

Organic Journalism and Gathering Information in Catastrophic Environments with Primal Literacy

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By

Alexandra Kitty

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To Rada Ugrenović.

We never met, but we've always been linked.
You never had the chance to read this dedication
or ever know who I am, yet you are with me, always.

Quod est superius est sicut quod inferius, et quod inferius est sicut quod est superius.

—*The Emerald Tablet (Tabula Smaragdina)*

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PREFACE

CHASING OUT IN FRONT

The world is an organic mechanism: random, evolving, unforgiving, unpredictable and is volatile by its very essence. Yesterday's people cling on to antiquated artificial rules and make decrees as they are ruled by their own fear, but it is a mere ruse used in the hopes that their marks are ignorant followers who live in the Now. A true journalist isn't fazed by such games of hucksters and con-artists: they ignore the spectacle and the fear-mongering and find the reality and the truth because they are visionaries and innovators of tomorrow. When I was a journalist, I understood the importance of patience and focus: manipulators hinged their games on psychological abuse, but if I was level-headed and didn't fall for their gambits, the truth of their weaknesses and incompetence became obvious. Like the game of Battleship, victory came by reading small *tells* of the manipulators and then forming a theory to test, analysing the feedback, and then finding information based on the responses – or even *lack* of responses. My empirical studies were a thrilling and educational escapade, and I could devise several new scaffoldings for the dying profession of journalism.

This book is your guide to looking for reality, even under treacherous conditions. While the standards here are both empirical and therapeutic, our focus will be on a new kind of journalism: organic epistolary. We are looking at plurality and, more importantly, *biology*. We understand the human condition through DNA and through organic functioning to report on the primal realities of an event or environment. Whether the humans in question are fleeing a war zone in their tatters and will overtly lie to a journalist in a desperate bid to salvage their in-group's fortunes, or they are polished suit-wearing powerbrokers deceiving us to hide the extent of their ineptitude, this text will readjust your perceptions of reality to take a more *primal* look without losing your humanity or your heart.

While there are the ideological dinosaurs who try to keep organic progress and intellectual evolution back with fear-mongering and chest-thumping, the truth is that reality doesn't align with their lofty decrees or manipulative gambits. The old patriarchal scaffoldings are antiquated; hence, the world

is experiencing an unprecedented transition to other forms of scaffoldings. This book is a guide on how to ignore the paper crowns of self-styled emperors to find the truths in the boardrooms, battlegrounds, and in other chaotic and dangerous situations as you learn to assess. The journalist's job is not to judge with pity, envy, arrogance, bigotry, disdain, fear, anger or hatred. It is to find reality to get to the truth.

Traditionally, there was a single model of journalism where there was but a single lens; however, those antiquated truisms have no place in the profession. This book will guide you to look through a new *old* lens: primal literacy. The oldest part of our brains will be stimulated to provide a dynamic new lens for information gathering, verification, and dissemination.

As a journalist with training in psychology, I understood how invaluable it was to cherish and nurture primal literacy, and knew that journalism absolutely required to incorporate it into its own deficient scaffolding. However, I also understood that I had to *test* this model before I could advocate for it or teach it to others. Ergo, I learned to take risks to chase out in *front*: when predators mistake you for prey and they begin to circle you, they will use specific gambits and ruses to do it. The question for me was: how do I study these methods to test what approaches could *counter* predatory ones – or ones of prey who may also try to hide or deceive for their own perceived or real self-preservation? I could compare and contrast the results as I could create a primal-based scaffolding of organic journalism.

When I turned the tables on deceivers, I used my results to create a map to an exciting and flexible new journalistic scaffolding. Chasing out in front allowed me to assess how predators see their cognitive and emotional strengths, deficits, and defects. From monitoring analytics to writing articles embedded with subtle empirical stimuli, I could tease out and extract vital data to see how to pivot journalism to be more aligned with our organic nature in times of peace, but also extreme stress.

The results of those experiments are now the backbone of this textbook. As organic journalism shifts and evolves, don't forget that there are always insights to be gleaned, pondered, and shared. As you learn to gain competence and confidence, don't forget that you may have many insights to share to improve a profession that was kept back for far too long, but now has a new purpose and mandates.

One final note: as primal literacy is epistolary in its scaffolding, there will be chapters where there are seemingly disjointed subsections. These are related concepts, but as primal understanding is one of hunter-gatherer, these sections speak to your primal literacy first, so that you can then process the information through emotional and analytical thinking.

