

**I Declare Factual Sovereignty
Re-imagining “Post-Fact” as Treaty Making
and How Mediation in Journalism Could Prevent a Dystopian Future**

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ABSTRACT:

Journalism is at the heart of the “post-fact moment” - it is roundly blamed by the public and political leaders.

Even before Facebook allowed mass re-interpretation of “truth”, The Guardian and others blurred the lines between fact and comment and their relative value. Combined with social media algorithms that favour the “viral”, the fracturing of identity has given rise to what can be termed “factual sovereignty”.

Instead of considering the current situation as a devaluing of facts, it is a rampant assertion of individuality, of interpreting feelings or “gut sense” as “truth”. My own factual sovereignty allows me to make treaties or war with others or even oppose previous personal positions because I am a sovereign entity determining facts.

Further, factual sovereignty reinterprets entitlement - i.e. who is entitled to establish a fact - redefining traditionally understood subjectivity as a new objectivity.

It is not a post-fact moment but a post-singular-fact moment in which exists a virtual string theory of multiple and co-existing facts. Facts being ubiquitous and meaningless, they are as non-existent as lies and hypocrisy become impossible.

The result of mass factual sovereign declarations is fear, the root of bigotry, racism, sexism and any other-ism where individuals decide the existential facts by which others live.

The solution which must come from journalism and more widely is diplomacy: mediation. Only through being able to understand the position of others, the factual shoes in which they claim to stand, can a virtual United Nations of agreed facts re-emerge.

Guilty as charged

Journalism is roundly and routinely blamed by presidents, paupers and publicans for the world's ills.

And why not? My profession has been filled with racist and sexist or misogynist content for more than a century. It has endorsed dictators and violence. It has acted in the interests of the few against our stated core belief to comfort the afflicted. And “journalism” is so broad and all encompassing a term that almost anyone and anything can don the hat and excuse peeping through the curtains and writing about what's going on behind them.

The term “fake news” represents a particular challenge because it is an attack on the profession from what most would – or should – acknowledge as being “outside” pretenders. It is used also to dismiss legitimate attempts at reporting and construct artificial universes, ones built to the attacker's own particular and usually unknowable motives.

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But the perceived illegitimacy of good “traditional” reporting – as opposed to the minority of our criminal, unethical or racist elements – started from our own inability and unwillingness to distinguish between fact and opinion.

Even before social media took hold, The Guardian launched “Comment is Free” in 2006 and it has become a dominant part of their online site. It helped them very successfully ascend as one of the top news websites in the world. While it might not be classed as “clickbait” in the sense of the lowest form of online media, it nevertheless attracted clicks. There is now comment on any and all subjects. If everyone loves a TV show or film, The Guardian will find the one person to say the opposite. And that gets clicks. (It might also be good epistemological strategy: a theory or judgment is only sound if something can be raised which falsifies it – the principle of falsification or “one-upped” verification theory.¹)

But I believe it had another effect: to blur the line between fact and opinion. It's fine for The Guardian to harken back to a core founding position, “comment is free, but facts are sacred”.² But the publication undermined facts constantly through pushing opinion and, whether rightly or wrongly, drove a constant questioning of any expertise, fact or authority. Conversely they do so from a very comfortable and “establishment” position themselves on a host of measures.

There are also, then, thousands of comments beneath each opinion article. It might be considered a “democratisation” of media, but it is more frequently a den of insults and accusations of bias and bile against either the contents of the preceding article, the person who wrote it or any and all of the responses to it.

Merge that with the Leveson Inquiry³ and the phone hacking scandal and The Guardian achieved both important reporting on and gleeful celebration in branding the rest of media as, at best, flawed. Pair this with decades of counterculture, anti-establishment movements rising and falling with the tide, and the rapid dissemination of personal technology devices and the decline of journalism was hastened rapidly forward.

Facebook and Google algorithms reward the “viral” as opposed to notions of quality or effort on the part of the originator of the content. In many pockets of the UK, there are more public relations staff at individual institutions than there are local reporters. If you are outnumbered and out-paid, how much do you need to rely on, let's call them “constructed facts”, through official statements and responses, as opposed to more “traditional” facts obtained by on-the-ground reporting? Are statistics put out through PR as opposed to obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation more or less accurate? My profession, in a vast number of organisations, only has the time to report on someone

1 The work of Karl Popper is relevant here though debates within philosophies of science and technology are so broad as to be simply beyond the capacity of this paper.

2 “Comment is free, but facts are sacred”, The Guardian, reprinting a piece from 1921 by CP Scott, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2002/nov/29/1>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

3 “Leveson Inquiry - Report into the culture, practices and ethics of the press”, November 29, 2012, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leveson-inquiry-report-into-the-culture-practices-and-ethics-of-the-press>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

else's figures rather than file an FOI ourselves.

And that staffing issue also means, daily, we have to ask the question: "Do I have time to approach this story from two sides?" in order to determine what's true. Frequently the answer is no. Does that matter for small fillers or a personal profile? Or is it still mandatory within a notion of journalistic puritanism?

Who defines news? Who gets to assign blame? Who should ask questions? Are "whatabout" questions online always invalid or hate-filled? When should we pause to learn or ask or consider? Is there a role for empathy or compassion? These are not just broad questions – they are fundamental to discussing facts and what I will introduce as "factual sovereignty".

Consider two examples before we get to that however.

Much was said after Brexit and the 2016 US presidential election about the economic argument, of people "left behind" and forgotten. The news media will often report official statistics saying pay is up, when the reality for many workers in many countries is a lack of pay rises and more likely pay cuts in real terms because of rising costs. The government statistic of "pay up" and the worker experiencing "pay down" are simultaneously true statements. When individualism is the rampant and dominant trait, it is the individual fact as truth as opposed to the media truth. But both exist.

More recently, in the discussion about if or when President Trump might be impeached, another impeachment story returned: that of Bill Clinton and his lie about Monica Lewinsky. Ms Lewinsky wrote in the New York Times how much the media loved the story *about* her, as opposed to her story. "'Monica was a news channel's dream come true.' Their dream was my nightmare. My character, my looks and my life were picked apart mercilessly."⁴

The media reported "truths", focusing on the *subject* – in this case, Ms Lewinsky. They lost sight of the *objective* of our job.

From food to culture to facts

The idea of factual sovereignty comes from a talk at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow on November 16, 2016.⁵

Visual artist and researcher Asunción Molinos Gordo spoke about the theories of food sovereignty by Peter Rosset in 1996. His chart summarises a corporate/capitalist food production system to the detriment of workers, society and the environment. In contrast, he offers a possible and indeed functioning model in some corners of the globe where food production is fulfilling of individual, community and environmental needs.

