but to question provenance, and whether there has been prior manipulation embedded into information. As we will see throughout this book: behavioural nudging and propaganda is not a fantasy, but an open method of control that can be found in reports from governments and corporations as there are countless manuals for the practice.

These practices, however, come at a heavy price: they are causing emotional traumas and suffering in children, teens, and adults, many of who already have their share of burdens and travails to face, often alone. The world is already overburdened with anger, hatred, and fear: what it lacks is understanding, compassion, bravery, and emotional literacy.

When suicides in 2020 jumped to disturbing levels as overdoses became a crisis globally, the last thing the world needs is more fear.

Yet our traditional methods of coping have been defined by old models of so-called journalism: hero worship before the hero’s fall. When US Joss Whedon had good press, it veered into dangerously positive territory before, as one artist noted in a January 17, 2022 article from *Vulture*:

The community’s sense of shock and betrayal could be seen in part as an indictment of the culture of fandom itself. “As fans, we have a bad habit of deifying those whose work we respect,” [Scott R.] Kurtz, the comic-book artist, told me. “When you build these people up so big they have nowhere to go but down, I don’t know why we’re surprised when they turn out to be fallible humans who fall.”

Narratives were never questioned by the press, and fortunes for the filmmaker rapidly changed in a heartbeat, showing the façade of success presented in the media hid the pain on the set and beyond:

Whedon had been thinking a lot about his childhood. He had been in therapy for the past few years, ever since he checked himself into an addiction treatment centre in Florida for a month-long stay. As a younger man, he had channelled his pain into his work, but he was never particularly interested

in picking apart the stories he always told himself about his past. Now, he didn't have much else to do. The allegations against him had led friends to stop calling. He was out of work and wasn't writing. What story could he even tell? There were things about his life he was only beginning to understand. "Not the things being said in the press, necessarily, but things I'm not comfortable with," he told me. "I'm like, I have nothing going on. I can do some work on me."

We have a never-ending cycle of ineffective scaffoldings from traditional so-called journalism, and the same problems repeat, with no learning curve, and yet there are methods to rectify the situation, look at what truly ails the world, and what it needs for citizens to find their footing.

What it needs is therapy of a different sort. Journalistic therapy.

This book will show you the core methods of psychological manipulation as well as their antidotes, from forming better questions to avoiding loaded language, and challenging stereotypes and base assumptions. From the mechanisms of propaganda and understanding how corporate branding is a form of weaponization, you will learn to spot the subtle hints of commission and omission to do more than just find the truth – but how to present information to an audience in a psychologically sound and therapeutic way.

There is no rule that states that information must cause fear: we do not need to frame things in a victimization or infantilization scaffolding. We can foster healing, bravery, and innovation in an emotionally literate way. An emotionally and cognitively balanced society is a thriving society.

We will examine three kinds of psychological filters: analytical, primal, and emotional to see how we can interpret the same piece of information in three very different ways. If we understand that we can have multiple views on an event or person, then it becomes easier for us to embrace organic plurality and equity. We will see how these filters interact and how they can be manipulated, but also how to prevent manipulation or correct it if it has happened. Investigative journalism thrives in emotional literacy, but therapeutic journalism has other applications.

But it also opens new spheres, such as having news for children or presenting information to traumatized or marginalized groups of people who can also use these methods to find information for themselves. The possibilities for therapeutic journalism are endless.

While websites such as SubStack, Medium, and Rumble platforms are becoming increasingly profitable with healthy audience growth using

emotional literacy and superior journalistic approaches in plurality, old legacy outlets who eschew such methods as they stick to the same monolithic methods can no longer function without government bailouts. As the January 26, 2022, edition of *Blacklock's Reporter* noted:

Subsidized newspapers face hard times without more federal concessions, a publishers' lobbyist has written MPs. Jamie Irving of New Brunswick's billionaire Irving family said dailies are in dire shape despite hundreds of millions in taxpayers' grants: "News publishers are facing an existential threat."