Alexandra Kitty

PART ONE:

REALITY

CHAPTER ONE

SAFE IS A HYPOTHETICAL CONSTRUCT

Life can be complicated enough during times of peace and prosperity, but when there is organic chaos of natural disasters or contrived chaos brought by war, the break of routines can unbalance individuals, groups, and even nations. Old worlds end as new ones are created, but how to navigate safely can elude many as they find themselves imperilled, destitute, and broken. Many die and others become captured, tortured, abused, and alone. For some, the idea of trust terrifies them, while others keep looking for saviours as they feel incapable of saving themselves. The old ways no longer work, but how to learn to find safety once more is impeded by feelings of terror, rage, resignation, and anxiety. Some will forever look for guarantees, while others will look for a mob or authority to protect them, only to be shattered that their quick fixes brought more harm and suffering.

It is the heuristics and algorithms of everyday life which often account for the flawed logic. Monomania, rote binary thinking, false linear divides, failure to reach Piaget's Formal Operational Stage and the lack of empathic thinking are real problems plaguing not just individual thought, but also groupthink. The lack of plurality, progress, and natural intellectual maturity can drive people to hide incompetence or plunder and malign others for personal gain. When too many corrupt agents begin to create an environment of dysfunction, civil unrest, revolutions, and even war begin to take root and explode. When an element has incubated deceit, abuse, and tyranny, the result can be devastating. When journalism becomes complacent or enables and hides scandal, it is responsible for the loss of prosperity and progress. True journalism should be empirical by design to maintain a healthy society, and therapeutic when problems have begun to erode the social scaffolding, but when there has been a complete breakdown, journalism must go back to the roots of humanity to retrace its steps.

In other words, it must be organic in nature to align with the core of humanity to heal and correct.

The process is not a simple one as many factors must be considered, from how our perceptions and expectations obscure reality, to how danger is an integral part of reality as is risk, and why journalists need to embrace this Truth. When we begin to ask *What went wrong?* we begin a journey into the atom of failure, even if the destination is toward solution and triumph. Without humility, no solution can ever be found.

When traditional journalism lapsed into opinion and partisan manipulations, societies became fractured. While the global mantra of 2020 had been *We are all in this together*, the reality was vastly different: linear divides broke families, neighbours, and friends, and distrust in the media became reality for a majority of citizens who went elsewhere for their information as they saw legacy journalism as apologists for authority.

Yet their distrust proved correct. Canadians, for instance, became increasingly distrustful of their press, and with good reason: a pair of *Blacklock's Reporter* stories on March 9, 2022, gave insight as to why. The first article, "Gov't Grateful for Coverage", had shown that the legacy press were active agents of the federal government:

Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez is promising more media subsidies after thanking reporters for their Freedom Convoy coverage. "Look at the role that the journalists played," said Rodriguez: "I think there are even more things we should be able to do."

The second article, "CBC-TV Guarded Reporters", showed that the journalists appeased and trusted the government as they maligned and feared the very people they were mandated to report on objectively:

CBC-TV assigned a security guard to protect every single reporter assigned to cover the Freedom Convoy, a journalism seminar was told last night. Media recounted the extraordinary security measures at a Carleton University "Journalism Under Siege" seminar: "This was a real threat."

The 2022 "Freedom Convoy" was an unprecedented peaceful protest, yet the CBC had twice spread deceptions: first by falsely claiming the grassroots protest was funded by "Russians" and that donations had mostly come from abroad (both xenophobic stories which the state-funded broadcaster was forced to retract). The outright deceptions from a journalism outfit to malign law-abiding citizens cannot be overstated: the CBC provided no proof of any of the claims. There was no bombing, shooting, or violence, yet journalists treated those suffering as criminals for expressing their pain. This is the same legacy media which sought millions

of taxpayer dollars to keep afloat, even as ratings and circulation had fallen as people were being maligned in those products.

Yet there were those in the legacy press who grasped the egregiousness of the journalistic disconnect with reality. As one *Toronto Sun* columnist noted in a March 12, 2022 article:

Another example of how little Mother Corp understood and respected the convoy participants: On Thursday, online Ottawa news source, Blacklock's Reporter, reported that the CBC hired a security guard for each reporter and each cameraperson it assigned to the truckers' blockade in Ottawa.

And it was company policy that no newsperson could go near the perimeter of the protests without these chaperones.

Talk about an overreaction based on an elite class bigotry towards the truckers and their grievances.

If the truckers were such a threat to reporters, wouldn't Ottawa police have laid some charges?

If they were such a threat to overthrow Canadian institutions, wouldn't they have been found with explosives and blueprints of government buildings in their trucks? Wouldn't they have attacked something rather than set up bouncy castles?