⁴ "Monica Lewinsky: Roger Ailes's Dream Was My Nightmare", by Monica Lewinsky, published May 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/22/opinion/monica-lewinsky-roger-ailess-dream-was-my-nightmare.html>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

⁵ "Food Sovereignty - Cultural Sovereignty", presented by Asunción Molinos Gordo on November 16, 2016. Summary of subject at <http://www.cca-glasgow.com/programme/food-sovereignty-cultural-sovereignty>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

Ms Molinos Gordo then proposed a similar dichotomy of a corporate, clickbait culture for the masses versus a “cultural sovereignty” that is fulfilling of human needs.

Food sovereignty:⁶

TABLE 16.1. Dominant model versus food sovereignty model

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Dominant model</i>	<i>Food sovereignty</i>
Trade	Free trade in everything	Food and agriculture exempt from trade agreements
Production priority	Agro-exports	Food for local markets
Crop prices	“What the market dictates” (i.e., leave intact the mechanisms that enforce low prices)	Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow farmers and farm workers a life with dignity
Market access	Access to foreign markets	Access to local markets; an end to the displacement of farmers from their own markets by agribusiness
Subsidies	While prohibited in the Third World, many subsidies are allowed in the United States and Europe but are paid only to the largest farmers	Subsidies that do not damage other countries via dumping are OK (i.e., grant subsidies only to family farmers, for direct marketing, price/income support, soil conservation, conversion to sustainable farming, research, etc.).
Food	Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated food that is full of fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and toxic residues	A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced
Being able to produce	An option for the economically efficient	A right of rural peoples
Hunger	Due to low productivity	Problem of access and distribution due to poverty and inequality
Food security	Achieved by importing food from where it is cheapest	Greatest when food production is in the hands of the hungry or when produced locally

Cultural sovereignty:⁷

ISSUE	DOMINANT MODEL	CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY
Culture	Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated culture that is full of fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup and toxic residues	A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, and locally produced
Production priority	Culture for exports	Culture to satisfy the local needs
Culture Prices	“What the market dictates” (leave the mechanisms that create both low culture prices and speculative culture price hikes intact)	Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow cultural producers a life with dignity
Market access	Access to foreign markets	Access to local markets; an end to the displacement of cultural producers from their own markets taken by big cultural business
Subsidies	While prohibited in the Third World, many subsidies are allowed in the US and Europe, but are paid only to the largest cultural producers	Subsidies are OK if do not damage other countries via dumping (i.e. grant subsidies only to small producers for direct marketing, price/ income support, culture conservation, conversion to sustainable culture production, research, etc.)
Being able to produce	An option for the economically efficient	People's right
Cultural Hunger	Due to low productivity	Problem of access and distribution due to poverty and inequality
Cultural Security	Achieved by importing culture	Greatest when cultural production is in the hands of the culturally hungry, or produced locally
Control over productive resources	Privatized	Under local community control
Access to culture	Via the market	Via cultural reform
Artist, intellectual and cultural producers	Anachronism, the inefficient will disappear	Guardians of culture and culture germplasm; stewards of productive resources; repositories of knowledge; internal marker and building block of broad-based, inclusive economic development
Credit and investment	From private banks and corporations	From the public sector
Dumping	Not an issue	Must be prohibited
Monopoly	Not an issue	The root of most problems
Overproduction	No such thing, by definition	Drives prices down and culture producers into poverty
Cultural technology	Industrial, monoculture, chemical-intensive;	Ecological and sustainable
Culture consumers	Workers to be paid as little and possible	Need living wages

6 From Peter Rosset, “Moving Forward: Agrarian Reform as a Part of Food Sovereignty”, chart sourced from Rosset 2003.

7 “Food Sovereignty/Cultural Sovereignty by Asuncion Molinos Gordo. Experimental chart based on Peter Rosset’s Food Sovereignty chart” provided by Ms Molinos Gordo on May 29, 2017.

In her talk, Ms Molinos Gordo said translating food into cultural sovereignty “puts those who produce, distribute and consume culture at the heart of cultural systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations”.⁸

She also said “people are searching for answers” and posited that “if each of us thinks of ourselves as a cultural producer ...” – and this was the key bit for me.

If “each of us thinks of ourselves” as a cultural producer, could “each of us” also think of ourselves as a factual producer?

The model assumes everyone wants the same future utopia on issues of cultural fulfilment, for example. But events last year such as Brexit and the US presidential election demonstrated, not for the first time, that there are significant populations who disagree with what could be oversimplified as “liberal” values or policies. This apparent split is most emphatically not new to history but was made more vocal and perhaps visceral through amplification in the “mainstream media” – and when I use this term, I mean Facebook, Twitter and social media as a whole; it is the mainstream now, not journalism.

With “each of us” in charge, powered by the new mainstream media, we arrive at factual sovereignty.

⁸ Asunción Molinos Gordo was kind enough to provide a copy of her chart and a summary of her idea by email on May 29, 2017. I include that full text in fairness to the original ideas which inspired my concept of factual sovereignty:

Back in 2010 I started developing the idea of “Cultural Sovereignty” as a conceptual framework for my art practice.

The idea of “Cultural Sovereignty” is rooted in the definition of “Food Sovereignty” given by the International Peasant Movement Via Campesina in the World Food Summit organized by FAO in Roma back in 1996. On a very basic definition we can say that “Food Sovereignty” puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.

On its translation to “Cultural Sovereignty” it could read as “puts those who produce, distribute and consume culture at the heart of cultural systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.” The idea of achieving “Cultural Sovereignty” it could be understood as a form of cultural emancipation in post-colonial contexts, where is the people’s right to define their own culture and cultural systems, according to the local needs, instead of adopting-consuming values imported by the external power, lacking any social backing.

During the talk in CCA I presented the conceptual kitchen behind the idea of “Cultural Sovereignty” in the form of a collective exercise, where I invited the members of the audience to define in their own terms what could it be “Cultural Sovereignty” when translating it directly from Peter Rosset’s chart.

The points I was emphasising during the talk were three:

A. The peasantry has an intellectual output; they are not merely food growers, but primarily knowledge producers.

B. The term “Food Sovereignty” is one of the most fruitful intellectual contributions to the contemporary discourse around policymaking in agriculture and it is a product of this peasantry intellectual production (Pensamiento Campesino).

C. The term can be adopted by the art communities when reconsidering our cultural practice. That is to say: Are we artists producing to satisfy the cultural needs of our contexts or we are producing to feed the global market?

During the presentation I did not offer any conclusion, but rather I open up the term for collective interpretation, that is why you probably got the impression I was just exploring ideas about “Cultural Sovereignty”.

The way I’ve develop the idea of “Cultural Sovereignty” over the last seven years, is not as a theory but as a artistic practice, using it as a barometer to evaluate the projects I have been putting forward and examining them according with that criteria. Were the works I produced helping to emancipate people’s thinking? Were they culturally serving the communities? Were they contributing to the strengthen of local culture?

