Journalism’s Myth of Objectivity: Transcript

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SPEAKERS
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Alison Cooley 00:12
Hello and welcome everyone to Running with Concepts: the Mediatic Edition and to the panel discussion Journalism's Myth of Objectivity. I am Alison Cooley, I am the Assistant Curator at the Blackwood Gallery, and I'm pleased to introduce our event today. I'm going to offer a short visual description of myself to get us started: I'm joining you from my living room in Toronto and there's a gray wall behind me with a small mirror and maybe a little bit of a reflection of my living room behind me. I'm a fair skinned white woman and I'm wearing big pink glasses and some dangly earrings and a black button up dress. I have kind of wavy brown hair that sits just below my shoulders with a little bit of bleached out and leftover from an early pandemic DIY dye job. So, welcome everyone. I wanted to begin by acknowledging and recognizing the lands on which we gather today and the acknowledgement that I'm going to share is informed by various methods and practices by which we've been acknowledging territory here at the Blackwood but also informed by many other land acknowledgement practices—so I want to recognize Jill Carter's approach to the notion of debt and digital technology, and the work of the #callresponse collective, both of which have influenced the land acknowledgement that I'm going to share. The University of Toronto Mississauga where the Blackwood Gallery operates is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River. As we gather in virtual space, we recognize that this gathering is also made possible by ongoing care of and protection for the lands and waters in many Indigenous territories. So Zoom, which supports our web recording, is headquartered in San Jose, California, on the traditional territories of the Muwekma Ohlone. Vimeo, which we are using to share this recording, and IONOS, our web hosting platform, are both headquartered in the traditional territories of Lenape peoples in New York and Chesterbrook, Philadelphia respectively. And, of course, there are numerous servers, data access points, incalculable kilometers of fiber optic cable that traverse Indigenous territories in order to support this meeting. So as we recognize the privilege of gathering here together in virtual space, we also invite each other and invite those who are watching to consider the ongoing colonial violence on these lands that manifests in many forms of extraction, and to hold together gratitude to these lands with a sense of debt and responsibility to their stewards and protectors. I'm pleased to introduce and welcome a really powerhouse group of journalists to this discussion today: Rick Harp, Carol Linnitt, Karyn Pugliese, Lewis Raven Wallace, and our moderator Anita Li. Each brings a sharp perspective on current practices of journalistic objectivity, their faults and fissures, and opportunities to

develop meaningful alternatives. I think we in the arts have much to learn from the way that journalists are approaching these conversations. I'm going to share just a little bit of access information and then I'm going to pass things over to Anita. So because Running with Concepts: the Mediatic Edition explicitly engages with the sort of mediated space that we all find ourselves in at this moment in time, we're endeavoring to support a few different modes of access. So this event is pre-recorded and will be available on our website for seventy-two hours following its release, which means that it's available in various time zones. And we encourage—we encourage you to make use of the closed captioning for the video; we encourage you to pause, play, share, and return to the video over that seventy-two hours; and if you would like, you can use the hashtag #RwCMediatic on social media. We also encourage people to visit the Blackwood Gallery website throughout the fall and winter where we'll not only be posting future events, but also sharing documentations and reflections on the program in multiple formats. So those are just a few of the ways that people can access this conversation and the rest of the conference. Now I'm pleased to turn things over to Anita and to welcome Rick, Carol, Karyn and Lewis.

Anita Li 05:15
Thank you so much, Alison. So, hi everyone. Welcome to Running with Concepts: the Mediatic Edition, which is a virtual conference presented by the Blackwood Gallery. My name is Anita Li. I'm a longtime journalist, as well as a media consultant and journalism instructor. So just to describe myself for the audience: I am an Asian woman in her early thirties. I have short, almost chin-length hair, I'm wearing a white blazer and a bronze minimalist necklace, and I'm wearing glasses. I'm also in a virtual—well, I'm not in a virtual space, I'm in my home via the internet coming towards you. So today, I'll be moderating a panel called Journalism's Myth of Objectivity, Accountability, Embodiment, and Neutrality. So that's quite a mouthful and involves a few concepts to wrap our heads around, so to kick off this conversation, let's start simply and define objectivity. So the simplest definition of objectivity in the context of journalism is this: objective reporting is meant to portray issues and events in a neutral and unbiased manner, regardless of the writer's opinion or personal beliefs. I also want to add that some say objectivity has been conflated with neutrality, when it actually means evidence based factual reporting—so that's a second broader definition for everyone. Although notions of objectivity and journalism have been challenged for decades, particularly in journals and academia, it's emerged as a hot topic in recent years. So many of you may know that Pacinthe Mattar's Walrus piece, which is called Objectivity is a Privilege Afforded to White Journalists, went viral recently. But actually, right now, I want to highlight a blog post, written way back in 2003, by Jay Rosen, who's a well known media theorist and commentator as well as a professor at New York University. The blog post was titled The View from Nowhere, which is a reference—kind of a derogatory reference to the concept of objectivity in journalism. And in the blog post Rosen questions this pursuit of balance and he writes: "Occupy the reasonable middle between two markers for 'vocal critic' and critics look ridiculous charging you with bias. Their symmetrical existence feels like proof of an underlying hysteria. Their mutual incompatible charges seem to cancel each other out. The minute evidence they marshall even shows a touch of fanaticism. It can't be that simple, that beautiful, that symmetrical, can it? Temptation says yes." And then Rosen goes on to

describe and criticize the late anchor Peter Jennings defense of objectivity. So this was in 2003 during the Iraq War—Peter Jennings was an anchor at a major broadcaster, I believe at ABC at the time—and Rosen quotes Jennings as saying: "I don't think anybody who looks carefully at us thinks that we are a left wing or a right wing organization." Rosen then writes: "There is no question this is a sincere statement. But it is also a superficial one—not left, not right—so what are you Peter Jennings? The answers he thinks adequate: 'we're a news organization,' 'we're professionals,' 'we're journalists with no axe to grind,' along with 'you don't understand how we work,' have one curious quality about them besides being bland. If accepted, they end the conversation. Another way to say it might be 'they lack soul.'" So central to this debate, today is the question: does objectivity still serve a purpose in journalism today? So let's just keep that question in mind for the next hour and a half as we explore the many facets of this conversation in this debate. So there are a lot of boundary pushing journalists, including the ones you see here today, who are challenging notions of objectivity. And they're moving from this 'view from nowhere' to a 'view from somewhere,' which is challenging the current paradigm especially in Canadian journalism. There are many approaches to taking a view from somewhere, but fundamentally it means being transparent with your audience about your biases and where you're coming from when you're reporting on a story. So I'll leave the panelists to fill in the details, and again, I'd love everybody to welcome Rick Harp, Carol Linnitt, Karyn Pugliese, and Lewis Raven Wallace. And to set the stage I want to start by asking each panelist to answer the next four questions, and we'll go around everyone—I'll ask a question and everybody can answer individually before we move on to the next question. So the first question to kick off this discussion is: how do you define objectivity in the context of journalism, given that there are some different interpretations of the concept? So does anybody want to kick it off? I'm gonna call on you. So how about let's start with Carol.