If those covering the event were both emotionally and primally illiterate, it is no wonder then that they would see peaceful people as monsters to fear. There is no connection; ergo, no alignment with reality. The irrational phobia of discontent working-class people would explain the network's questionable narratives: when journalists fear the very people they are covering, there is no utility in the product. If a news outlet is so afraid of its own citizens who have different life requirements to the point of irrational demonization, then how can they expect to gain the trust of news consumers? When there is no functional feedback loop, then journalists become incapable of providing information, but become conduits for propaganda, sophistry and narrative.

Legacy journalists have never had an empirical understanding of either reality or the truth, and no more is the problem evident than during times of war and civil unrest. Journalists often rely on the misquoted and misattributed quote that, "the first casualty of war is truth", yet that sentiment is inaccurate. If we cannot find truth during danger, then we cannot expect to survive. When we can see both reality and truth, we can

find safe passage, even in the worst of circumstances. Truth is as evident in war as it is in peace. When a profession's default assumption is to make excuses for believing lies when the truth is the most important element to survival, it is a profession that has ingrained failure and incompetence at its core.

Fortunately, as more independent outlets emerge with empirical standards at their core, we are seeing the beginnings of a more responsible alternative that questions truisms with logic and data. But how dangerous is legacy journalism, and why? When narratives aren't challenged, we miss vital clues which expose scandals of incompetence. When "fact-checkers" and journalists become offended when others use critical scepticism, there is a failure in the information stream. As Glenn Greenwald noted on March 9, 2022:

Self-anointed "fact-checkers" in the U.S. corporate press have spent two week[s] mocking as disinformation and a false conspiracy theory the claim that Ukraine has biological weapons labs, either alone or with U.S. support. They never presented any evidence for their ruling — how could they possibly know? and how could they prove the negative? — but nonetheless they invoked their characteristically authoritative, above-it-all tone of self-assurance and self-arrogated right to decree the truth and label such claims false.

Greenwald went on to describe why fact-checkers and journalists should have questioned the official narrative:

Yesterday afternoon, Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), hoping to debunk growing claims that there are chemical weapons labs in Ukraine, smugly asked Nuland: "Does Ukraine have chemical or biological weapons?"

Rubio undoubtedly expected a flat denial by Nuland, thus providing further "proof" that such speculation is dastardly Fake News emanating from the Kremlin, the CCP and QAnon. Instead, Nuland...told a version of the truth. Her answer visibly stunned Rubio...

...When asked whether Ukraine possesses "chemical or biological weapons," Nuland did not deny this: at all. She instead — with palpable pen-twirling discomfort and in halting speech, a glaring contrast to her normally cocky style of speaking in obfuscatory State Department officialese — acknowledged: "uh, Ukraine has, uh, biological research facilities."

When journalism lacks primal literacy, the news product is non-functional. When citizens hinge their self-confidence based on advocating a position based on dubious information that is publicly debunked, they will either retreat in shame, or go into denial as they lose the ability to discern credible information from hoaxes, lies, and outright propaganda. The emotional damage is real, which leads to other forms of cognitive impairments. Media literacy is crucial, but so is having a multi-literate press, and no news producer can expect to be functional by being only one-third literate.

When people become afraid, they see danger in safety and safety in danger, and individuals begin to retreat and become resigned, dwindling the pool of bold and innovative visionaries who are willing to provide solutions. Sentiments such as this March 5, 2022 Tweet from Lee Camp show how fear can grip individuals to overestimate threats:

The US Empire has crushed most voices that are even slightly adversarial to the ruling elite. Does it feel like a better world today than 6 years ago when they started this witch hunt? I don't think so.

Far from crushing dissent, 2020 has given rise to alternative outlets and venues to disseminate information. What arose from unprecedented global lockdowns was the emergence of citizen journalism as a real force, meaning this tweet was far from the truth. While we are seeing the rise of empirical journalism, what is lacking is primal journalism.

What becomes clear is the profound lack of primal literacy in legacy journalism: journalists will proclaim to debunk an obvious truth before having to backtrack once the obvious truth becomes too big to ignore. News consumers leave as they don't wish to be insulted and dismissed once again, with many deciding to become media outlets: if they can find information better than the status quo, then they will do it. Those who are emotionally and primally literate begin to forge their own course, and it is the reason why new emerging forms of journalism arise.

When we are primally illiterate, we cannot properly gauge basic reality. We see conspiracies or trust the corrupt. Only when old systems begin to collapse do we begin to panic with no solution to help us find safer footing.

The problem is that we are a hyper-literate society when it comes to *analytical literacy*; however, we have *other* core literacies that society neglects, such as emotional literacy and primal literacy. When all three core literacies are harmonized, we have more information coming in and can make more informed decisions. True journalism is harmonized, but what

literacy is used depends on the situation and circumstance. For the purposes of this book, we will examine the primal literacy as the driving core, but we will examine both the emotional and analytical as well.