How factual sovereignty works

Factual sovereignty is a declaration by an individual, group or organisation that their facts are separate and free from those belonging to others. It is divisible, fluid and beyond challenge.

A lie, in pre-factual sovereignty days, meant a statement that was given while known to be untruthful. Now, a lie is impossible because an individual or group can merely hold that their current facts were sovereign to those held by others, or to their own facts at an earlier time. Their future facts can also be sovereign.

Many of the discussions about the political events of 2016 have been on the nature of asserting national or even racial sovereignty. And a diverging vein from those arguments is about media reporting – or failing to – “truth” or voters' “true values” and the public not seeing their views reflected except through the lenses of limited social media feeds.

What has actually happened to a new extreme in 2016 is individuals declaring factual sovereignty in all but name.

It is said regularly now that we live in a “post-fact” world, sometimes one with “alternative facts”.⁹ These are two separate things. Post-fact suggests a rejection of what is accepted as facts only by one group, typically those on the political left. “Alternative facts” is closer to describing a system of sovereign declaration, at that particular moment, from other facts. It is a declaration of factual sovereignty. And “fake news” is utilised on both sides of the factual sovereignty wars to dismiss contrary “facts”.

Sovereignty allows for the constant redefining of ones own facts. “We hold these truths to be self-evident”¹⁰ only applies to what you choose to be true. Declare sovereignty and you can ignore the truths of others. They are only self-evident if you hold them yourself.

We are told there are no systems or institutions worthy of respect, that all experts are meaningless (conversely while university educations still supposedly matter to some employers and all governments), that “establishments” must be torn down. By extension, they are all invalid. And you exist apart from them – sovereign of the state and its actors and of other citizens.

For years, there has been a growing online assertion that “I know I'm right” with little challenge except for yelling, much of that encouraged by TV “news”. And it resulted in a viewing/reading public who knew they were no longer a universal public but instead living in isolation.

Social media and its societal extensions in the real world don't require you to believe anything unless you *want* to believe it.

Unlike epistemology, you don't need to see something for it to be factual or real. Merely the whiff of suggestion is enough to know a statement is factual to you, in that self-

⁹ Kellyanne Conway first used the term during an interview with Chuck Todd on NBC's Meet the Press on January 22, 2017. Clip available at <https://twitter.com/MeetThePress/status/823184384559878144>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

¹⁰ United States Declaration of Independence, 1776.

declared sovereign state of facts. Each sovereign state has its own state broadcaster in the form of one's own Facebook page or social media feed, beyond challenge from enemies both foreign and domestic.

If President Trump or Kellyanne Conway assert that “liberals” or the “media” are taking tweets and statements “too literally”,¹¹ it’s because the tweets are factually sovereign from themselves. Tweet A at time XX:XX can be a fact in its moment but no other. It can be used as evidence or considered false simultaneously and without contradiction. Democrats won the popular vote but those votes were illegal. Both are statements held as truth and completely isolated from each other.

When there is agreement between sovereign states of facts, in the form of retweets or mass produced placards or hats, this can be considered fact treaties. The facts continue to act independently but can trade in mutual support and reassurance.

Need to back up your facts? Draw on those from your treaties on social media to support them. If you feel inclined to believe climate change, you are in alliance or a treaty with those who hold those facts to be true.

There have always been individuals and institutions who refused to believe what was scientific fact or measured proofs, self-declared or actual experts. But where once a majority accepted facts or proofs, individuals now declare their facts as sovereign to those of others. The media only reports the “truth” if it is a fact already known to those held by the audience.

A person does not have their own self-worth unless someone else assigns them value. To some, the homeless only have “value” when a racist declares “we should care about our own homeless” before refugees. By the same token, you can call the statement or speaker “racist” but that’s your designation or perhaps that of a court. It is a fact determined by your sovereign views of someone else. There might be a collective treaty establishing that the statement or person is racist, but it remains an externally determined “fact”.

Are there facts? Yes. Can diverse people agree on them? Yes. But do they? And are sovereign actors always aware of the treaties they’re making through their reactions on social media, such as with likes or retweets?

Though $2 + 2$ currently equals 4, there is nothing to prevent a shift to it equaling 5. Authoritarian regimes already change facts or deny them to ensure power is maintained. They have taken a Hobbesian “knowledge is power”¹² concept and twisted it to an extreme Machiavellian control. “Fake news” and twisted narratives can also attract treaties from sovereign actors and take on lives of their own, quite apart from those created by

¹¹ This has been said a few times but one example is Congressman Devin Nunes in a press conference on March 7, 2017, available at <https://www.usatoday.com/videos/news/nation/2017/03/07/nunes-media-take-trump-tweets-too-literally/98879796/> and accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

¹² I reference Thomas Hobbes' *scientia potentia est* from “Leviathan”, 1668, though the older version by Imam Ali (599-661 CE) and recorded in the 10th century “Nahj Al-Balaghah” Arabic text is equally applicable.

authoritarian figures. Those actors have the ability to make treaties as easily in states of rabid freedom of expression such as the US, or hyper repressive ones such North Korea and increasingly Turkey.

It is a mistake of the current attitude of many that your sovereign enemies are “too stupid” to know the correct treaty to make. Easy examples would be both the Scottish independence or EU referendums where there were subsequent arguments that the “correct” result would happen when the older generation died out. Or the recent UK election where polling night drinking games encouraged Tories to drink bleach.¹³



Furthermore, unlike Hobbes' Leviathan, a sovereign actor is not necessarily calculating – they can innocently and genuinely make a treaty and they are entitled to. Whether stupid or calculating, we are advocating declaring swathes of persons as inhuman, illegitimate or incapacitated because of one or several treaties. Of course, in much of the world where individuals are denied voting rights, incarcerated at higher rates, killed because of gender or race, treaty choices can be incidental to dehumanisation or central to it. This is a form of war between sovereign actors, expressed through a range from angry, derogatory or criminal Tweets, to extrajudicial killings.

The new objectivity

Factual sovereignty is driven by individuality in particular – but if it is all about the individual, does that make it subjective?

Perhaps, now, the subjective-objective dichotomy has been turned inside out. If your agreement or treaty with a fact is made in the digital space, then it is disconnected from

13 Screen grab from Facebook, originally posted June 8, 2017. Unknown origin.

humanity – it can exist forever, irrespective of place or the original actor who created the sovereign fact. This new digital sovereign nation of facts is set apart from any of its constituent actors' subjects and can therefore be objective truth. Even if it is just a nation of one, its facts are objective truth thanks to that isolating and digital space.

Nobody is lying anymore. There is no demarcation necessary between news and “fake news” because it is for the factually sovereign to make treaties with or declare war upon the content.

The consumer of content is supreme over producers of content, because they decide whether to acknowledge its existence and then judge its worth or “truth”. This has been advocated for many years by the press axion of "give the people what they want". Now consumers can spin their own reality.