Carol Linnitt 10:19
Sure. Well, thank you so much for the invitation to participate. My name is Carol Linnitt and I'm the Managing Editor and Co-Founder of The Narwhal. And I'm speaking today from Victoria on the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt Coast Salish First Nations. I am a white woman in my mid thirties, I have long, dark brown hair, it's slightly wavy, I'm wearing a black shirt and I have big expressive eyes, and I talk a lot with my hands—but you can't see this so I've just got a bobblehead effect—in this little like soft pink phone booth room that I'm speaking to you in right now. So I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about objectivity and what we mean when we even use that term in the context of how we do reporting at The Narwhal and the suite of considerations that are ever present to our journalists. So The Narwhal, we report on Canada's natural environment and generally for us that means we're reporting sort of at the intersection of energy and environment and conservation issues. And these, all of those issues in Canada, are polarized. So we are coming into a reporting environment where the stage has already been sort of set into fairly entrenched camps and you see that reflected back in a lot of journalism about these issues, whether we're talking about pipelines, the oil sands, climate policy, coal mines, and also, Indigenous rights and Indigenous land use and land claims and management. So we're thinking about objectivity and how we tell these stories and how we engage in them. For us,

we're looking at ways that we can report on these stories that doesn't actually further increase that sort of tribalism, and the way that those camps are entrenched on those issues. Ultimately, for us, that means that when we're reporting on a story, we ideally want a lot of Canadians to see themselves reflected in the stories that we tell. That generally means that we have to get a lot more complicated, complex, and nuanced in our reporting. As opposed to sort of a detached, simplified, and sort of neutralized sense of objectivity, for us, we're trying to actually get like, more deep into the mud of these stories with the people who live there, with their lived lives, and the stakes as they see them and as they're represented. Sometimes objectivity, when it comes down to sort of an individual reporter making a judgment call on what is the sort of full and final objective sense of a story, we actually really distrust even our own ability to actually claim that and especially claim it on behalf of the people for whom we report. The Narwhal is a nonprofit publication. We truly do exist to serve the public interest—we actually don't even run advertising on our site. Our motivations are first and foremost to serve our readers and we are very privileged to get to report in that kind of environment. I know there's a lot of amazing journalists who hustle real hard and they don't actually get to make those calls about the way that their reporting is sort of situated in the media landscape. At The Narwhal we feel very lucky that we get to do that, and what that means for us is that we—if the story needs to be long, and we need to have a long-form piece about, you know, what is actually happening with the decisions that are being made about this farmland, then we can do that and there's no other considerations that sort of prevent us from doing that. Of course, it takes resources and we're very lucky that we have readership that really supports our work. The thinking more about, like, there's challenges for us as journalists reporting on the environment—we really do want to sort of lean more into that nuance and complexity. For us, that doesn't really mean sort of representing both sides deeply. We really want to move beyond like a simplistic 'he said versus she said' kind of framing of reporting because we feel like that can really reflect back kind of a superficial and simplified sense of what a story is about and what's at stake and bigger questions like who holds power and who doesn't. Oftentimes what we end up talking about rather than objectivity, is context-rich versus context-free reporting. Potentially, you can have reporting that can be described as completely neutral and objective, but we wonder would it actually generate a deeper understanding of the world in which we live and how decision makers have the ability to contour the world in a way that can, especially in the context of environmental reporting, actually have life and death consequences for some communities and really impact the ability of some people to live full and healthy and happy lives or the ability of some ecosystems to flourish or not. So, the idea of being context-rich is that we want our journalists to really force themselves to ask: Why is this happening? Why does this matter? Who and what is affected? For us, we're a part of the Solutions Journalism Network, which has really inspired us to dig into a kind of reporting that's called 'complicating the narrative.' For us that means we're looking closely at a way a story is complicated and the various ways that actors are sort of entangled in a story, entangled in a place, and in a situation that is oftentimes still unfolding. We're looking to represent unusual actors who are the individuals that might be overlooked in the course of like a quick and dirty news report, or, in environmental reporting, we might want to complicate the narrative by, for example, going to a union hall in a small coal town in Alberta and asking how, like, the provinces decision to

phase out coal actually affects that community. Talking to coal miners about climate policy was a way for us to sort of add to the narrative around climate impacts while also understanding communities, and in this case, a class of workers that I think are often easy to oversimplify and very easy to misunderstand. In a way for us, moving beyond sort of a purified sense of objectivity in our reporting has really freed us to dig deeper into that nuance and ultimately ask: How are these stories reflecting reality? And whose reality do they reflect? And in a way we feel less sort of hindered by some of the scripts of objectivity—kind of like 'this side says this and this side says that'—we really want to move beyond that to a kind of reporting that's really asking the big questions about what is actually happening in our world and are we helping our readers understand that world more richly.

Anita Li 17:38
Okay, great. Thank you so much, Carol, for that really in depth look at The Narwhal's editorial process. I definitely want to get into just more tactics or your approaches to taking a view from somewhere later on in our discussion, for sure. So, yeah, who wants to answer the question next? And yes, please introduce yourself and describe yourself and then we can start by discussing or defining objectivity in the context of journalism. Maybe I can throw it to—I'll just go clockwise, right. Rick?

Rick Harp 18:11
Okay. This will be a true test of objectivity, describing myself. I can be Indigenous in appearance depending on who's looking at me and what time of the year it is—have I gotten a lot of sun, speaking phenotypically, I guess. But, I have a checkered shirt, a black pullover, I have no hair whatso—well, I look like I have no hair whatsoever. I'm coming to you from a basement in an undisclosed location in Winnipeg, otherwise known as Treaty 1 territory and a key part of the Métis homeland. I have glasses. I'm clean shaven. I like long walks on the beach (laughter). I hope that's giving you a sense—and I too, I too am a handsy guy, so to speak, but I don't know if they'll get into the frame or not. But how do I define objectivity in the context of journalism—oh, who am I? Who the hell am I? I host and produce MEDIA INDIGENA, which is a four times a month, almost weekly podcast that looks at Indigenous current affairs through the format of a kind of a discussion roundtable, sometimes one-on-one interviews. We broadly interrogate all sorts of ongoing events in the world and try and put them into some kind of context, which is obviously very relevant to to our discussion. So, how do I define objectivity? I guess I look at it in terms of the principle versus the practice and the gap between theory and practice is so massive as to almost—well, I guess that explains why we're having this discussion, because it's so large you can drive a number of trucks side by side through, and in a lot of ways I feel it's ideological cover for a lot of things that are done at the institutional level. I feel that's very important to situate the discussion. We can't just talk about Joe or Josephine Blow writing a story at a particular moment, it's looking at it in the bigger picture across time and space, the institutional needs, the institutional interests of the media outlet in question, as well as the tension, I think, between individuals and structural forces. I mean, all of us are situated in a particular place and time and class and race and gender and many, many aspects of our lives that influence how we see, how we tell. So I guess the theory is it's sort of understandable, yet often fraught attempt to to act as if one

has no interest at stake whatsoever in the story they're trying to tell. I think, in practice, it ostensibly means an effort, probably genuine, to not take sides, to be balanced quote-unquote and 'fair' to those whose realities you're trying to present or represent as the case may be. Now, that said, I sort of feel like, well, if we took this logic to its extreme, we'd only need one newspaper in Toronto, because the Star and the Sun would publish the exact same story—and I'll leave it to you as to whether that's possible and why it isn't. Taken to its extreme, in another way, it would imply that who makes the news doesn't matter, so long as you're unbiased and neutral. Objectivity implies storytelling can reflect reality in a relatively untroubled way. But I will say this, I think it's too easy or doesn't capture enough of the discussion to just focus on how we tell a story—the method—when maybe the bigger question is how media outlets choose which stories they tell and for whom. We can also look at who owns the media, how concentrated it is, whether it's profit driven or advertiser centered. And so, we have to ask ourselves, have we consciously or sometimes unconsciously presupposed a mostly white, straight, male, affluent standpoint for our work? And to me, it's hard not to imagine all these kinds of what we might call upstream aspects not affecting what gets reported downstream in the day to day grind. And yeah, I'll leave it there.

Anita Li 22:40
Yeah, thanks so much, Rick. I love—actually, it's first time somebody's, like, the thought experiment where you take it to this, this extreme, actually really illuminates, in my opinion, how flawed objectivity is, so thank you for sharing that. That's a really interesting way to think about it. Lewis?