The analytical alone cannot compensate for the lack of emotional and primal literacy. When we use AI and algorithms in place of textured thinking, we miss obvious signs of dysfunction and rot. Incompetent, corrupt, and abusive players don't like to be either challenged or questioned and will use feints and ruses to hide their scandals. Analytical thinking can easily miss these signs, but with emotional and primal thinking, we sense it; ergo, it is vital to use the latter two when investigating and reporting on reality.

But to report on reality means being able to see it as it is. Safe is a hypothetical construct: "safe" doesn't exist. There will always be extreme risk and danger which cannot be seen or predicted, but to overcome it, we must confront it. When we are confident in our own abilities and are competent, we don't fear complex solutions or challenges.

When those in power try to stymie the pursuit of truth, they are harming society's ability to survive and prosper. As constitutional scholar Dwight Newman noted in a February 1, 2022 video, it is a human right to "pursue truth without interference by the state". As Newman also noted when discussing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

[T]he forgotten freedoms, like the freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of belief, freedom of opinion all there alongside freedom of expression.

When our ability to find the truth is impeded, our lives and futures are imperilled, but when those in power seek control, they will justify the use of deception at any cost. Klein and Kuperman noted in 2008 that retired Major General Robert H. Scales defined "military victory as capturing psych-cultural and not geographical ground". Institutionalized deception, propaganda, and nudging are attempts at hiding both reality and truth. As Clemis wrote in 2008:

Actions and ideas—and how to influence them—lie at the heart of counterinsurgency doctrine, the manual argues. Counterinsurgency is a human, rather than technological, endeavour that relies more on cognitive skills such as language and cultural understanding than it does on military technology. The population—not weapon systems, geography, or political and military institutions—is the "centre of gravity" in insurgent conflicts. Therefore, knowledge of the motivations, strengths, and weaknesses of insurgents and others involved in an area of operations is critical.

However, the over-emphasis on “psych-cultural” ground means that people’s perceptions of reality are skewed by design, causing frustration, fear, rage, and grief, further clouding and distorting perceptions. Pandering and manipulation have their limits as the human mind does not thrive in deceptive and manipulative environments. Just as abusive domestic situations cause anxiety, depression, and stress, mass gaslighting causes equal harm. When those methods are used in times of depression or war, the effects cause despair, apathy, and violence. It is up to the organic journalist to stop the cycle and rock society back on course. Finding the calm that comes from solutions is the anchor to show the opportunities slumbering in reality, and the organic journalist can use facts to bring peace, even in the worst of circumstances.

This book is your guide to understanding primal literacy and organic journalism. From how to cover dangerous situations to how to assess risk, this book will show how the brain and the body must be part of the journalistic equation. As we will see in later chapters, we can find reality and truth under the worst of conditions, giving us the keys to finding solutions and liberating ourselves from fear and tyranny. Organic journalism is the method of tearing down barriers and boldly chasing out in front, even during times of war and violence, as the following chapter explains.

CHAPTER TWO

DANGER IS REALITY

Journalists are supposed to be the chroniclers of reality. Traditional journalism had factual roots, but never used empirical or therapeutic standards to test their theories, allowing other vested interests to co-opt the message and overtake the profession through atmosphere, sophistry, and narrative, meaning that legacy journalism could never flourish in new directions as it became stuck in a holding pattern. Academia, on the other hand, ensured that their empirical mechanisms allowed them to become more self-aware, resulting in disciplines such as psychology, and STEM-based industries becoming an integral part of life outside of universities.

When an industry lacks empirical self-awareness, it relapses into rote binary thinking: the group follows static and untested “rules” which seemingly worked in the past, but without empirical testing to confirm or refute the theory, meaning that their ideas of success came from extraneous variables, or that they are based on *false causality*. This conflation of factors prevented journalistic innovation for decades: because correlation is confused with causation, rote methods are reinforced and alternative explanations and criticisms are rejected, or even mislabelled as “enemies” who spread “misinformation”. The current landscape and its realities are ignored as the point is to rig perceptions to maintain an antiquated status quo.

Independent and citizen journalism have no such misconceptions as many began with the assumption that information must be questioned, verified, vetted, and analysed. This shift in the mandate is significant because propaganda is most often employed in times of war and unrest, and it is essential to examine this form of information contamination, especially as it is a staple of high-stakes events. Wherever there is danger, there is propaganda used to serve as a misdirection, and the journalist must understand that whenever a manipulative scaffolding is used, there must be a scandal of incompetence being hidden. It is the reason why it is imperative for the reporter to understand the dynamics and motives for covert behaviour modification: the *bigger* and more important issue is masked through fear-mongering.