Like the analogy of the tree in the forest, if the audience doesn't click content about an event, that event didn't happen – there are no factually sovereign individuals willing to agree the event happened. If one factually sovereign individual says it did and five say it didn't, then the will of the majority holds sway and it didn't happen.

It is a variation of the court case where a jury decides the facts. What the accused and the complainer may argue as factual can be different in turn from the agreed decision of a jury. Each party is factually sovereign, and within the jury itself the members can agree or not. And if the accused refuses to accept that verdict, they can challenge it and it may be found, in time, to be incorrect if a judge or panel decide the objective truths of the jury members were not in treaty with their own objective truths, whether in facts or in law.

The *belief* that a sovereign fact is true is central to turning the formerly subjective into a new objective. Telling someone they're wrong isn't enough to dissuade them from that belief. Subjectivity has been turned on its head.

The end of truth and lies, love and hate

In editions 62-64 of JLA (Justice League of America),¹⁴ Wonder Woman encounters two, equally valid but conflicting truths. At an impasse, it shatters her lasso of truth. How can she protect truth if truth is subjective? And then, peoples' beliefs become manifest. The more people that believe a “fact” the stronger the change in “reality”. The earth becomes flat for a few hours. Criminals are let go by saying they didn't commit crimes. The moon is made of cheese. Batman pops in and out of existence because, to some, he is an urban myth. The whole Justice League change to reflect how society sees them.

Once you begin to frame things within the factual sovereignty model, you remove the hand break on a reality that careens out of control. And we must push it along so we can see its extreme. Because at its furthest potential, factual sovereignty brings a near endless war across a nihilistic void.

¹⁴ JLA, #62-64, written by Joe Kelly, art by Doug Mahnke, Tom Nguyen and David Baron, DC Comics, New York, 2002.

There would be no lies, no hypocrisy, no abuse, no crime, no courts, no hate, no adultery, no love, that is, unless it was imposed by extremist political or religious doctrines imposing truth.

Indeed there is a gravitation towards that because the public is adrift – or has been convinced they are – from any sense of moral, ethical or factual truth. It is the furthest realisation of the white libertarian dream where individual rights lead to mass sovereign declarations, something present frequently in America in particular with secessionist or isolationist movements. But factual sovereignty goes an extra length because there are no agreed facts unless treaties are made and even then they are constantly in flux and simultaneously valid and invalid.

Can you commit a hate crime if your sovereignty declares the person you hate is not a person at all, or, as Trump says of reporters, the “lowest form of life”?¹⁵ Can love be possible if notions of fidelity or equality or abuse or manipulation are not anchored beyond individual moral facts?

The post-singular-fact moment

In an interview last year, former US Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich created an entire universe for his sovereign facts.

Gingrich: The next two weeks are a contest of two parallel universes....

Kelly: All of the polls in Pennsylvania have her [Clinton] ahead.

Gingrich: I know! I just told you! We have two alternative universes right now.

The Washington Post created a fictional conversation following on from this to describe a “Many Worlds theoretical framework”¹⁶ – we have achieved the multiverse.¹⁷

15 President Trump at a rally in Erie, Pennsylvania, August 12, 2016, as reported in “Donald Trump’s Other Campaign Foe: The ‘Lowest Form of Life’ News Media”, New York Times, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/13/us/politics/donald-trump-obama-isis.html>, accessed most recently on June 25, 2017.

16 The Washington Post’s spoof of this is quite funny but a good illustration of the potential: “Megyn Kelly, Newt Gingrich and the universe wars” by Alexandra Petri, published October 26, 2016, Washington Post. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/wp/2016/10/26/megyn-kelly-newt-gingrich-and-the-universe-wars/>, accessed most recently on June 26, 2017.

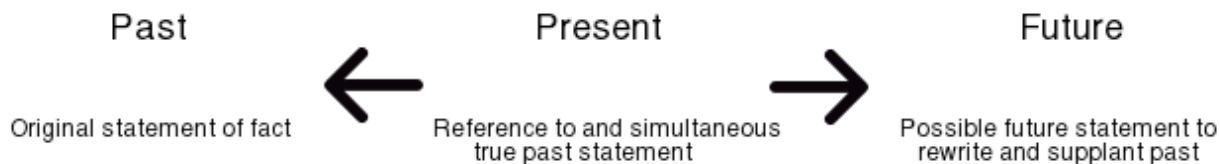
17 I am using this term in the sense of splintered realities where multiple states are possible at the same time. “Multiverse” was first coined in 1896 by the philosopher and psychologist William James and his single use of it is worth noting. “We of the nineteenth century, with our evolutionary theories and our mechanical philosophies, already know nature too impartially and too well to worship unreservedly any God of whose character she can be an adequate expression. Truly, all we know of good and duty proceeds from nature; but none the less so all we know of evil. Visible nature is all plasticity and indifference,—a moral multiverse, as one might call it, and not a moral universe. To such a harlot we owe no allegiance; with her as a whole we can establish no moral communion; and we are free in our dealings with her several parts to obey or destroy, and to follow no law but that of prudence in coming to terms with such other particular features as will help us to our private ends. If there be a divine Spirit of the universe, nature, such as we know her, cannot possibly be its *ultimate word* to man. Either there is no Spirit revealed in nature, or else it is inadequately revealed there; and (as all the higher religions have assumed) what we call visible nature, or *this world*, must be but a veil and surface-show whose full meaning resides in a supplementary unseen or *other world*.” From “The Will To Believe”, paragraph 44, William James, Longmans, Green, and Co, London, 1896. Full text available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm>, accessed most recently on June 21, 2017.

Some journalism thinkers have advocated the primacy of speed in reporting, above all else, making truth a “process” more than a collection of verified facts.¹⁸

Similarly, WikiLeaks offers a self-proclaimed approach to information and documents where the subject matters more than its truth, accuracy or context. Publish and let others verify, if they are so inclined.¹⁹

The screenshot shows a tweet from the account @wikileaks. The profile picture is a sand timer icon. The tweet reads: "#MacronLeaks archives are now available as uncensorable magnet links archive.is/aULcm". Below the tweet, it says "@WikiLeaks is still assessing content." A screenshot of a web page titled "https://macronleaks.github.io/" is shown, with the URL, a timestamp ("archived 6 May 2017 03:02:47 UTC"), and the "archive.is" logo. Below the screenshot, engagement metrics are listed: RETWEETS 3,380, LIKES 3,248, and a row of small icons for sharing. At the bottom, there are additional metrics: 335 replies, 3.4K retweets, and 3.2K likes.

Truth in this approach, and more widely, is defined as something stated in the past which remains true at all moments in the present until there is an abstract and unknown and/or unpredictable future correction.