Lewis Raven Wallace 23:00
Thank you. Hi, my name is Lewis Raven Wallace. My pronouns are he, ze, and they, and I am 36 year old white, salt and pepper haired—I don't know if y'all can see it—but previously dark haired now prematurely gray. I have blue eyes and I'm standing in my writing room in Durham, North Carolina. There's a fake tin ceiling up above me. It looks like that cool imprinted tin but it's actually foam core, pretty sweet stuff, and green walls behind. It's actually turned to being a sunny day here. I am the author of a book called The View from Somewhere: Undoing the Myth of Journalistic Objectivity. So, kind of right on the nose for the topic of the panel today. I also create a podcast, also called The View from Somewhere, that's focused on the history and future of journalism with a purpose. So the overall kind of thesis is that all journalism has a purpose: we're either sort of working to uphold structures of power and oppression, or we're working to break them down in one way or another. The more kind of transparent and real with ourselves and our audiences that we can be about what that mission and vision purpose is and who we are and how we're working, the better that is for trust and relationship in the long term. I'll share a definition of objectivity that I've shared a lot that came from my very brilliant collaborator, Ramona Martinez, who's actually the producer and the person who scores the music on The View from Somewhere podcast. She and I both worked in public media, for many years in US public media, and left because of various levels of dissatisfaction and disconnect with the understanding of ethics and the practice of objectivity in that space. I was fired. She left voluntarily, but her big takeaway about what objectivity is that she said when I first met her and interviewed her is that objectivity is the ideology of the status quo.

So, that brings us to this idea that we all have an ideological frame, whether we know it or not, and the news items, or news angles, or terminology that might be considered quote-unquote 'objective,' is usually just a reflection back—it's a mirror that shows us the status quo. To me there's something very interesting embedded in that analysis that's about how objectivity then upholds the status quo, and sort of has an inherent effect of gatekeeping and making sure that any voice that comes from outside and says something like 'gender is not a binary'—that's a great example of something that's sort of shifted from a very non-status quo, sort of un-objective 'you can't possibly say that in the news,' into a legitimate debate over the last twenty years or so. But in a different time period, we might be looking at objective newspapers that share quote-unquote 'balanced opinions' on slavery, right? And the assumption is that slavery overall is a common good or a thing that people want. There was a time when that was considered objective and something outside of that was radicalism. And so objectivity, essentially, has served to gatekeep and exclude and, in subtler ways, to just sort of keep things as they are and not make room for change, both in newsrooms and in the ways that we report stories. But I think what's important to me is that there have always been—and most of what my book and podcasts are about—is that there have always been people and journalistic organizations who stood outside of that, who never accepted that framework, who always knew that they had a stake and had skin in the game: Black newspapers in the US, abolitionist papers—there's a long tradition there—LGBTQ press was very much a sort of activist press in its origins and activist by necessity, right? It wasn't like 'oh, I just don't feel like working at the New York Times.' You could be fired from the New York Times or the AP (Associated Press) simply for being out as gay. To be a journalist and to tell those stories, you had to be someplace else, and you had to advocate for change. Of course, that's been true for so many marginalized and oppressed communities over the decades. The one other thing I would say about the definition of objectivity in sort of how it plays out now, today, is that I think we're often talking about two things when we talk about objectivity: one of them is the practice of sort of trying to get to facts and truth in the fairest way possible, and I think there's a lot of legitimate debate about how that happens. I don't think that that's objectivity. That's not what I like to call it, but sometimes that's what people mean, right? And that's a good thing that we need in journalism—it's like, real debate about how do we make sure that we can verify the things that we're saying and how do we build trust and all that stuff. Then there's this other interpretation of objectivity that's about the performance of objectivity and appearing to be unbiased and seeming to not have a stake in things. That actually has nothing to do with whether or not you told a story that was true or that was verifiable, or you fact checked, or you made the whole thing up—that's about whether you think people are going to think that you made the whole thing up, which is a completely different standard. And so, that, I think is often where the conversation breaks down is that there's this in newsrooms and practice in a lot of places. Those two interpretations of the idea are completely mixed up together and so the difference between appearing unbiased and being fair and accurate and reporting isn't totally clear. Institutionally, often the interest is more in appearing unbiased—all the false balance stuff, all the ways in which we see people going like: 'you know, it was an untruth or an unverifiable statement' when what they mean to say is 'lie,' or 'it was racially charged' when what they mean to say is 'racist.' Those things are about the performance of being objective and not about whether what you're saying is

accurate. That's, I think, where things sort of fall apart. My personal story was that I was fired from a major public media outlet for talking about that publicly. Specifically, some of the language that the outlet that I worked for took issue with was that I had said that Donald Trump benefits from white supremacy—and Donald Trump benefits from white supremacy, that's just a fact. This was in early 2017. Do with it what you will, but the concern was that I would appear to be unbiased—or I would appear to be biased, sorry, I would appear to be a partisan in some way. I don't care, and I don't think that journalists should care about whether we appear to be partisan when our job is to tell the truth. That's where the current objectivity quote-unquote 'framework' just really, really falls apart and isn't serving us and isn't serving the public and particularly isn't serving audiences and people who have been marginalized and pushed to the side and pushed out of mainstream media representation and stories for so long. It's just sort of an unacceptable status quo at this point. All right, I'm done.

Anita Li 31:20
Lewis, that was fantastic, providing those very clear definitions for us. And last but not least: Karyn, please introduce yourself and define objectivity.

Karyn Pugliese 31:32
Okay, so I'm Karen Pugliese. These days I'm a journalism professor at Ryerson University, former News Director of APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network), which I think I'm still known for—even though it's former it hasn't been former that long. I've got about 20 years experience in journalism, mostly covering Indigenous issues and politics. I am—well, you would never see it, but this trait that I'm most known for is actually how short I am. I'm five feet tall, so, you wouldn't be able to tell that on the screen anyway, but I feel like it's such a defining characteristic I should say it. Other than that, I'm rather non-descript. I'd be perhaps what people would call white-passing, at least in Toronto. People can spot me as Indigenous a little faster in Thunder Bay and Winnipeg where there's Pikwàkanagàn peoples. I've got blue eyes and brownish red hair, which today is pulled back into a ponytail. I'm wearing a brown jacket and I'm coming to you in an attic in Toronto that has some nice art on the wall. So, I want to say first I really liked what Rick and Lewis had to say about implicit bias and who it serves and how it maintains the status quo. I also liked where Carol went with 'we need a new word.' The idea that objectivity is impossible is not new. I'm also, I should describe myself as middle aged, and many, many, many years ago, when I was in university, my university prof said objectivity is not really possible, it's not really something that you can do. What we can try to do is we can try to make the process objective, but a person can never be objective. We have too many things that tie us to stories. The whole reason that APTN was founded was because there was this idea that mainstream media was not being fair about our issues and not being fair and telling them as objective as they tried to be. And so we can look at the idea of story selection, which somebody mentioned. I had the power at APTN and I used it to decide we were going to focus on certain stories. I decided two years ago that we were going to make hay out of child welfare, and that was going to be one of the stories that we ran hard on and they're still doing it. Either is the idea of who gets quoted in a story and how much voice they get. We mentioned false balance. Very early on at APTN Dan David, the first News Director, pointed out the false balance of having the Minister of Indian Affairs have a twenty-

second clip and a human being on reserve having a thirty-second clip. The Minister of Indian Affairs has a whole professional team helping them say the perfect thing in sound bites, whereas the Kokum who's standing up for her rights or her needs out in the community doesn't. So this is a false balance when you think you're being balanced. Then there's the implicit bias that we all bring—you know, we can talk about, right—so something that I believe in and I believe are the foundation of Canada, and I believe that's the truth. There are people out there who believe that there're old documents that don't mean anything. So, having said that, I think there's a point though, that we can't just throw objectivity out the window. We might need another word for it. We need a process that does have some sort of fairness to the people who we're reporting on and accountability and transparency back. I should not pick stories if I have the power to do so that are of personal interest to me. It should be a service and I should be thinking about what is of interest of the community, which was what I was trying to do when I thought of child welfare—how impacting it was in our community. I have no skin in that game. I have not been through the child welfare system and thankfully neither has my child. I think especially an Indigenous country, you know, it's very easy to want to be the voice of your people—except our people don't agree. So, I always say, whose voice are you going to be the people who want the pipeline, or the people who don't. There are issues that have no other side, or should have no other side. Murdered, Indigenous women should not have another side to the story. Black Lives Matter does not have another side of the story. Black Lives Matter. There is no other side. I think that when we're choosing stories, we're picking people—when we're choosing the angle for the story, we're thinking about how much voice to give who in story. All of these things are things where implicit bias comes in, but there needs to be an accountability back to people in the story so that they feel like they were dealt fairly with, and that you didn't replace their voice with your voice.