However, people are people, and in times of extreme stress, it is all too easy to become indoctrinated through fear-based messaging. Rationality and sensibility are suppressed for aggression, obedience, bigotry, and even violence. Worse, a default delusion will reinforce this toxic belief system as a primed faction will see the deficiencies of an out-group and assume they are correct by default. Worst of all, vested interests will spend billions of dollars to keep the factions distracted and primed as they refine the methods on how to manipulate a public: journalists are no different from other citizens and must be vigilant and aware that they are vulnerable to the effects of propaganda and manipulation as regular citizens. When reporters are further parachuted into places of frenzied collective mindsets, it is too easy to get swept up in the groupthink and make further psychological damage as the historical record is distorted. Not only do primal illiteracies infect the information stream, but they also prolong the violence and bloodshed, placing civilians and journalists alike in mortal danger.

Understanding the Realm of Danger

Realities of various scenarios, from civil unrest to war, and even mass shootings and natural disasters, must be examined and analysed carefully. What are the hidden dangers? Who is trying to rig an outcome? What are the secret teachings? Each scenario has key dangers and mandates that must be weighed carefully. Warmongers dehumanize and demonize one side as they deify another. Mass shootings will hide systemic failures of those who allowed a homicidal person to slip through the cracks. Oppression, censorship and tyranny will always be justified in moral posturing by those who seek vile tools to rig an outcome. There will be common themes in atmosphere, sophistry, and narrative, and it is important to understand why those perceptual rigs are put into place to avoid both physical danger and the psychological travesty of contaminating an information stream with lies and manipulation.

Understanding the Mechanics of Catastrophic Environments

News isn't advertising. It is factual information presented to align with reality and not an institutional agenda. Whenever there is a failure, there is incompetence. Most times, failure doesn't trigger a cascading catastrophe, but when too many variables have been ignored, or worse, reinforced through incompetence, catastrophe occurs. Organic journalism's primary focus is on catastrophic environments to inform a public about what has

happened and how to remove themselves from imminent tragedy or disruption. When the natural flow of civilization is jolted, there will be emotional and neurobiological shifts, which, in turn, will have a ripple effect. When there are too many ripples, a tidal wave, or even a tsunami of emotional reaction will alter social cohesion, leading to further disruption. The organic journalist must understand this effect: those whose livelihoods and egos hinge upon their titles and clout may take drastic and dubious actions to hide the extent of their incompetence to maintain power. It is not only the dangers of the catastrophic event which must be taken into the organic journalist's equations, but also what actions incompetent players will use to maintain their own status quo. Manipulation is the by-product of hiding or distorting catastrophe, especially if it was entirely avoidable.

The organic journalist must first understand the realm of danger of the actual locus of catastrophe before devising strategies to deal with the mechanics of the catastrophic environment. There are both physical dangers, but also psychological danger where emotional rights will be violated. To begin our understanding of the nexus of physical danger and manipulation, it is important that we look at major categories to compare and contrast their core characteristics:

Civil Unrest: Protests can turn violent. Riots and looting destroy cities and weaken social cohesion, trust, and incentive to rebuild as fear of loss prevent any form of physical or cognitive reinvestment. Regular citizens lose faith and trust. Those who protest are often desperate, primed, and who do not have power or control over their worsening situation. Other times, operatives will have incited groups of people into rioting as part of their theatre of misperceptions. There will be danger from protestors, operatives, saboteurs, police, and even the military as primal instincts will overpower rational thinking from each of these parties. Riots are high-stakes ecosystems where there is danger from both citizens and those brought in to quell unrest. There can be counter-protestors and citizens who will be armed with anything from guns to stones to defend themselves. Any of these factions will react violently if they perceive you as an outsider to distrust.

However, your job is not to look down on any of them or pass judgment, nor are you there to justify, excuse, or enable any violent behaviour as your job isn't to sympathize or play the part of a propagandist. You are there to observe reality. Do not speculate or hypothesise as you craft a narrative to push an agenda or sensationalise to gain attention. What is happening? Where is the epicentre of the problem? Who is there? How are emotions being manipulated? Are there signs of staging and sabotage? The more

neutral you are as you empirically gather information, the easier it will be to gain trust from each faction to extract factual information.

Most importantly, do not misclassify the level of discontent. Do classify a riot as a protest, but do not classify a protest as a riot. Be mindful of operatives who try to stir a public or are paid to cause damage to sully the reputation of those protesting. Finding forensic evidence and photographing and videotaping events to vet and verify later on is imperative. Narrative and sophistry are not information, but a mere interpretation of it. Look for facts.