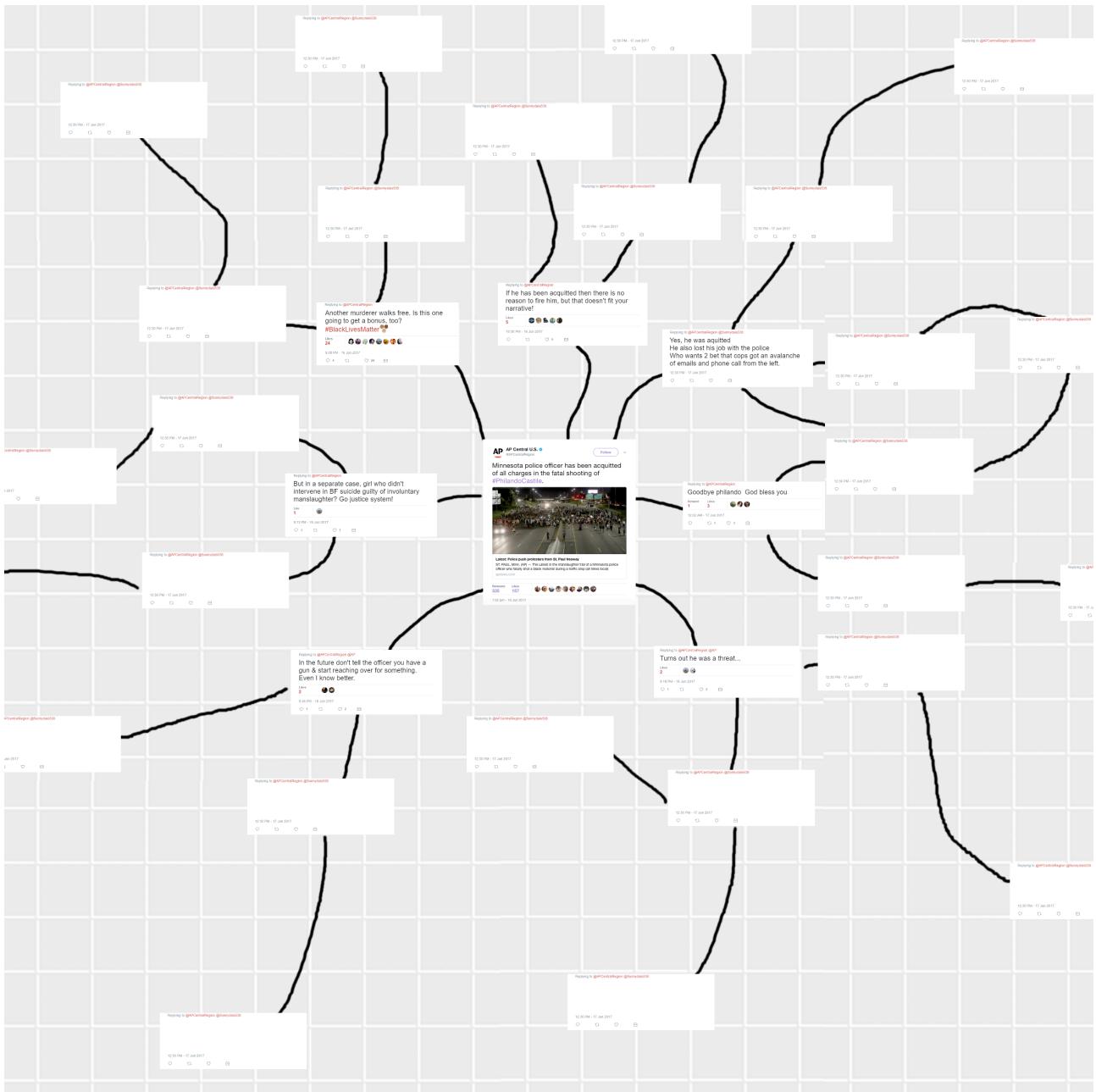


But this model presumes only a singular fact is true, in a linear temporal context. And factual sovereignty dictates any actor can assert any truth, any where and at any time, breaking out from a linear progression.

18 Jeff Jarvis is a particular advocate of journalism as process, including when he had to apologise for a tweet in haste about the identity of the Newtown shooter in 2012 (<http://buzzmachine.com/2012/12/14/i-confess-a-journalistic-sin/>). Other links worth examining are <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/07/business/media/07ping.html>, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-jarvis/product-v-process-journal_b_212325.html and <http://www.poynter.org/2011/jarvis-solves-the-case-of-the-missing-carr-tweet/125706/>, all most recently accessed on June 25, 2017.

19 Screen grab of tweet from @wikileaks of May 6, 2017, 4.14am BST.

The individual is entirely in control. They have been handed the tools with which to determine facts they like or dislike. Each interaction on social media, and sometimes conflicting ones, is a new factually sovereign moment. And each is connected to a single or multiple actors. The splintering effect would look the same as a string theory of temporal choices.²⁰



The swathes of retweets can either agree and be in treaty, or disagree and be at war with the original fact. If one group is larger, is that a sufficient domination for the original statement to be determined true or false? If journalism fails to report, replicate or mirror

²⁰ This graphic, created by Liam Pollock, is a rough illustration of what would be difficult to depict in practice.

perfectly all the multiple sovereign truths, then is it biased? Is it fake news? (And I use the broad sense here to include the fabricated stories and the proper journalistic ones Trump doesn't like.)

Given the only way to express the "truth" of the factual sovereignty string map or multiverse would be to replicate it exactly, and given that that is impossible because the multiverse is constantly changing and evolving, then reporting or journalism in all forms is dead.

Discourse, too, is dead. Communicating the world around us is impossible because of the shifting sands of information – simultaneously stationary and moving, infinitely replicated and unique, true and false, fixed in time and rejected because of its relative position in time. It would be more akin to a subatomic particle than a presidential tweet. And like subatomic physics, you would have to describe only the potential states of existence, not the existence of fixed and knowable states or, in this case, facts.

If new tweets supplant old ones, then by extension past news ceases to exist. History has no meaning. Indeed it has been undermined already by revisionism, by racism, by presidents, by voters.

Syria is a perfect example of a factual multiverse, constantly in flux, endless factions changing sides and alliances and all with deadly consequences. Pinning down who is the "enemy" can change building to building, bullet to bullet. Past alliances can be denied, asserted, ignored, twisted by multiple groups and individuals at the same time. Reporting all that is simply impossible.

In the journalism world, the Daily Mail is often mocked for reporting the veritable cornucopia of foods and items that cause cancer. It asserts each science report as fact, even when it contradicts something from the day before. But from that constant uncertainty and changing universe, it gains sales. And politicians, in turn, proclaim to offer the public "order" or "hope" in response to such a multiverse.

Factual sovereignty can offer instant gratification, immediately asserting what is true or not. Understanding the links between or the multiverse map of factually sovereign moments is much harder. When memes, The Independent or Twitter reactions reduce everything to singular factually sovereign moments with which to make treaties or war, what's left is just those moments. It is the quick fix versus wisdom.