Anita Li 36:37
Thank you so much, Karyn. I want to pick up on something that you said about the fact that you don't want to throw objectivity out the window, but it's maybe a matter of like, redefining it in some way or clarifying the concept. So I want to ask the rest of the panel, do you think it is possible to be objective in journalism? Or how do you see it evolving as a concept over time?

Carol Linnitt 37:04
I can hop in there a little bit: just in terms of what all of the other panelists have said, in terms of approaching a sense of truth and credibility, verifiability, and reporting, there are obviously ways that you can sort of show your work. For example, some ways that we try to do this is a lot of news outlets won't—they'll mention a government document, but won't link to it, or won't publish it, or the Freedom of Information documents that they will report on but not release in full. We really try to provide all of that to readers if they want to follow up and understand where we're getting our information from. Another interesting dynamic that comes up in questions of objectivity and individual reporters, the fact that we are individuals that, you know, are not removed to detach from situations and if we are very detached from situations, how can we possibly reflect and understand the stakes? Even just thinking about trying to tell a story of my family, which I know so intimately and know so well, that's actually

an environment in which I'm probably the least objective. I'm intimately acquainted with the stakes of like some big family argument or something like that, but, I'm the most embedded in that. So, while I can accurately reflect the stakes, I can't really sort of get close to that, that sort of purified portrait of like an objective scientist. Oftentimes, when I think about the idea of objectivity, I think, you know, we're starting off on the wrong foot right away, because it automatically separates the world into subjects and objects. If you think about a scientist in a laboratory and they have some sort of viewable object, and they can put it up on the laboratory table and look at it from all sides and describe it very thoroughly, the real world cannot be emulated in those circumstances, by any means. Also, scientists—this is something that's so interesting and Karyn, you were sort of getting to this too—the scientific community has really been held to the fact that objectivity is almost not useful as a term because: What do you mean? What is your object? Who is studying the object? What were the variables? Who is there?—and all of that together is the scientific method. I think rather than objectivity, we need a journalistic method. We need to have tools and a methodology that is something that we share with our audience so that they can actually evaluate the efficacy of our work against a set of standards and practices that we are owning up to and that we are aware of. So much of the work of journalism in the past was really done thoughtlessly and with a lot of bias and blindness, and that's not always malicious. Of course, like socially, from a social historical perspective, we know that it ended up having very, very harmful consequences for anyone who isn't a part of sort of the dominant power holders of society. That's work that journalists now have to work to undo and to resolve. We actually hold that burden for the public and for those publics who for so long have not been adequately represented or treated or considered by media and members of the media. So yeah, it's interesting to think about what those methodologies and practices would be. I think, also, they would need to be sort of ever evolving, so there's that challenge too.

Anita Li 40:41
Awesome. Thank you, Carol. That's a really—I love that we're throwing out solutions already, so that's really exciting. Rick? Lewis? Anything about how objectivity can evolve as a concept?

Rick Harp 40:53
Okay, I was going to speak to the question: is it possible to be objective in journalism? And I guess the short answer is no. So, though, I think we can, you know—I had an amazing opportunity to have an extended conversation with a couple of professors from the University of British Columbia Masters Journalism program: Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young. They put out a book that I highly recommend called Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities. They talked about—and this, this alludes very much or overlaps with what Lewis was talking about—that this projection of a certain authority. And I think, in some ways, this is what this whole debate is about. The internet has made it possible for other people to come forward to not only critique, but present their own standpoints on reality and to represent reality as they see it. And so what connected to that thematically is, I think, journalism—I forget which philosopher it was who just talked about how, in a lot of ways the function (this is from an earlier time of course) wasevery morning, the world was there and your

newspaper, and you could see it arrayed out, you had a sense of events—in some ways, journalism is about projecting a world of certainty. And as the current pandemic makes abundantly clear, we live in very uncertain times. Certainty, I think, generates binaries, it generates sort of black and white quote-unquote 'outlooks' on the world. It doesn't allow for uncertainty and I think to not—if we're going to situate ourselves in terms of the institution and the individual trying to produce a picture of reality, we may have to allow for the fact that our knowledge is partial, right? As opposed to impartial, I'm playing with words. But because, you know, there is no unassailable, incontrovertibly truth. It's messier than that. Nevermind the weaponization of information that's been around for decades. I mean, the whole public relations industry has been set up to weaponize information. Nevermind the commercialization and concentration of media creation. If I was to write about that—writing about my own paper—I mean, that would never happen, virtually. Anyway, those are my two thoughts, clumsily expressed.

Anita Li 43:33
Not at all clumsily, Rick. Thank you. Lewis, do you have anything to add before we move on to the next question?

Lewis Raven Wallace 43:42
I'm on board with everything that's been said so far and I think that, for me, it's an important distinction that not only is objectivity not possible, but that it's not the right goal. I think everything that Rick just said kind of illuminated some of the reasons why, right? And that thought experiment of sort of like 'okay, if it was the right goal, then what are we moving toward?' and I agree completely that a lot of the anxiety over the last couple of decades around truth and verification, while understandable, is often coming from a place of folks who haven't thought about all the perspectives that haven't had a platform or haven't had a voice and so, of course, there's more chaos and there's more debate and there's more conflict in that space. But on a balance, I think that it is a very good thing that more voices and more perspectives and more ways of seeing the stories of today have a platform. I think Black Lives Matter is such a good case study for that, in that, police killings of Black people, extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black people, have been going on for the entire history of this country. But the drumming up of newfound attention to that came through social media. It was necessary that people had these platforms to tell stories that just weren't being told and weren't being covered. And that's not a threat to truth, it's not a threat to trust, it's not a threat to the public good. It's a good thing, on balance, that those stories are finally being told. Folks can't get away with just murdering someone because now people have cameras. And I think that's just a really good example of the sort of net positive that comes out of having more different voices in the ring. Disinformation and misinformation and distrust of the media and all of that existed before the internet. You know, it's just that in some cases, those voices as well didn't have quite as much access to a platform or to fast moving information. So that's not to say that all that isn't a problem, but just that that's also not a problem that's new. This sort of battening down the hatches on objectivity is not a good solution to that because that ship has already sailed, so to speak. I'm thinking maybe I'm mixing my metaphors, but I'm not sure. It's not just that it's too late, but I also think it's an ineffective approach to rebuilding trust

with media and that a more effective approach is relationship based and driven by really listening to community, and especially listening to communities that haven't been listened to and where there's a real deficit of trust. And it's not because they don't have a voice, it's because folks in power haven't been listening.

Anita Li 47:03
Thanks Lewis. I definitely want to get into just a solutions oriented approach to this and getting into how I'm actually really curious about the fact that the view from somewhere is actually emerging as a relatively new concept in the public eye, at least among the Canadian public in particular. So, I actually want to get into solutions and figure out: how would you convince your audience members that reporting with a view from somewhere is fair? Especially given that public trust in journalism is at an all time low. And in addition to that question is like, I recognize that it could likely very much depend on the audience that we're speaking about—mainstream audiences versus audiences on the margins who were historically overlooked. So I kind of want to just add that for context, but, how do you—how do we make this concept of view from somewhere more mainstream? Any thoughts on this? Lewis?