The desperation of emotionally illiterate outlets that function on spreading panic and negativity has made real damage. Wars begin when we lack therapeutic modes of communication. Hate crimes, civil unrest, terrorism spiral out of control and can turn to genocide when we do not have emotional rights in mind or at heart. When we treat others as lesser beings, we plant dangerous seeds of destruction. We can condone abuse and terror when we are not driven by emotional literacy. This book will be your guide in seeing the world through more than the traditional analytical lens: but also a primal and emotional lens as well.

And so, let us begin by looking at what the world has lost because of the lack of ethics of an uneven playing field of psychological manipulations.

CHAPTER TWO

LOSS

*All tyrannies rule through fraud and force, but once the fraud is exposed,
they must rely exclusively on force.*
George Orwell

The core of journalism is the interview, and ideally, the journalist is a you-centred emotional person, making them an organic listener. Some of the most powerful and iconic reports weren't about politics, but important emotional stories; however, even then, a journalist learns early on that every story has a more important secret story behind it. Each secret story is different from the others except in one crucial way: what is left out of a source's account will almost always be the crucial element that explains the true motives and problems. We often see censorship as a horrific abuse of power, but self-censorship is in its own sphere.

Follow the money is a prime example of the mechanics of self-censorship: we look to see what people have to gain to explain why they advocate and lobby for certain narratives to be accepted in the mainstream, but what is missing is the issue of loss. If someone gains money, for instance, it absolutely means that someone else will lose money in the bargain. Money exists as a feedback loop.

The concept of loss is one of the most important overlooked facets in journalism, and it is the reason we don't have very empirical or precise ways of reporting on the concept of loss. Loss of freedom causes psychological trauma and alters the brain of both people and animals, yet journalists don't know how to deal with the concept of void. What we have is the very void humanity needs to confront to functionally progress both physically and psychologically. If journalists are guilty of any one inexcusable sin, it is their collective cowardice in dealing with a void vortex: what is the meaning of loss or darkness? If we do not have an answer to a problem, how do we create one?

Governments, PR firms, advertisers, and those in the optics industries thrive in this void: they can, intentionally or not, prey upon people's loss and the

pain and fear that is fed from it. Propaganda, fear-mongering, and gaslighting take full advantage of the notion of loss, and the fear of the unknown has sparked wars, oppression, censorship, and tyranny time and again, yet instead of creating a scaffolding of bravery for societies to boldly confront the unknown, journalists fed into the fear narrative time and again.

Traditionally, there is one communications outlet that explores the notion of loss: fiction. The Hero's Journey is an exploration of how to reclaim or gain from loss; however, this kind of emotional equations have not been translated into journalism and this sin of omission is important to consider as both a news consumer and a news producer.

Journalism pigeonholes and stereotypes people into four confining roles: hero/winner, victim, villain, and freak/outsider. Worse, everything is rote binary: 1 and 0: you are either a 1 or a 0. There is no grey zone. It is Us Versus Them, meaning Us is 1 who are either heroes or victims, and the Them are 0 who are either villains or freaks. Take any news report and begin to identify the roles of newsmakers and then substitute names with the roles: there will be no deviation from this scaffolding. We can reduce people in news reports as 1 or 0.

In a world of infinity, binary labels are as distorted and unrealistic to extremes, and it explains why loss and void are perpetual problems: we can never find a solution if we keep looking at only two elements. We cannot see reality or truth when our perceptions and interpretations are constricted to artificial labels of Establishment convenience.

No wonder humanity is plagued by tunnel vision: we have no idea what we see, let alone perceive. We believe one artificial rule can explain everything as we ignore our emotions that scream to us to look elsewhere. We become angry at people whose life requirements are not the same as our own. We become offended and enraged because someone else doesn't have the same feelings about a person or event that we do, even though we have conflicting emotions and perceptions within us.

In a world of infinity, we are actively encouraged to deny our own perceptions and emotions, creating artificial voids, leading to real loss. It is sanctioned insanity that breeds anger, fear, hatred, jealousy, panic, prejudice, and frustration. A journalist must walk right into that void vortex to see what is being hidden – not from malice so much as from fear.