The multiverse is too complex to understand, constantly in flux and ripping apart any notions of stabilities in "truth", love, morality, self, *et cetera*. And so treaties, although contradictory and naturally part of the multiverse, allow the plotting of a path through that map. You simply push forward and ignore the contradictions and changing factually sovereign moments to assert a stability which is, by definition, impossible. But you believe it to be there, allowing and requiring you to dismiss any challenge or contrary sovereignty. It assumes war with all others because it is the only hope of maintaining a stable thread of self.

The potential goodness of factual sovereignty

There are, however, examples of factual sovereignty that are valid and valuable.

Indigenous knowledge

Jesse Thistle is a Métis-Cree from Saskatchewan, connecting intergenerational trauma to historical research in new ways, healing himself and winning awards along the way for his work. In an interview with CBC last year, he said: “I’m trying to rewrite history the way that I understand it. Yeah, I might be breaking a lot of the rules but I think in a lot of ways that makes it more readable for people and more relatable. It’s not just looking at history to have a history, it’s a very proactive way of using history.”²¹ By interviewing members of his own family and recording oral histories, Mr Thistle can revisit more than a century of history written from outside those stories, usually by oppressors. Unlike some sort of historical revisionism of the sort that denies crimes such as the Holocaust, this is rewriting history by putting the subject back into what would once be considered – and would still be argued to be by traditional historians – as “objective” truth about the past.

Kim TallBear is an associate professor at the University of Alberta and a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate in South Dakota and descendant from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes of Oklahoma. Amongst a vast array of work, she focuses on the “historical and ongoing roles of science and technology (technoscience) in the colonization of Indigenous peoples and others”.²²

We want to call attention to emerging research in which scientists are rethinking their research questions such that they reflect not only a “European” view of historical events (including genomic events) and values about which knowledge is important to produce but also which address a broader array of standpoints, thus resulting in a broader array of “truths.”²³

Just as the example of Henrietta Lacks stripped out the person from the “facts” of the HeLa cells,²⁴ Kim TallBear is asserting Indigenous people as subjects, not objects to be owned by scientific “fact” or knowledge. The argument that scientific “truth” is egalitarian or transcends subjects because it is objective treats Indigenous peoples, instead, as objects. Indigenous peoples and their approach are factually sovereign from outside scientists.

21 “Return of the Michif Boy: Confronting Métis trauma”, CBC radio Ideas, originally aired March 23, 2017. Available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/return-of-the-michif-boy-confronting-métis-trauma-1.4037672>, accessed most recently on June 21, 2017.

22 Personal website of Kim TallBear, <http://www.kimtallbear.com>, accessed most recently on June 25, 2017.

23 Reardon, Jenny, and Kim TallBear. “Your DNA Is Our History”: Genomics, Anthropology, and the Construction of Whiteness as Property.” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 53, no. S5, 2012, pp. S233–S245. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662629.

24 Skloot, Rebecca, “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks”, Crown Publishers, New York, 2010. Further information available at <http://www.lacksfamily.net/index.php> and <http://rebeccaskloot.com/the-immortal-life/>, both accessed most recently on June 25, 2017.

Dementia patients / memory

For those living with dementia, past and present blur. Facts are meaningless.

When my great aunt, now 97, lost her only child suddenly two years ago, she was understandably distraught. But, as she lives with dementia, she can frequently refer to him as though he is still alive. Her memory, moment to moment, is factually sovereign. And that's okay. She is not lying. She is not giving fake news.

Only compassion can confront an almost real unreality. It is a sure example of why expecting a stable and solid knowable is not universally possible. A person living with dementia is factually sovereign and we are merely visiting their universe.

"Crime" and facts

I'd like to look at two examples of the literal court of facts and how justice systems determine "truth". As a defence solicitor recently told a jury, "it is not a fact until you decide it is". In a court of law, facts are for others to judge and validate.

In the first example Matthew Conn writes about the "sexologists" of 1920s Germany, where legislation was so broad that judges relied on expert witnesses to describe the character of individuals to convict them of homosexual crimes without evidence of actual acts.

One court case included details of "tests' of the defendant's sexual character, including obtaining a writing sample and a description of the contents of his trouser pockets. The purpose of these inquiries was not to ascertain whether Heinz M. Had engaged in sexual intercourse with Hermann S., but rather to sketch the former's sexual character – or as the state prosecutor Stegemann put it, 'the picture of one's personality' was to be determined 'from the question of his sexual integrity (*Unbescholtenheit*)'."²⁵

The public took great interest in the lurid details but also the competing sexual theories and debates on the "objectivity" of experts. But there were also more appeals of offences "against morality", rising in Prussia from 23,000 pardons in 1919 to 125,000 in 1921.

Press analysis of another case concluded: "We should be weary of the dirty fingers of this pseudo-scientist (*Afterwissenschaftler*)... polluting the public sphere with his self-made products of perversity. The circulation of his dodgy (*windige*) hypotheses regarding notorious facts are a sign of the times (*ein Zeichen der Zeit*)."²⁶

Sexologist Albert Moll asserted, despite concerns from others about young witnesses, that, "a young boy ... is the best observer and witness there is. He observes everything that occurs with interest, synthesises events without prejudice, and reproduces them accurately, while the girl of the same age is often an unreliable, even dangerous witness'. "²⁷

25 Matthew Conn, *Medical History*, vol. 56(2), pp 201–216, Cambridge University Press, 2012
doi:10.1017/mdh.2011.33.

26 Ibid. p207.

27 Ibid. p214.

In a 2016 court case involving sexual assault and sending sexual messages to girls under the age of 16, "Hannah"²⁸ was one of the survivors, aged 13 at the time of the offences. Of the charges she gave evidence in court on, three were guilty by a majority, one not proven – a distinctly Scottish verdict – and one not guilty by a majority.

That makes for a complex mix of agreements and rejections of facts by a jury of 15 people. Hannah, who I have interviewed before on her case, agreed to answer questions about the nature of facts and truth in her experience of the justice system.

1. When you gave evidence in court, how certain were you in recollecting everything that happened? Obviously when time passes, people forget specific details - some don't matter, some get picked up on by the defence, *et cetera*. How did you distinguish fact (i.e. "I know this happened") versus feelings (i.e. "I felt like this"). Is there a difference? Did you feel giving evidence that describing how you felt was, for you, a fact or truth?

When giving my evidence in court, despite it being such a nerve wrecking experience, knowing what happened was the most prominent thing in my mind. I feel after giving so many statements to the police and being asked so many questions before the trial even began, I do feel now that I was standing up to give "facts" rather than the "truth". Everything I said in court was definitely all the truth but the whole experience made it feel as if I was to stand up and say the correct things then leave? My feelings came out a lot during the trial in my opinion so although I knew everything that happened was correct feelings get mixed in which I had no control over and I can imagine anyone else in my situation would have been the same. I would definitely say there is a difference between fact and feelings based on this.