Lewis Raven Wallace 48:09
Yeah, this is Lewis. I think that transparency about who we are, and what we're about is a very strong foundation. I think relationality—really, and truly seeing ourselves as journalists as not separate from our audiences and not separate from the stakes and the stories we tell even if we are reporting on communities that we're not a part of, or what have you. I agree that that question is really context dependent and audience dependent, because, of course, there are whole big wide swaths of audiences or potential audiences that are like 'yeah, of course, objectivity is a crock, we know that they haven't been reporting fairly on our community,' so what does that even mean? And so that's like, rebuilding—it's not so much rebuilding trust as starting over. But I think in this moment, an open and transparent commitment to racial justice and open and transparent commitment to democracy, to radically inclusive democracy—those kinds of commitments, I think, can create a foundation of relationship with audiences and with people who need news. And I think that another sort of piece of it is that all of these values and changes go hand in hand: we can't have a strong democracy without strong information ecosystems, we can't have strong information ecoystems without strong communities. I think it figures that those of us who create information and who put information out have a self interest in having strong communities and communities with less economic inequality and communities with less racial violence. Journalism has to be reconceived as an act of community building. And as an act of social change in light of that. That's not an overnight process, you know, people want 'silver bullets' as sort of a way to say 'well, okay, there's a trust deficit, let's close the deficit,' you know, but that trust is relational. It's harder to win back once broken. So that's a real issue about collective trust in society, as well as in media production. I think that starting with just being honest about that and transparent about that, and knowing that it's a long term process and not an overnight thing—corporate models don't have a lot of room for that, which I think is one of the problems that we're facing.

Anita Li 51:19
Thank you so much, Lewis. I actually want to go to Carol because in your introduction, you talked a bit about The Narwhal's approach to basically incorporating community in your editorial process. I also note that you guys are very transparent about your values on your website. If you could just talk some, I guess, more about your practical approaches to taking a view from somewhere and how your audience has responded as well.

Carol Linnitt 51:45
Yeah, yeah. So I mean, this is very—all of these issues are very sort of core to The Narwhal and how we operate and how we communicate about ourselves. I have a couple different thoughts, but from a very practical perspective: we know that if in place of sort of that traditional view of a journalist as a neutral, sort of transmuter of the truth of the world to readers—if we need to replace that figure, that figure is going to be human journalist—it's going to be Carol Linnitt. Who am I? What am I from? Where am I from? What do I represent? What is the body of reporting that I carry along with me? What is my face? How do I talk? How do I signal that I care about the people who are telling me their story? We take some cues from the Membership Puzzle Project, which has some really interesting tools for journalism outlets that are basically trying to create a membership relationship with their readers, and that's what we're trying to do with The Narwhal too. So when we're thinking about who we're serving with our writing, we're mostly predominantly thinking about our members. They are on our walls, they read us, they share our stories, they support us monthly, they're a huge part of the whole machine and mechanism of what The Narwhal is and how it functions. We have to think about those people a lot, we have to incorporate their concerns into our reporting, and we have to be really transparent with what we're doing with the actual material support that they're providing us. So one way that we try to embody some some transparent practices are we disclose our sources of funding on our website, which is very unusual for any media outlet in the country, basically. We feel like that is very important because we are asking our membership and our readership to engage in a trust relationship with us. We actually have to do a lot of work too, to be vulnerable to our audiences who we endeavor to serve on a daily basis. So from some practical elements we really try and do that. We also know that it's important to show our faces and to tell in our newsletter stories about what's happening with The Narwhal in the world. What are we up to? Who are we? We know that, from the Membership Puzzle Project, it's really important for audiences to connect with journalists. They might actually support individual journalists even more so than a news outlet itself. So there's some people who we know come and read our Alberta reporting because they have been reading the work of Sharon J. Riley, our Alberta investigative reporter, they know her they met her they appreciate her reporting, and they actually come to us for her. Allowing ourselves to be human and be vulnerable to the way that we are actually engaging—not even engaging a relationship with our readers, but actually trying to rebuild trust between journalists and members of the public, is a precious enterprise that we take very seriously. Some of the ways that we try to be exposed to our readers and expose ourselves and be transparent, we think builds our accountability, a sense of credibility that people have about us, and also those mechanisms for accountability, because it allows people to write us and

say, like, 'you guys, you know, you're not living up to that promise,' or 'why haven't you done this,' or 'I was actually really disappointed with the way that you represented XYZ.' We were just talking about this yesterday, about not being thin skinned, and how much better The Narwhal has become because of the way that we have responded to our community when we've let them down. One example I can think of is we relied too heavily on government data about forestry in BC and this really upset some independent scientists who say you cannot unreservedly report government figures about the climate impacts of logging because the government is not a neutral party. In the industries and in the economic policy priorities that are going on in these forests and beyond that, those have implications for these ecosystems, for these species that are going extinct that we are working to save. It is hugely—it does a huge disservice to the public if you uncritically report government figures. We were like 'oh, shit.' We took that very seriously, we actually ended up sending a whole team up to this one particular patch of forest to meet with this forest ecologist and produced a feature called Canada's Forgotten Rainforest, which was one of our biggest and most impactful pieces of journalism that we ended up doing all of last year. So, it was rewarding for us to actually engage in that relationship in a more relational, reciprocal kind of way with our readers and our audience.

Anita Li 56:58
Thank you so much, Carol. So I actually want to ask this, this question is directed towards Karyn and Rick: So at APTN, and MEDIA INDIGENA the audiences are largely from your own community. I'm wondering what does taking a view you from somewhere look like in that context and have you actually had discussions with your audience members about notions of objectivity in mainstream and what do they think?

Rick Harp 57:33
I'll let Karyn handle that first.

Karyn Pugliese 57:37
You want a chance to think eh? It's a hard question. You know, I guess, just while I'm stalling for time to think about how to answer—one of the things that I was thinking about to your last question, as Carol and Lewis were answering, is I don't think that the issue is a problem with the audience understanding that something in journalism needs to change. I think that pretty much everybody wants more transparency and accountability from journalism, and to feel fairly represented, and they realize there's problems with that happening, particularly amongst marginalized groups. It sounds like, I don't know Carol's background, but it sounds like Lewis, Rick, and I were all chewed up and spit out of mainstream journalism for exactly trying to do those things. So to your question about the audience, I mean, there was a lot of thought put in, in the early days of APTN, about how things would be going differently and I'll speak a little bit on behalf of Dan David, who has now become like a news elder to most Indigenous journalists. He had spent some time over in South Africa, just when they were ending apartheid and setting up their own media, and in his time over there, he—I mean, he's also got that Mohawk background, not to stereotype, but we know that Mohawks are sovereigntists and embrace the idea of having their own things. So, he was very excited

about this, and was watching the new system change and he thought, how could it go so much further? So when he came in to start APTN, he asked everybody like how should we think about the news? Should we, would we be like CBC or CTV with those same top five stories every night, but just be brown people telling them? Or would we choose different stories and how would we choose? How would we think about them differently? So we did a lot of thinking about themes, like instead of sports and international and national that it might be elders and youth and community. You would still tell the stories that are important, but you would look at them through frames that were more natural to our people. So this was all playing with the idea of journalism, but it did have a very high accountability element to it because we weren't reporting from far away. We weren't parachuting into communities, we were going to communities, staying with them and staying with the story, and revisiting them—not just showing up when there was something wrong, but going in to also tell when things were going well. We played a lot with the paradigms of journalism. Then I think in terms of relating back to the audience, I mean, we've always had a fairly active audience writing in to talk to us and their expectations changed over time. Very early on in my journalism career, particularly because I was thrown up onto the hill, like literally six minutes out of J school, I was all of a sudden Hill reporter. And so your journalism tells you to interrupt people, and to be aggressive with politicians, and to get in their face. My culture tells me not to do these things. So I was torn between my culture and the expectations of journalism. Very early on, when I would interrupt somebody or cut them off or be aggressive with them, at first, people in our community felt that that was very inappropriate. I would say that, seven years later into APTN, they're cheering that kind of thing on and they want to see more accountability and hard questions and not giving politicians ways to worm out of things I think it's that constant accountability back with your audience and understanding that your audience is going to change over time. Some of Dan David's ideas that were brilliant, when I stepped in as News Director, I wanted to revive some of them with the staff there. It was a younger generation and as their leader I had to listen to them because they have different expectations for what they were doing with journalism. So there's a lot of dynamics that come into setting that up, getting it right, revisiting it, changing it, getting it right again, or trying to get it right again.