Mass Shootings: When there is extreme violence, there is chaos. Primal and emotional literacies will be taxed and recollections will widely vary. It is crucial for journalists to get as many primary sources as possible before a fixed narrative is disseminated, meaning that important information which runs counter to the framing will be ignored, distorted, misappropriated for political means, or censored. It is essential that the journalist does not stoop to harvesting, propagandising, or exploiting tragedy and pain as a means to an end either directly or as a pawn, proxy or player.

Those who murder others on such a scale may be primed, mentally ill, or psychopathic. Motives will not be clear, and it is important to vet and verify facts so that the reality of the situation emerges. It is important to unobtrusively observe the scene carefully to see clues and to look at the nonverbal cues of those on the scene.

When we have information, we can develop lines of inquiry. For example, one mass shooting in Buffalo, New York was live-streamed on both Facebook Live and Twitch as reported in the *Buffalo News* on May 14, 2022:

Ten people were killed and three others were wounded – two of them critically – outside and inside a Tops supermarket on Jefferson Avenue on Saturday afternoon in what law enforcement officials described as a racially motivated hate crime.

A Buffalo police official at the scene and another source close to law enforcement confirmed the massacre at the supermarket prior to a late afternoon news conference.

“It’s like walking onto a horror movie, but everything is real. It is Armageddon-like,” said the police official at the scene. “It is so overwhelming.”

The gunman was dressed in body armour and armed with a high-powered rifle.

Police and prosecutors said they suspect the shooting had a racial motive.

“It was,” Erie County Sheriff John Garcia said, “straight up, a racially motivated hate crime.”

Unfortunately, despite giving no less than four journalists a byline in the article, none of these writers had been on the scene, had first-hand knowledge of the event, or went to the scene to gain insight. All information was culled from police and social media feeds. The *Buffalo News* article failed to mention that the alleged killer had live-streamed his crimes on Twitch, was not from the area, or that the reason why the police suspected it was a hate crime was because the murder weapon had a racial slur written on it and that the gunman, Payton Gendron, allegedly released a 106-page manifesto online on Discord prior to the shooting (it should be noted that this manifesto was heavily plagiarised from Brenton Harrison Tarrant’s 2019 manifesto before his mass shooting at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. It should also be noted that Tarrant live-streamed his crimes on Facebook Live).

Yet the *Buffalo News* wasn’t the only publication to mishandle the coverage. *Marca*, a Spanish-based news outlet, had far more details of the shooting, but veered into opinion and speculation without facts. As we cannot know the thoughts inside another person, we report on observable actions and audible words. While it is tempting to proffer untested theories and opinions, the journalist’s job is to deliver facts, a more difficult undertaking which has no substitute. Considering that the gunman wrote a manifesto online and live-recorded his crime, the bigger question that needed to be addressed was why, in all the talk of mass surveillance, was this killer unimpeded in his actions? A common misdirection can be a politician trying to leverage a tragedy with rhetoric to deflect attention away from the legislator’s own lapses and negligence. Gendron had made threats to his school in 2021 and had undergone a mental health evaluation. The *News* had published on July 3, 2019, boasting that the FBI was “tracking” potential gunmen, and yet the system was an ineffective one. Regardless of the motives of the crime, do not allow your dossier to become a vector for political grandstanding, especially if the decree comes minutes or hours after the event as an investigation takes days, weeks, or even months.

Hostage-Taking: While there may be casualties during a hostage-taking, there will be captives whose lives hang in the balance. Irresponsible

reporting can lead to catastrophic consequences and distress for families whose loved ones have been captured. However, it is also important not to become a useful tool to be manipulated as a means to an end: you must create a map of the dangers and of what has transpired. What vulnerabilities and signs are important? Often, hostage-takers will have a clear line of provenance, from grievances to manifestos. It is important to look for salient information without endangering yourself or others. Finding as much information about the breakdowns which lead to the danger should be your primary goal, then how the problem was handled, and then a portrait of those who took hostages.

Bombings: Here, there will be danger even after a device is detonated as rubble can collapse. There can be shrapnel, stampedes, fire, exposed wires, or any number of secondary or even tertiary aftershocks. Organic journalism is about finding paths to survival during times of danger, meaning that it is important to expose those dangers. Has the bomber been caught? Were there accomplices? Where is the epicentre of the destruction? Who has been injured? Where are the breakdowns? There will be gaps that will need to be filled, and you will not be able to provide a complete record. It is more responsible to admit where there is missing information than speculate and go off in an irrelevant direction.