To look at loss is a form of ghost-hunting: secret motives drive people to either prevent their own losses or to ensure someone else loses. Journalists

are often sent malicious “gossip”, but most times, it is a form of manipulation used to secretly knock a competitor and set a narrative in the journalist’s mind. It is difficult for those in the C-Suite to be able to speak about their own accomplishments objectively: they have been positively reinforced to first speak about themselves with unempirical hyperbole before speaking poorly about rivals; however, journalists need verifiable facts, not boasting of the Me or Us (the 1) and slander of the Them (the 0).

This competitive rote binary narrative can infect an information stream, but in the hands of an emotionally savvy reporter, those sentiments can be used to tease out actual information – the missing pieces that are crucial to understanding the reality of the situation. By injecting some emotions into the equation and veering off script, a journalist has the power to find the true state of reality.

After all, what many people overlook is that C-Suite players hire former intelligence operatives to train them in interrogation and counterinterrogation techniques. Governments, on the other hand, boast of having “nudge units” – psychologists hired to overtly and covertly manipulate the public. The *Toronto Star* noted that the Canadian federal government had a nudge unit during COVID-19, while the UK has no less than ten departments for the express purpose of manipulating the public to side for a rigged outcome. It is not just media training that gives people in authority the advantage, but more clandestine training as well. Most citizens have no way of knowing how unschooled they are in the ways of psychological combat, and it is up to the journalist to give them some leverage in that regard.

Experimental psychology can give journalists the tools to find the nature of reality: for instance, that cockroaches run faster when other cockroaches were watching them, meaning that the drive is innate. We can take the results of the laboratory, tweak them, and then apply them in the real world the same way PR, governments, and corporations do around the clock.

Legacy journalists, on the other hand, have no training in psychology. It is now a given that any C-Suite executive has not only training from former intelligence players, but also other kinds of specialists, and journalists need to have their own ways of bypassing and countering those techniques. Corporations and those in predatory professions understand loss and how to use void to cover up those machinations: shrinkflation, for example, is giving less of a product in the hopes that consumers don’t see the terms of the bargain have been skewed against them.

But loss and void are also understood by both novelists and artists who have ways of illustrating the emotional price of both: the murder of a young woman has driven stories from *Twin Peaks* to *The Lovely Bones*, and we can explore the themes from countless angles. There is loss, but there is also a void: and yet, we can explore both, meaning that even void has infinite grains of meaning inside it. When a fictional story begins with a death, we understand clearly it is not over: it has only begun. One curtain has fallen, but another begins to rise. There are echoes and shadows, and each is worth exploring.

When we compare fiction and nonfiction side by side, we can see how cold, and how uninformative a journalism story actually becomes: where are the facts about the loss? The void? Journalists do not understand the language of pain or loss: they are a *trope* of innocently insensitive, and when there is a public outcry over their methods, they blame the victims, labelling all with some sort of *othering* narrative. The CBC had gone so far as to shut off Facebook comments because they did not see how hurtful their narratives have become. The agony is *cumulative* and not unlike those who become tired of people inquiring about their accents. The *residue* of past coverage begins to weigh down on people until they explode. Donald Hebb, a Canadian psychologist whose ground-breaking 1949 book *The Organization of Behaviour: A Neuropsychological Theory* showed that fear and stress *builds* over time. A shaman can sentence a perfectly healthy believer to *die* within a decreed hour. The emotional toxicity of fear cannot be overstated, and journalists absolutely need to understand the psychological ramifications of emotional residue, but sadly, never seem to *get* it.

The comments shut off was telling, however. Journalists do not understand the meaning of why a public has a seeming intolerance for mainstream journalism. Brodie Fenlon, editor in chief and executive director of daily news at the CBC, tried to justify their move in a blog post on June 15, 2021:

There is ample evidence the mental health of many Canadians is fragile and in need of attention after 16 months of pandemic lockdowns, school closures and economic uncertainty.

Journalists are no different. Some recent articles on the well-being of reporters tasked with covering a crisis they're also living through have many of us looking in the mirror to take stock of our health.