Anita Li 1:02:23
Rick?

Rick Harp 1:02:25
Can you restate the question, please?

Anita Li 1:02:27
Yeah, sure. So I said that my understanding is that MEDIA INDIGENA, you're largely serving Indigenous communities, or your audience is largely made up of Indigenous communities. What does taking a view from somewhere look like in that context?

Rick Harp 1:02:46

Okay. I mean, the former is certainly true. The intention of the program is to produce a kind of discussion that isn't Indians 101—that you've had some familiarity, you live these situations and experiences and dynamics that we discuss, and you don't need to be handheld, which is going to exclude, you know, most settlers. Now, having said that, basically because they self identify as settlers—'I'm a settler, here's $10 toward your work' kind of thing—I know that there are a number of non-Indigenous people who are listening, who would never, I hope, think to say 'I don't like what you do on your Indian program do something different,' but it raises an interesting point. I wonder if The Narwhal goes through this as well. Sometimes the people in your audience with the ability to contribute to your work aren't necessarily representative of the audience you're trying to serve. So in The Narwhal's case, I mean, there is a stereotype that I would love to have dispelled that the environmentalist movement is a predominantly white movement, and it's affluent, middle or upper class, that kind of thing. And so they're in a position to pay for The Narwhal, to invest in The Narwhal. Environmental racism is a thing. So, in my case, do I risk this source of funding by alienating them too much? Well, I mean, that's not my problem. I mean, in some ways, what motivated the creation of MEDIA INDIGENA was to scratch an itch—was to get something out there that I felt didn't exist. If it one day comes to haunt me, so be it. I would like to survey my audience and ask them what some people might perceive as sensitive questions, but my plan pre-COVID was to do a lot more events, get out in the quote-unquote 'community' and see who shows up, and then make determinations from there.

Anita Li 1:05:11
Great. So just to follow on these recent comments by Karyn and Rick, I'm wondering if you're reporting on a community you don't belong to, is it possible and advisable to take a subjective view from somewhere as an outsider? So, for example, if you're a white person reporting on an Indigenous community, what does that look like, and how do you go about doing that in a way that's ethical and transparent and holds you accountable?

Rick Harp 1:05:45
You're asking me, or is that kind of a free for all?

Anita Li 1:05:47
It's for everybody, yeah.

Rick Harp 1:05:48
Well, I mean, I guess I'd be curious, where's that Indigenous reporter that you should have on staff in that scenario and, frankly, who among us—as we've already I think well established—who among us isn't an outsider to most communities? I mean, if I say, think of a Canadian, picture a Manitoban—'picture a Manitoban,' I mean, who do you picture? In most newsrooms, I think they probably have a quick image flash to mind if they're being honest, but that's the challenge, right? I mean, we talk about parachute journalism, we talk about extracting stories from communities we only have a passing familiarity with. I don't know, I mean, in some ways I guess I'm trying to unpack the assumptions that may be built into that type of question.

Anita Li 1:06:46
No, I appreciate that, and that's very valid around the fact that, you know, like it was mentioned many times that no one community is a monolith. And within my own community of Chinese Canadians, there are people who're conservative and liberal and like all manner of intersections. So, I recognize that, but I do also want to say that you did mention in that scenario, where's that Indigenous reporter in that scenario, right? So that implies that you're kind of prioritizing a cultural connection, even if that Indigenous reporter isn't necessarily from that exact community that they're reporting on. So can you speak to that a little bit and unpack that even more?

Rick Harp 1:07:28
Sorry, what aspect would you like me to speak to?

Anita Li 1:07:30
In the sense that like, in that scenario that I gave out, it sounds like, it is important to have some sort of cultural connection—the reporter to have some sort of cultural connection on the community they're reporting on. Based on what you said that sounds like that's what you were implying, so I just wanted to unpack that.

Rick Harp 1:07:49
Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we—it's funny, right, because in the same breath that we talk about, you know, generally speaking the industry about objectivity, we also talk about the importance of beats and developing expertise. I mean, we have business reporters, though we don't have worker or labor reporters. We have political reporters, right? We have these walled off little spaces that people develop expertise. I guess the question is, is having a connection to an Indigenous community, potentially, an expertise, a beat? Although, Mi'kmaq and Haida are on opposite parts of what's currently called Canada. I don't know how many Haida specialize in Mi'kmaq history or politics and vice versa. But there is a thing in law called an Indian, which we all unfortunately are squeezed into as status Indians, and it does have that kind of colonially imposed uniformity. So, I'm just thinking of the way the industry is and trying to squeeze this into that. In some ways I think that's what we're trying to do is like, how do we take what we have and make it better? And I guess where my mind is stuck is, can we rehabilitate something that's so compromised to begin with? I'm sorry I'm not able to square the circle.

Anita Li 1:09:25
No, I appreciate that. It's just, it's something I think about a lot as well because I teach community driven journalism at a local college and sometimes that concept comes up where I have a student—a white student once said, like, 'I can't cover a black community, because I'm not from that community.' And I'm of the mind that I—

Karyn Pugliese 1:09:43
I actually have some really strong feelings about that, if I could. Sorry I was trying to get your attention to jump in.

Anita Li 1:09:50
Yeah. Yes, for sure.

Karyn Pugliese 1:09:51
I think it is possible. I've had to cover white communities and I would be—I guess I'm half white, so that qualifies me, but that half white's only Italian and maybe a little bit of Irish. I'm told I have an Irish grandmother, I just can't prove it. That's an Indian joke. So, you know, I've had to cover actually—more seriously and at VisionTV—I covered Muslim communities and Jewish communities and also specific Christian communities that I was not part of. I took a lot of lessons actually from some non-Indigenous journalists that had come in to work at APTN, and some of them have not always done it well, but there are some there that just do an amazing job. I think it goes to sort of what Rick was saying that, you've got to consider it a beat, you've got to consider it a very complicated beat. When you're covering, you know, people's religions, faiths, societies, and cultures, you've got to know something, and you've got to be very open minded to what you don't know and your own ignorance and any blind spots that you may have. You need to ask people in the community, especially, to help you as you're writing it to make sure that you've got it right and you may take those extra steps: 'did I get your quote right?' and let them change it. But I think I would go back to a community that I'm familiar with and ask them: did I get this right? If I write it this way do I understand it? There's all sorts of things that you can do. Some of the reporters in—or the staff in at APTN were non-Native, and non-Native, mostly white or Caucasian, and some of them were phenomenal because we had our own blind spots as Indigenous people. I normalize violence as an Indigenous woman. I do. And so things happen, I kind of go 'oh, that's too bad,' and it takes somebody from outside our community to say, 'no, that is outrageous!' And they were able to play that role, and I think that diversity—like diversity is a good thing. Diversity can always strengthen your newsroom and it goes both ways.