2. When you went through cross examination, did you question your own memory at times or how you described what happened? If you describe an event with slightly different words, for example, is it still true? Or is the truth hard to put into words so you're just trying to describe the almost impossible to describe?

Cross examination was definitely the hardest part without doubt. I never once questioned my own memory. Word choice was definitely a down fall for me I would say as it allowed the man who was cross examining me to pick up on small things and twist it to make it seem like I didn't know what I was talking about. The truth is so hard to explain so yes I would say it can be almost impossible to describe.

3. Obviously in the case of one of the charges, it was a not guilty verdict and three others it was guilty by a majority and one was not proven. How did that feel going through the court process? If a jury and justice system decides something didn't happen, but you know it did, how do you feel? How do you sort that out in your own head?

²⁸ I have changed the name of this interviewee from previous reporting coverage to further protect her anonymity and the name "Hannah" has no connection to anyone on this particular case.

When the jury decides that something didn't happen it is heart breaking. You just have to sit and take it. You can do nothing. It's annoying as it's a matter of someone's opinion and even though I gave my evidence they still did not believe me. Even a year on I'm still not over it – some days I can't get it out of my head. I think it's just a matter of moving on but yet it's so hard. Despite a jury not believing some facts, it's great to have family members and friends behind you 110 per cent which is what I think helped me the most.

4. You experienced the trial via social media as well. When people accused you of lying online, and others reacted to those comments or statuses, how did you interpret a “like” or other emoticon from others? And why do you think some didn’t believe what you knew to be true? Did they believe a different truth? Did they not ask you for yours? When people discuss what did or didn’t happen online, how is that different from being in a court of law?

Social media is a big part of my life (and is to many others too haha) so seeing people discuss something so sensitive about yourself is very difficult. The people who said things weren't true, in my case, didn't know “my side” of the story – they only knew his. This was SO ANNOYING as they didn't even know half of the facts and didn't even attend the court case to find out. I definitely think that in a court of law, people distinguishing what did and didn't happen is a lot easier as they know the full story but on social media no one knows both sides. In a court of law a jury hears from both the witnesses and the defendant so they can form a fair opinion but people online can't – purely as they don't know the facts! Even though the whole process was very hard social media was the worst to deal with.

As well as formal judging of facts and “truth”, a court case is then reported on. By almost any measure, the press cannot capture every moment of a case – whether print reporting, live tweeting or other methods, there will be edits. Similarly, if it was a US court being broadcast on TV, what happens if an audience member turns away? What happens if a jury member switches off during key evidence? What happens to facts in this case? Given the multiple variations and nuances of reporting on Hannah's or anyone else's case, and the interpretations of “truth” drawn by an audience who may or may not even read the reporting, factual sovereignty creates the potential multiverse or string theory of truth, but one which is both vital to society and deeply flawed.

Reporting, mediation and salvation from the dystopian nightmare

Simply disengaging from subjects, persons or, if you will, the factually sovereign, doesn't work. Dehumanising them doesn't make them disappear. And reporters must speak to anyone and everyone – it is our job.

But speaking doesn't always mean people listen. The public says they want facts but won't choose articles in which they are included or represented²⁹ – a public of sovereign

²⁹ “Why audiences hate hard news – and love presenting others”, [theatlantic.com](https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/news-kim-kardashian-kanye-west-benghazi/372906/), June 17, 2014. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/06/news-kim-kardashian-kanye-west-benghazi/372906/>, accessed most recently on June 25, 2017. One notable line is this: “Ask audiences what they want, and they'll tell you vegetables. Watch them quietly, and they'll mostly eat candy.”

actors who make fact treaties but won't determine on what basis the treaty exists. It is agreement without mediation, without content – an audience flailing at an empty stage. There is responsibility – ie treaties – but no effort.

The factually sovereign demand facts from reporters. They demand the factchecking of other actors. But they will not do any research themselves. And they will not buy newspapers or click fact-checked links. They want easy treaties – a treaty based on minimal effort and the gut, the quick fix. It is debatable whether that's because there is too much information or the multiverse of factually sovereign moments is so overwhelming, or because they long for a more paternalistic or authoritarian dictated parliament of compliant sovereignties.

What is their responsibility then and what is that of reporters and journalism?

If 10 people witness a crash and a reporter speaks to two or five of them, is the resulting “true” report accurate? Does a statement of factuality have more or less truthfulness if it itself comes from a media outlet in New York versus Langston, Oklahoma?

What makes a truth true? Immigrants to the UK must pass a “Life in the UK” test, for example, including a question on the percentage of the United Kingdom's population made up of ethnic minorities.³⁰ In this case, only immigrants are required to learn census-based facts. Immigrants are factually sovereign from citizenry.

None of this is a statement against the need for more voices, for more diverse voices, nor is it excusing the complacency, mistakes, or even crimes by journalism. But if factual sovereignty exists, then it creates a potential weighting or hierarchy that is as open to abuse and manipulation as it is perhaps liberating. The truth of a court case witness is just as easily rejected by a jury as a tweet by Trump: a judgement is made on “truth” by 12 or 15 or 60 million or a billion people. Why is it believed or disbelieved? How are we meant to report “accurately” when two or 10 or millions may reject a truth but it remains truth for one individual?

This approach to understanding the mass individualising of facts is not an endorsement of the content of #PizzaGate, of the Hillsborough lies printed by The Sun, of Holocaust denial or any such lie/fiction. But that individuals advocate them as true, whether meaningfully or for attention, is undeniable. Simply stating they aren't true is no longer sufficient because, to those sovereign entities, no amount of evidence is enough to surrender their sovereignty and agree with that of someone else. This is true even when “their” sovereign positions are, in fact, created by someone else in the first place, for example President Trump. There is no removing his factual sovereignty.

When Mr Dickerson asked whether Mr Trump stood by his characterization of Mr Obama as “sick and bad,” the president appeared to become agitated and

³⁰ Practice test 10, p151. “British Citizenship Test: Study Guide”, 2nd edition, Red Squirrel Publishing, 2006. The answer is B. Figures match those 2001 statistics quoted on p36 of “Life in the United Kingdom: A Journey to Citizenship” noting the “white” population is 92 per cent of the UK. TSO (The Stationery Office), 2007.

said, "You can take it any way you want."

"I have my own opinions," Mr Trump continued, as Mr Dickerson tried in vain to ask him for an explanation. "You can have your own opinions."³¹

Could we aim for a sovereignty cease fire, where we remain sovereign but have a capacity to ask questions and consider the sovereignty of others?

The root of journalism is asking questions. And those ideally open questions – "Tell me what happened" – are identical to those of mediation or peacebuilding. The only difference between the professions is journalism reports on the conflict, mediation tries to resolve it. Reporters can, I believe, do both. We are ideally placed to ask questions and to bring people together face to face, not just digitally.