Compounding the stress and anxiety of journalists is the vitriol and harassment many of them face on social media platforms and, increasingly, in the field. As André Picard wrote in a recent column, "For journalists,

platforms like Twitter can be a great way to find sources and promote their work, but also a cesspool of hatred. Increasingly, reporters are also physically attacked.”

This self-assessment is a Mary Sue argument: to demonize the very people you are supposed to inform is more than just counterproductive — it fails to recognize that the profession’s emotional illiteracy is hurtful. The public is not your enemy. Your detractors are not your enemy: they are not stupid, evil, or crazy for lashing out, and it is counterproductive to paint thousands of pained voices as such, going so far as to label nonviolent suffering people “terrorists” when those in other nations are suffering from abuse and death from the genuine variety. Journalists need to stop taking criticism personally and start taking it emotionally. If you cannot see reality for what it is, then you cannot be a professional observer of it.

After all, if even members of parliament have reached their breaking point, there is a problem. A June 15, 2021, *Canadian Press* article was a stunning admission of how broken the world has become in that regard:

Canada was excoriated as a racist, hypocritical failure Tuesday as MPs who don’t intend to seek re-election said their official farewells to Parliament.

Mumilaq Qaqqaq, the New Democrat MP for Nunavut, used the opportunity to blast Canada as a country built on the oppression of Indigenous People and whose history is “stained with blood.”

“People like me don’t belong here in the federal institution,” she told the House of Commons.

“The reality is that this institution and the country has been created off the backs, trauma and displacement of Indigenous People.”

The sentiment defied party lines, however:

...Conservative MP David Sweet revealed during his farewell speech that he’s decided not to run again in Ontario’s Flamborough-Glanbrook riding because he’s been grappling with mental health challenges.

He attributed those challenges in part to having spent 15 years as a member of the Commons human rights committee, listening to “the worst stories of human suffering” as well as to the “draconian lockdowns” imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“All of us need to be conscious of what our limit is and assure we get relief and help when needed well before it becomes crippling. This is what I’m doing,” Sweet said, urging others to do the same.

And yet, signs of loss are everywhere. Food insecurity in 2022 is a global concern. In the UK, it was reported that 1 in 10 people now had to go without food for an entire day at a time as inflation and the cost of living created societal harm, all while there were companies making record profits. When there is a loss of power, control, or the ability to remove an obstacle, frustrations taint and cloud our view, limiting the number of solutions we can see, and it compounds the loss. The problem is even the concept of loss is itself infinite. How do we begin to be able to create the methods of dealing with loss in journalism when a single idea is a world of meaning on its own?

It is not as if news reports have never treated the subject of loss properly. *60 Minutes* had allowed one woman whose young son was senselessly murdered during the Yugoslav civil war to express her painful void on December 26, 1993:

MRS DESA STOJANOVIC (Mother): I've been searching for my child for nine months, and for nine months I've been grieving. My hands can't cover him anymore. I can't feed him anymore. I can't look after him anymore. The enemy killed my son-- tortured him. Tortured him...All I have left is this sweater and this sweet reminder of him. I'll take these to the grave with me. He is no more, but I'll go to him soon.

How does a journalist cover loss without provoking prurient interest in gossipy details or inviting people to feel superior because the same tragedy hasn't befallen them? How do we translate the language of loss and pain to a public without airs or assumptions?

We want to talk about loss, but then do anything but keep focused on the subject, looking for any excuse to talk about something else. When there is a void, there is no shortage of people willing to throw irrelevant fill into it to avoid facing it. Those who suffer loss become exploited, and there is no shortage of people who will hijack the platform for their own ends. It isn't just fear that makes people vulnerable to abuses, but also those who have lost, whether it is the loss of a loved one, a limb, power, fame, or fortune.

Traditional news producers are often actively and deliberately complicit in downplaying loss and void for the sake of narrative and a misguided notion that news consumers don't want to hear stories that have no upbeat resolution.