Coup D'état: Political upheavals may seem chaotic and spontaneous; however, these events are often carefully-crafted foreign strategies of sabotage. As former US National Security Advisor John Bolton told CNN's Jake Tapper on July 12, 2022, when Tapper said that "one doesn't have to be brilliant to attempt a coup: "I disagree with that. As somebody who has helped plan coups d'état, not here, but ... other places. It takes a lot of work." As *Business Insider India* noted about the admission on July 13, 2022:

But Bolton rejected the notion that [former US President Donald] Trump's actions were part of a "carefully planned coup d'état aimed at the Constitution." Bolton portrayed the former president as too incompetent to be involved in such a plan.

"You have to understand the nature of what the problem of Donald Trump is. He's — to use a Star Wars metaphor — a disturbance in the Force," Bolton added. He said the former president's effort to overturn the election was "not an attack on our democracy" but "Donald Trump looking out for Donald Trump." Bolton made a similar point on CNN in 2021, stating that Trump wasn't "capable" of staging a coup because it requires "advance thinking, planning, strategizing, building up support."

Coups take resources and planning, and you will need to be careful, as their architects see nothing wrong with them. To trust the theatre can endanger you, and it is important to see events as optical misdirection meant to hide those players and patrons behind the games.

War: The most difficult of catastrophic environments to cover as there is not only physical danger and traumatic inhumanity, but also rampant propaganda and manipulation which deliberately keeps the violence going until some endgame is achieved from all sides. Journalists are viewed as useful pawns and proxies to spread deception, fear-mongering, and hate-mongering. Us versus Them paradigms are presented as reality, and resources are spent on refining the process of propaganda. There will be false flags, and false victims, and each of the warring factions will claim complete innocence despite the visible forensic evidence present. Your job isn't to be a propagandist's stenographer or dupe, but to provide a portrait of reality. Where are the dangers? How are the civilians surviving? How has propaganda been used?

However, there will be other factors which will make the job of journalists more difficult, from censorship to embedding. Do you know the geography? Do you know the language? Do you understand the customs? Do you know the Shibboleths? These are ever-changing variables that you will need to take into your journalistic equations, and rote binary 1 and 0 scaffoldings merely prolong destruction and justify violence. There are real dangers, but there are also *manufactured* ones, and you will have to make decisions about which atrocities are real, and which are theatre. There will be players who deceive you as a means to an end. You will be in harm's way and there is the risk of death either by a faction wishing to make a statement, or as collateral damage to ensure a propagandistic narrative isn't challenged. Many in this ecosystem will see you as a spy, further complicating your task as a journalist.

To add to this toxic system, many politicians may try to exploit the situation with photo ops to push a narrative of their bravery, even if there is no danger. For instance, if war is being fought in a large country, there will be many areas where there is no war, but the politician may try to exploit the public ignorance of the situation for political, or even personal gain. It is akin to someone going to New York for a publicity tour when a war is being battled in California. Photo ops are not news: they are advertising, and thus have little news value, and it is best not to treat PR as information, especially as there are real victims who are being ignored. Choose your focus and resources carefully and ethically.

It should be noted that war-based bigotry and prejudice will be exploited for financial gain: third parties wishing to sell weapons and gain power will denigrate *both* sides of opposing factions: one side will be deemed the Evil Lesser, which must be broken and tamed, while the other side will be deemed the Dumb Lesser, which will now forever need to be supervised as they are too feeble, uncultured, and unintelligent to look after themselves. Both sides will be infantilised and primed to feel untrustworthy and helpless, while the vested interests come into the area once both sides are too exhausted to pose a challenge to a refreshed third party. This classic Machiavellian gambit will be in play, and it is up to the organic journalist not to fall for the ruse. Not every warring side will carry a gun: many will be fighting through the use of nudging, gaslighting, and propaganda. Your mandate is to find the facts of a dangerous reality to show the truth.

Terrorism: Similar to war, terrorism has many of the same dynamics at play: the difference is that terrorism brings war-like conditions to a deemed “peaceful” country or area. There can be bombings, hostage-taking, mass shootings, or mass killings through a chemical attack, such as anthrax. These instances may or may not be predictable or common; however, you will still need to relay verifiable information without speculation. Some terrorists are lone wolves, while others are members of a group; still, others are being unwittingly manipulated and exploited by another actor who has targeted the individual for both their gullibility and their cognitive or psychological impairments. Some individuals have been lured, primed, and groomed in a cult-like fashion, and may have been manipulated through drugs, abuse, isolation, starvation, threats, or sleep deprivation. While the behaviour isn’t excusable, it is not up to the organic journalist to play armchair psychologist or judge. The mandate is to report on the dangers, and then find information for the news consumer to understand where the breakdowns and vulnerabilities occurred, and why.