Mediation is the term but empathy and compassion are the root necessities. Understanding the positions of others is a core requirement of journalism. Think of us as the translators of a United Nations of factually sovereign actors. We put them in a room, act as go betweens, and see what treaties emerge.

Mediation is always voluntary – we cannot force someone to talk, nor to listen. But the invitation should be made. Many would never talk to each other and the digital world is an easy way to avoid ever meeting and looking at another person. But reporters are perhaps best placed to try.

There are challenges, of course. In mediation, you must always be on the look out for a potential power imbalance, whether gender, racial, employment, economic or other. How does mediation avoid the "I told you so" triumphalism that drives people sovereign? How can journalism inform without preaching? Or should it preach? Is the job of informing inherently preaching and imposing a dominant sovereign position on other sovereignties?

During the 2017 White House Correspondents' Dinner, the famed journalist duo, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, spoke about their work during Watergate, a story told repeatedly. But consider some key lines.

Mr Bernstein said: "We're reporters, not judges, not legislators. What the government or citizens or judges do with the information we've developed, is not our part of the process, nor our objective. Our job is to put the best obtainable version of the truth out there. Period. Especially now."³²

Like reporters, mediators are meant to be entirely neutral. Rather than solutions journalism – or endless commentaries – where we tell others how to fix the world, we need to bring others together so they can decide how to fix it.

Can everyone be brought together? Is this a "Kum ba yah" moment for the world? No. As I've said, mediation is voluntary, as is journalism – I can't force anyone to speak to me

31 "Trump abruptly ends CBS interview after wiretap question", by Glenn Thrush and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, New York Times, May 1, 2017. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/01/us/politics/trump-cbs-interview.html>, accessed most recently on June 25, 2017.

32 "White House Correspondents' Dinner 2017", 38:20 on C-Span coverage, available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?426363-1/hasan-minhaj-headlines-white-house-correspondents-association-dinner>, accessed most recently on June 18, 2017.

and offer their story, though I'm eternally grateful for those who do. And should we even speak to some individuals? I would argue there is almost nobody above questioning or meeting face to face.³³

If we believe in religious notions of redemption, then nobody is so sufficiently "fallen" they are to be isolated from communication by anyone, save god herself. They are not beyond mercy.

And if human rights have replaced, for example, the Bible as a new theology, then Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights says to 820 million people, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment"³⁴ – it is a guarantee to *all*, not some – even those we find abhorrent. Whether on that mass scale of forgiveness or the extreme end of recovery from human fallacy, then we can communicate, if not directly to each other then through mediators, whether that be reporters or reporters working as formal mediators.

Because if we don't believe that, if your factual sovereignty excludes both religious and legal notions of redemption and forgiveness, then the fractured and multiverse of infinite, simultaneous truths beyond any agreement is the result.

The UN doesn't cease to exist because some nations go to war or commit crimes or abstain from engagement. Though flawed, it continues. Journalism can be the UN, reporters the diplomats. They translate between different languages or sovereignties so they can communicate between each other.

What I am advocating is not mediation to achieve homogeneity³⁵ where we all share some "liberal" or perhaps even "white" vision. It is a mistake the news media makes that presumes a liberal notion is where we're heading, that a consensus is the future. That is so broad a brush as to leave no room for subtlety, and has been the basis for many political arguments and those of supporters in recent years across social media and other media long before that: either you believe in "progress" or you're against us.

While mediation should not bring homogeneity, journalism is getting hemmed in by a drive to opinion over reporting (whether by owners or the public), and by professional constrictions that mean we go for two sides of the argument – often their most extreme

33 In 1945, just three weeks after he was liberated from a concentration camp, Viktor Frankl wrote a play, *Synchronisation in Buchenwald* – a quick, raw and early articulation of his eventual psychological treatment, logotherapy. The character Franz says: "I've made up a list, in my mind. With names of people whose lives will be in danger, during those first waves of hate. I know hate will come. Violent passion that will destroy people, including those who did a lot of good, secretly, without anyone knowing about it. I've prepared a list of such people, including even some who are wearing uniforms now, the uniforms we hate so much. But beneath those uniforms, hear and there, still beats a human heart. Not often – but it does happen: someone who remained human, in spite of everything and does what he can – but only a few know it. These few carry a responsibility, they must see to it that those expectations are remembered. A mercy list – I've prepared a mercy list – and I'll go to the people on the list ..." Unpublished. Copy obtained from UC Berkley.

34 Council of Europe, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights, as Amended) (ECHR) Art 3, 1950.

35 "Normalisation" might be another description, in the vein of what is argued is happening with Trump. Of note is "Against Normalization: The lesson of the 'Munich Post'" by Ron Rosenbaum, Los Angeles Review of Books, February 5, 2017. Available at <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/normalization-lesson-munich-post/>, accessed most recently on June 25, 2017.

sides – and let the fight ensue. If you have time to interview three people or a dozen, you're taking too long on the story or your organisation has money to burn.

Rather than safe spaces, reporters should offer, as I believe is a guiding principle, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the complacent. Confronting those who are factually sovereign from you requires effort, requires patience, and empathy. The inequalities inevitably present in such clashes of sovereignty – racial, gender, economic, *et cetera* – require an absolute commitment by the reporter not to judge, but to enable communication. Journalism *is* communication. And turning on comment sections or “engagement” on Facebook is not. Meeting people in person, asking questions and exploring what makes a person unique, not sovereign, must return to being our prime objective. For too long, we have been, yes, subjective – driven by ourselves as the subject or by the building up or tearing down of another person as the subject. The new objectivity should, instead, mean our goal: to be mediators, and communicators, ethically and factually.

Consider the words of American poet Wallace Stevens, commenting on an essay of HD Lewis:

There is one most welcome and authentic note; it is the insistence on a reality that forces itself upon our consciousness and refuses to be managed and mastered. It is here that the affinity of art and religion is most evident today. Both have to mediate for us a reality not ourselves. This is what the poet does. The supreme virtue here is humility, for the humble are they that move about the world with the love of the real in their hearts.³⁶

Discussion

Individuals and organisations claiming the mantle of journalism have caused and continue to cause factual sovereign ripples, augmented by technology and rampant individualism and a disconnect from others and agreed or imposed core moral and fact-defining structures.

It will continue to escalate and erode systems of governments, law, relationships and education.

But proper reporting at its root offers mediation a digital or physical space for treaty making between sovereign facts and their actors. And it can expand beyond this to facilitating understanding and more importantly empathy between agents of factual sovereignty.

If it takes years of one-to-one treaty making to repair the damage wrought by millions of clicks of opinion pretending to be reporting, then that is the task lying before journalism. The need will only get greater.

36 "On Poetic Truth", in response to HD Lewis, by Wallace Stevens in "Opus Posthumous", edited by Samuel French Morse, Faber and Faber, London, 1959.