For example, we often hear of people who are abandoned by friends and family once they lose a loved one or are diagnosed with a serious illness. Why avoid the most vulnerable? Because those outside that radius of sorrow blame the victims for their tragedy: the Just-World Hypothesis is a vile form of emotional abuse, but usually justified with face-saving virtue-signalling excuses of being busy or giving the wounded their space.

But any kind of loss is surprisingly unexplored. Canadian news reports, for instance, follow a particular formula: when bad news is delivered, there is a compulsion to add that there is some good news. The US press spin for happy endings and resolutions. The US newsmagazine *20/20* had devoted an hour-long program of the working White Collared poor and tried to wrap up happy endings that seemed to be a stretch. Professors and Silicon Valley workers having to sleep in their cars because they can't afford an apartment hasn't gone away because a journalist pointed at a few cases of trauma and then falsely implied that media attention alone has solved the problem.

Neil Postman whose flawed 1985 work *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* is often quoted without challenging his inaccurate assumptions about the press.

Postman assumed that television was dumbed down for the public, even though print reportage used grade school level vocabulary before. As those in the profession are fond of saying, it has always been thirty miles wide, but one inch deep.

The biggest misconception in the book is that news was brutal and sensationalized and that the news is always negative, yet the amount of scrubbing and sanitizing journalists do is commonplace. Brutal footage of carnage is omitted as can be seen by the chasm between raw social media footage and legacy news footage. Stampedes who stomped over dead bodies without looking down or back occur frequently. Governments forcibly remove homeless people from their shelters with violence. Bodies of murder victims aren't visible to news consumers but can be found in other forums, all of which undermines Postman's hypothesis.

If every facet of life is sanitized and hidden by television because the reality is far worse, then television is not providing any sort of spectacle. They are downplaying reality, not making it sound worse but better than it really is, meaning news consumers are always at a loss and void.

The journalistic sanitized and clinical presentations are akin to gaslighting those who are suffering, making them sound as if they are exaggerating their

trauma and loss. If you are sleeping in your car as a professor and the journalist boasted to have solved your problem in an hour, how likely is it that people around you will think you are still in peril or ever were?

For journalism, it is a profession that requires to objectively quantify loss and pain. Journalism is supposed to be applied psychology, and yet how do we express it in empirical, descriptive, sensitive, but non-literary terms? From people who lost a child or were swindled into losing their life savings, the journalistic focus was always on how to make loss vanish. It's not that bad, and there must be some positives in the tragedy: the police made an arrest, there will be a trial, there is a promising new cure on the horizon, and a new law is being crafted. Yet follow up with those people and you soon discover none of those remedies ever made up for the loss, and most times, made the loss bigger and the pain worse.

There is another consideration: once people are labelled as those who were victimized or suffered a loss, the press always draws attention to the loss, even if it has nothing to do with their role in a news story. How emotionally literate is it to always be defined by some loss in the past? Stigma and pain create deeper losses, and thus, we must reorient the journalistic focus on emotional literacy rather than rehash old wounds. People suffer in reality, but they also have both information and insight.

Because traditional journalism's scaffolding is unempirical and undefined, its utility has always been in question. We do not train journalists with methods of reporting pain, loss, suffering or oppression, let alone teach them about the differences between sophistry and logic. Intriguingly, so much of the journalism product is driven by logical fallacies: from monomania (that in a world of infinity, there can be just a single answer that can be seen as moral, sane, just, and correct), the confirmation bias (looking for anything that confirms a theory and not refute it), sink or swim, appeal to authority, appeal to mob, appeal to celebrity, personal attack, and the Strawman fallacy, to name but a few. Once you see the defects, you cannot unsee them. It is the reason journalists perpetually publish hoaxes, lies, scams, and outright propaganda as news without any empirical examination of it.

And it still remains a serious problem. People who lie about pain and loss are believed over those who are truly harmed. People who faked cancer were believed over those who truly had it. When a profession is emotionally uneducated, they can mistake griping and whining over trivialities as legitimate and newsworthy stories and turn their backs on the homeless with smug righteousness or perfunctory and patronizing mention. While

psychologists agonize over believing fraudsters in the clinical setting because the consequences of an incorrect assessment can be catastrophic, reporters are blithely making on-the-spot reputation-damaging assessments with no evidence and then justify and defend their calls.