Carol Linnitt 1:12:16
Karyn, that is just so powerful what you've just laid out there and I'm just thinking about, in terms of what we normalize, and even just this idea of objectivity and the sort of presumed right to access, you know, we think about this a lot in terms of reporting on Indigenous communities, which The Narwhal does very frequently. We were sort of talking to our audience at one point about the fact that, for many years we've been reporting on and from within Indigenous communities without having single Indigenous reporter on our staff, and we wanted it to be upfront about that fact and prioritize hiring Indigenous writers because we knew that we needed Indigenous people to help us learn how to tell those stories. Some of the ways that we're having to learn and evolve in telling those stories are, for example, developing a protocol for reporting on Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities themselves oftentimes have a protocol. We found ourselves classic like white settler outsider journalists trumping on to, in to an Indigenous community, pulling out our cameras, you know, like sending the film guy to, like, go film the longhouse while we—you know, and people in the community being like 'whoa, can you guys just slow down for a minute? Let's all introduce ourselves.' And we're just like 'oh, my gosh,' like, we need to learn—every single time we're in a community, we need to be learning, we need to be evolving, we need to be adapting, and we

need to be communicating this with our team because it's so critically important to us that we are engaging with these communities in respectful way. Because if we're not, why on earth do we presume that we should have access to their stories and be able to tell them? Objectivity there is this inbuilt sense that the truth of things are just laying out there for us to sort of take and we can extract no matter what, but some of these stories are sacred, some of them are secret, some of them are traumatic. Some of them are, you know, we don't have a right to if we can't tell them in a way that it involves a kind of context that is so important to the community. There have been times we've been asked by communities not to emphasize, for example—I mean, these things are just so hard to talk about and I don't want to throw them out there glibly like, but—for example, a suicide crisis within a community: do we report on those in the context of an ongoing sort of environmental crisis or some sort of natural resource extraction pressure, which we're there to sort of report on, and then are we going to sort of shoehorn in this community's trauma to sort of ramp up the stakes of that story? There are ways that doing that can feel very extractivist and very unfair to that community. So we care very deeply about those relationships because ultimately we want to be able to report in a long term way on these communities and not in a in a softer, superficial way, but in a way where the community is like 'damn, that was a hard story, but we're sure glad that they told it the way that they did'. So we're kind of shooting for that high bar and it's not going to be the same for every community. Having Indigenous journalists on our team is a way that we can have those conversations within our own team that isn't also exclusive of Indigenous perspectives, and so that's something we're also trying to work on as we grow.

Anita Li 1:15:52
Great. So, earlier, one of the panelists mentioned that the Canadian public or audiences are demanding more transparency in news and that's something I think we can all definitely agree to, but objectivity remains the gold standard in mainstream Canadian journalism, which bestows it with a lot of legitimacy. That means news outlets that don't pursue objectivity, in the traditional sense, in terms of neutrality, don't have as much access to funding or may be limited to access to expert sources. And that's something that I experienced when reporting—when working at The Discourse which is a community driven journalism outlet out on the West Coast that does challenge notions of objectivity as well. There are some questions around our biases and our perspectives. So my question is: how can journalists who don't pursue objectivity overcome this barrier?

Lewis Raven Wallace 1:16:58
I can talk about that a little bit, just from my own perspective as someone who rejected objectivity and lost my sort of whole line of work and in public media became kind of un-hireable in that world, at least for the time being. Now I work with journalists across the US South who are focused on movement journalism and on journalism that's openly in solidarity with oppressed communities, produced by the people who are directly affected and moving toward liberation as a big picture goal—that's movement journalism. What we're really trying to do is create and strengthen our own infrastructure for that work because someone who's openly a movement journalist right now can't really work in mainstream outlets. But we have people who work in mainstream outlets coming to our events and thinking about our

frameworks and moving toward movement journalism. Those folks are pushing for that change, I think, from inside of their newsrooms. And then there are people like Scalawag Magazine, which covers the regional south, that's creating whole new structures for that and becoming a movement journalism outlet that employs a lot of writers and pays people and doesn't have nearly as many resources as our competitors—but we see that in many ways the only option to make space for that kind of journalism and for those journalists is to create our own outlets and create our own programs and support structures. Scalawag does that, the organization that I work for now, Press On, does that through fellowship programs and training programs and direct—where we just started making grants directly to movement journalists in the south. I think that's kind of, for us, the only way forward and part of what makes that worthwhile is that journalism for us is not just a career, right, or just a line of work, it's more like a calling or something that we see is a necessary part of work for liberation. And it seems like everyone on this panel is doing some version of that, right, like making your own way, making our own ways in community, and with that kind of support, but maybe without institutional support of the kind that we could have had had we stayed in those environments.

Anita Li 1:20:03
Thank you. Also, my cat just made a cameo and was trying to tell me something. Does anybody have anything to add to that? Because all of you are obviously pushing the boundaries of this and leading the way, have you encountered barriers, and how have you overcome them around this pursuit of having a view from somewhere?

Carol Linnitt 1:20:32
...I just kind of disappeared. It's not at all that because we report on the environment that we lose our ability to actually be journalists—that we are a journalist with a very specific focus on a very critical issue that is often completely underrepresented in reporting. It's not uncommon at all in Vancouver, the head of many, many international mining companies, to read a business, news in the business section of the Vancouver Sun about some sort of mine, that is like 'should we invest in this project?' You know, 'how much money could you make and what are the predicted financial outcomes for the next 10 years?' Totally not talking about 'Where is this place? What is the community? Do they have community buy in? Is it on Indigenous land? Where is it at in the in the environmental assessment process? What are the expected environmental outcomes? And what is the company promising in terms of mitigation? What is the scientific community say about that?' Literally, you'll see it, a story completely devoid of all of that. And yet, there are times when we'd want to report on those stories and people call us activists and I think, I think this is very particular to the Canadian media landscape which tends to be very traditional, very conservative. So for us, we certainly feel like we've had to put our heads down and do really good work. In some ways, we felt like we've actually had to hold ourselves to a higher standard than we see other journalists at times because we know that we face higher levels of scrutiny because we are subject matter reporters. That has certainly been interesting for us and we always said if we do good work, the credibility will shine through and people will begin to recognize the quality of our work. And so, we did kind of, in a way, kind of put our heads down and just commit to doing like,

really, really quality work. [Technical Difficulties - We experienced a brief service interuption] Some of the payoff for us has been that we have been able to overcome some of the things that people were telling us about the appetite in Canada for environmental journalism and the appetite amongst Canadian readers to support—to become members of media and will they pay for media that's free? The Narwhal's free for everyone, we don't have a paywall, or any excluded content. Is it really a practical, sustainable funding model to ask people to pay for something that's ultimately free? And we feel like we've just been like, totally busting down all of the things that very many people told us that would have made The Narwhal quite impossible. So certainly we've had to overcome some naysayers and some non-believers, but we've like—kind of like what Lewis was saying—we just felt this calling. We wanted to try to chart a path forward for nonprofit journalism in Canada that's a very lonely path in a lot of ways. There's very few nonprofit news outlets—the Tyee and there's others that came before us that definitely had blazed that trail—but we felt like there was a way to sort of re-infuse the Canadian public about the possibility for media that actually did purposely fall outside that kind of traditional structure.

Anita Li 1:23:58
Fantastic, thank you. Rick and Karyn?

Karyn Pugliese 1:24:03
Yeah, so, I don't think you really need to worry about what legacy media thinks of you. I agree with Carol. I spent like ten seconds once I—once I found a place where I could do what I wanted to do, I spent ten seconds thinking about what media, mainstream media thought of me. And then I thought about what I thought of them. That was the end of the story. But you know, the great thing that's happened, the change in the business structure has on one hand made media outlets struggle, but this is not necessarily a bad thing because I think one, it makes them accountable and two, it's opened up opportunities for people like Rick, and for people like The Discourse, another one National Observer, The Tyee—well The Tyee's been around for a while, but they're on a different business model. They're probably the ones who sort of premiered that business model in Canada. So you've got all these other voices coming in and finally don't have to worry one whit about what legacy media thinks. However, I'm also, full disclosure, past president of the CAJ (Canadian Association of Journalists), so now I'm going to say something about the CAJ, but that's just in the spirit of transparency. When we're giving out awards, we're seeing a lot of these startups who are coming in, including The Narwhal who won a major award last year, and the work is being recognized and too much time worrying about what legacy media thinks.