Refugee exodus: Often in times of war or unrest, there will be a wave of people who flee their homes and go elsewhere for salvation. There will be both innocent civilians, but also criminal elements. Refugees from warring factions will go to the same host nations, bringing their unresolved animosity with them. Some refugees will be without a single resource, while others will either have their own resources, or the resources they plundered before leaving. Some refugees will be queue-jumping, while others will languish for years in limbo. Some families will be torn apart, while others will remain together. To paint a group of people with the same narrative brush is both irresponsible and deceptive, and it is up to the organic journalist to show the organic plurality of the situation.

There will be human trafficking and kidnapping. There will be smuggling and bribery. There will be exploitation of the desperate to accept dangerous and illegal jobs in factories or as domestic servants. There will be crime among the refugees who are now in a more desperate frame of mind and whose lives have been displaced.

Here, the reporting must look at various angles: who are the refugees and what brought them here? What criminal activity is happening to them, because of them, and why? Who is exploiting these individuals directly, or as a photo op for political gain? How is the host country dealing with the influx? How are these individuals housed? How are their medical issues addressed? How many resources are being used? Are these people being carefully integrated with a strategic plan, or left to their own devices in a foreign land? How will they be educated? Are they being shuffled from area to area or country to country? How are their psychological scars being addressed? What are the breakdowns? How long is the process taking? Who is exempt, and why?

Once we break down collectives and strip away arbitrary labels, we can examine both the individuals on a case-by-case basis to find patterns and issues, and see how well-equipped institutions are at handling the crisis. As we will see in Chapter 7, bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. By challenging folksy logic and contrived narrative, we break a toxic cycle of shading information as a form of psychological pacification. Your job is to serve as cartographer for reality, not to enable delusions or lull a news consumer into mistaking wishful thinking for reality.

Natural Disasters: Perhaps the most unpredictable events are natural disasters, from flooding to volcano eruptions. Hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, avalanches, and tornados can destroy homes, and roads, and cause the loss of electricity. Danger happens during the event, and after with long-term consequences. There may be an uptick in looting and homicides as well as domestic violence. Buildings can collapse or electrical wires can fall on people. Water systems can become polluted. Criminals can roam the streets looking for the vulnerable. There will be multiple dangers that will need to be addressed and followed through. You will need to know the frequency of such events occurring in the area, what was the emergency preparedness plan, and where there were vulnerabilities and neglect. Was the infrastructure neglected, causing additional problems? How were the vulnerable protected — or exposed to danger or even death?

Manufactured Disasters: There are those whose power comes through exploitation and parasitic gambits, and it is important to understand that criminals can wear expensive suits and hold positions of power. Many companies were shams that used deceptive methods for their business, such as Enron, WorldCom, Theranos, Business in Motion, Tyco, ZZZZ Best, Bre-X Minerals, and United Sciences of America. These individuals will first create too-good-to-be-true promises of instant wealth, but when they cannot deliver, use various techniques to hide the truth of the schemes. Other times, a manipulator who has been cornered will use any sort of deflection to hide the extent of their criminal activity and truly vulnerable position.

Other times, false tragedies will be invented for another's personal gain. Those with vested interests in creating distractions or false terror do so to either hide the true nature of their precarious situation, or the extent of their corruption and incompetence. Here, your job is to gauge the veracity of the disaster to see if it is a shield to hide a bigger scandal before determining who created the diversion and what is the gain from allocating resources in a sham. Most of all, you must be prepared to face threats, shaming, bullying, personal attacks, and accusations from their vested interest and be ready with counter and proactive strategies. The most effective starting point is looking at the financials of your suspected deceiver to see what financial incentives there are for the deception, as well as their financials prior to the manufactured disaster. If there is any financial benefit to either their threat or remedy, it is a red flag that perceptions are being misaligned with reality.

Police Brutality: There are times when those who are in charge of protecting society will go and harm citizens, either of their own volition or by orders from a government. Citizens are seen as lower on a pecking order, and the state decides to cause harm in the name of restoring order. There are serious systemic abuses and breakdowns when there is an abuse of power with no remedy. Governments will often create laws to hide such abuses, and yet journalists must expose these breakdowns. The legal strategy must be considered as much as taking precautions by documenting evidence with video, photographs, and any forensic evidence available. You will have to make a series of decisions: court and police records will be crucial as well as hospital records. Gaining confidences is important to get multiple perspectives, but it is equally essential to strip away narrative. Data extraction will be the best way of weighing facts as you quietly work to find enough information to create an accurate dossier that looks at all parties involved carefully and without narrative and speculation.