And yet, if any one profession has its members being constantly bombarded with lies and propaganda, it is journalism, and people who lie and manipulate have three reasons for doing it: to cover up their incompetency, to seize ill-gotten gains through trickery and deception, from money to power, or to prevent loss. They function using boast, hyperbole, pseudo-moral posturing, and fear-mongering. There are fear scams, greed scams, affinity scams, and pity scams. No journalist is ever trained to differentiate these categories. No journalist is trained to know how to use the PCL-R (Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised), the DSM (Diagnostical and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), the CCM (Crime Classification Manual), or any other useful classification of human behaviour, let alone use any sort of empirical testing that could help uncover important factual information (analytical), context (emotional), or utility (primal).

Traditional journalists are not given tools or methods to understand the differences between reality and perception or truth and interpretation; ergo, they do not have the means of seeing the nature of loss or void. When #MeToo became a movement, it gained traction only after wealthy white women were seen as the victims. When members of an elite Establishment said sexual harassment was bad, the press gave them publicity. They did not give mundane or diverse women the platform in such a manner previously. This is not to detract from the problem, but there is something to be said about whose plight gets to fill the newshole or become a news peg.

What this means is that there is no emotional literacy, hence, there are no weights and measures: a billionaire whining in the press about the loss of a business deal will get significantly more press coverage than the single mother who loses her job and ends up homeless with small children. The concept of loss and void eludes the profession; however, it doesn't elude artists or novelists whose fodder gravitates in a completely different direction. The chasm is instructive: the difference is artists and fiction writers have a core of emotional literacy, but journalists do not. When they believe they do, they use the same bad measurements and keep making the same rote binary errors in their perceptions and interpretations of reality: it is bad to sexually harass rich women, but we can ignore the poor ones. Journalists will report with reverence that a billionaire has gotten wealthier,

but won't look at job ads that state delivery drivers for the same company earn a shockingly paltry \$1.40 per delivery.

Loss is a relative concept: someone else drains the resources of another entity, and parasitic breakdowns can often be masked as false gain. Companies gain at the expense of those who do the laborious and often dangerous work. While C-suite players pay less than the minimum to maximize their profits, they use that money to hire lobbyists, PR firms, intelligence operatives, and even behavioural psychologists to continue to rig the environment to harvest more resources they haven't earned. When there was a global shutdown of production in 2020 and 2021, the wealthiest billionaires became richer. How could this be possible? Simple: taxpayer bailouts and stimulus were given to them, and many, such as Blackrock, used the funds to buy up middle-class houses to rent them. As inflation devastated those with fixed incomes and the working and middle class, the elites took the resources of those people to line their coffers.

The chasm between rich and poor was one of the biggest stories about inequity and loss, but it wasn't treated as such by journalists, who themselves were losing their jobs in droves in 2020.

But when you rely on a press release and do not walk bravely among the poorest and most vulnerable, there is no way a reporter can weigh or measure loss.

Interestingly, Canadian newspaper journalists did begin to peek out in January 2021, yet by April, they retreated. For the briefest of moments, there were stories about COVID-19 policies instigating domestic violence, psychological trauma, homelessness, and poverty, but then came in the image operatives to hand out press releases, and it suddenly vanished. Loss is a difficult concept and it can be a depressing one as the losses mount without remedy.

This is no minor point: the destitute do not have the funds to hire a PR firm or crisis management team. Governments and corporations have armies of them. Take a look at any lobbyist registry, and it should be no surprise that the most prosperous companies and players do not send a single lobbyist once a month to ask cities, provinces, and national governments for money and new laws: it is often a half dozen to a dozen lobbyist knocking on doors weekly or biweekly.

When Ontario nurses complained that they were doing the same jobs as doctors during COVID- 19, but receiving one-tenth the pay, all a journalist