Anita Li 1:25:36
Great, thanks Karyn. Rick, you had a thumbs up. Did you want to add anything to that?

Rick Harp 1:25:44
I think that, yeah. There are compromises that come with quote-unquote 'access,' which is often used in terms of 'well, if we get too tough on government folks or political folks, they'll shut the door on us,' and there's a price being paid for that. I think that, I guess, things I would

like to see is a push in the United States. I don't want to paint it in a completely uncomplicated light, but it seems there's more support for not-for-profit, forms of funding journalism, and there's a lot more collaboration—ProPublica comes to mind. They create this material then that's distributed to newspapers, which in some ways lets newspapers off the hook. But be that as it may, I think that it's always a cost benefit analysis and I think there are more benefits than costs for issuing access to mainstream funding or sources.

Anita Li 1:26:55
Right. We have about five minutes left of this really engaging conversation. Rather than a specific question, because you guys have so much expertise and so much to say, I'm just gonna ask for any sort of last thoughts. Just throw to everybody. Anything?

Karyn Pugliese 1:27:15
We're all waiting for Rick to go first.

Rick Harp 1:27:17
Oh, really? Okay. Well, you know, I've been reading a book lately called A Good War by Seth Klein, and he's talking about the degree of climate literacy and he cited studies that indicated that it's fairly low among Canadians. Alas, and that for example, there's not as much widespread knowledge that promoting the oil and gas industry is somehow connected to climate change that driving your car or flying in a plane is creates CO2, which in turn puts us in the situation we're facing. I sort of feel like, if there's one—if there's one situation I think which highlights the perils of following objectivity as practice, it has to do with the discussion around the terminology we use when presenting the reality of potentially cataclysmic climate change. The Guardian said 'we want to use words like catastrophe, we want to use words like emergency' and the CBC Director of Journalistic Standards said 'well, climate crisis, climate emergency are words that have a whiff of advocacy to them. They sort of imply something more serious, where climate change and global warming are more neutral terms.' So I think in a nutshell that tells you everything you need to know about what neutrality or objectivity means in practice. Don't say a house on Smith Street is on fire, say a house on Smith street continues to experience rather warm temperatures today. So that's where I come at it and shame on CBC for equivocating and clouding what is the defining issue of our time. And if journalism can't—is not up to that task—wow.

Lewis Raven Wallace 1:29:19
I'm so glad you brought up that example, Rick, because I do feel like climate change is kind of the—climate crisis is kind of the overarching story of this moment in many ways In the conclusion of my book, I have a passage that sort of imagines myself as the newscaster, you know the NPR newscaster?—I love those people, I love their voices and they're just, they're so great with the 'two minutes and fifty-nine seconds,' and then they're out. Really powerful voices like Korva Coleman, she's a great one. But the performance of quote-unquote 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' in that context is so intense. So I sort of imagined being news caster while the water around you is literally rising and it's at your feet, and then it's at your knees, and then it's at your waist, and you just keep stating the numbers, right? Or at some

point, do you have to say that you have a stake in what it is that's happening?—and then this rising water around you, if so, do you, are you—can you not be Korva Coleman anymore? You know, can you not be that newscaster anymore? Do you have to play a different role? Does that make you an activist? I think that the climate crisis is, again, just such a good example of why that binary is such a false one—because we're all standing in the rising water and it's gonna affect among us differently, but all of us are definitely like, that water is at our feet, or it's at our knees, or it's at our waist, already. It's just ridiculous to propose that we don't have a stake and high time to move into a model of journalism where we're all thinking about both telling what is happening and that the water is here, but also thinking about maybe part of the role of the journalist is like 'swim instructor' right? I have an idea for how to get out of this, or I'm building a boat while I'm talking to you, or at least I'm talking to the people who are building boats, because this is a crisis that affects all of us.

Anita Li 1:29:19
Thanks, Rick.

Karyn Pugliese 1:31:52
I'll jump in because I don't want to go last. I don't want to be the person that wraps up. I'll leave that to Carol—jumped in, beat you to it, Carol! Yeah, so I want to go back to I guess the question to leave with is objectivity. I said at the beginning, it's a myth and we've known it's a myth for a long time. [inaudible] ...the realization that we're hitting is that we're saying, like, we do have to be transparent, we do have to be accountable, we have to be representing people fairly in a way that they understand they're hearing their voices, it's being fair, we're not taking ourselves and putting our selves, our own biases, on top of the people that we're reporting on. What we're finding is that's very difficult to do and that the tools that we've been using, or that we've convinced ourselves do the job, actually don't do the job. So this is all, we're all in our own way searching for the way to do journalism right, and to do journalism in a way that represents communities. But we all know, there's a problem.

Carol Linnitt 1:32:58
Yeah, I just want to say I'm very grateful for this conversation and I know we're running out of time so I'll keep it quick. I do feel like far beyond this idea of journalists being sort of tellers of objective truth, we play a role in making visible the world, and we choose to show something, and always to the exclusion of other things that aren't being shown and stories that aren't being told. I think living in that tension as journalists is important because it reminds us of what we're doing. The fact that stories go untold all the time and people's experiences of the world go untold all the time—thinking of Lewis' world of the rising water and like, are we boat builders, or maybe like in terms of environmental journalism, I think we're trying to tell the story like: 'those people really need boats but those people are hoarding all the lumber.' There's a power imbalance that is operating, and the stakes are very high for some people. So yes, I think, a reminder of those stakes and Karyn, as you point out, reporting for these communities and keeping that in mind is so important. I know I mentioned previously this complicating the narrative way of thinking about journalism from the Solutions Journalism Network and just as a resource, there's a really, really great article by Amanda Ripley called

Complicating the Narratives. The Solutions Journalism Network has actually created a list of twenty-two questions for complicating the narrative and they're things like: 'What is the question that nobody has asked you? What do you wish the other side understood about you? What do you think it is that the other side actually wants? Is there anything that about how the media portrays you that is really inaccurate?' They're just these little tools and methods for transforming the way that journalists actually think about their role, but also practically transforming the very way that we have conversations and engage with people about whom and on whose behalf we report. Just wanted to share that in case anyone's interested.

Anita Li 1:35:15
Thank you so much, Carol. And on that note, I just want to thank all the panelists, Rick Lewis, Karyn, Carol. This was such an illuminating conversation and I learned so much and so I'm grateful for your knowledge and just your presence on this panel. Thank you again. I'm going to throw it back to Alison at the Blackwood Gallery. Thank you so much for joining us, everybody.

Alison Cooley 1:35:41
Now I get to be the newscaster doing the outro with the water rising around me. So, thank you to all of the panelists this evening and thank you to Anita for your moderation, and to those out there who are watching thank you for attending this video recorded event as part of Running with Concepts. I think there's a lot for us all to kind of continue to return to as we think about these sort of mediated spaces that we occupy especially now, and the ways in which we are operating in this intensely kind of mediated environment. I'm struck by Karyn's notion of this shift from objectivity to process—a process with fairness and the way this is echoed in everything that everyone has shared today: this notion from Carol of showing your work, showing where the data comes from, where the documents come from; Rick, your beautiful assertion that knowledge is partial; and Lewis, I love the way you speak about journalism's responsibility towards community building. I think we will all kind of continue to take these lessons from the conversation into the way that we think about how we operate in and consume media in these spaces. So, I'd like to close by acknowledging the support of our funders, which include the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the University of Toronto Mississauga, and to encourage people to attend our next event, which will be Documentary Practices: Agency, Power and Representation, which I think will pick up really beautifully on some of the conversations we've had today. As part of that program, films by Brett Story and Esery Mondesir begin streaming on October 29, and then a panel discussion with the filmmakers begins streaming on November 4. We hope that you'll join us then and continue to follow along with the conference on our website and social media. Thank you all.