

ISOJ 2020: Day 5, Keynote Session

Objectivity is Not Neutrality: What is the purpose of journalistic inquiry?

Keynote speaker: [Tom Rosenstiel](#), executive director, American Press Institute

- **Chair:** [Kathleen McElroy](#), director, University of Texas at Austin, School of Journalism
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Rosental Alves Good Morning, America. I was mute, but I am now on. So sorry about that. You know this "Good Morning, America" is my Hollywood-inspired way of waking up students when I enter class here at the School of Journalism at UT Austin. So I want to wake up the world because it's not only America. We have more than 4,000 people registered for this ISOJ online from all over the planet. Thank you all for joining me today as we come together virtually for our last day of ISOJ online. It has been an amazing conference. It makes me sad to wrap the conference today. I don't know what I'm going to do next week without it, but I'm incredibly happy to know that thousands of ISOJ-ers joined us this week. And we'll keep coming because we have the videos of all the sessions on YouTube forever.

Before we begin our keynote session of the day, I would like to do a few housekeeping reminders. The panels, keynote sessions, workshops will all be interpreted to be Spanish. If you'd like to join in watching the Spanish, click on the interpretation globe in the meeting options down below on the Zoom screen and select the Spanish language channel. Please also note that we are live streaming on ISOJ YouTube channels. So in case you have any problems, any issues with Zoom, you can also watch us on YouTube, and we're going to be following the questions there too. In order to get the YouTube address, go to ISOJ.org. You're going to find it there, along with some recipes of Texas food that you can eat during the conference, which is very cool. And also we have Spotify music selection also. Anyway, remember also to follow us at hashtag #ISOJ2020, and tweet, tweet. Please. Tweet and retweet a lot. Because we need more tweets. When we meet in Austin, we have more tweets than than now that we are just online.

I also want to take a moment to give an incredibly huge thank you to our sponsors. Thanks Knight Foundation, Google News Initiative, Microsoft, Univision, JSK Fellowships at Stanford, the Trust Project and Moody College of Communication for your contributions and support. Now, I would would like to introduce you to and welcome my friend, Tom Rosenstiel, executive director of the American Press Institute, and Kathleen McElroy, director of my School of Journalism at Austin.

Kathleen McElroy Hi, I'm Kathleen McElroy, director of the School of Journalism, soon to be School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin. I am so pleased to introduce our keynote speaker, Tom Rosenstiel, who is an author of fiction and nonfiction books and a press critic. And the business of news or the packaging of news has been in the news this summer, and he has some fascinating thoughts on it. And so I think we should go straight to Tom and let him talk about objectivity is not neutrality.

Tom Rosenstiel Thanks, Kathleen. It's good to be here. Thank you, Rosental, for the invitation. I love ISOJ, as most of you do, and it's always a treat to be part of it. What Rosental wanted me to talk about is the question of objectivity. Objectivity Is Not Neutrality: What Is The Purpose of Journalistic Inquiry? My good friend Bill Kovach often says that "every generation invents its own journalism." And I think this is one of those moments. We've entered a period of reflection, reexamination and reckoning over race, racism, default culture in newsrooms, objectivity, the purpose of journalism and more.

And there are moments that all of these institutions and many others going on right now. Among the questions being raised is what does democracy need from journalism? Which begs the question, what is the purpose of journalistic inquiry? I hope to offer some perspective in the next few minutes that helps each of you answer these questions, because we're an unlicensed profession. And each of us answers them for ourselves, and then each institution answers them for itself.

Professional journalism arose out of the Enlightenment, with the express purpose that information that was once held by the few, usually by the ruling family, could be shared by many. I won't bore you with a lot of history about early newspapers, but I could. But when information was held by the few, there was not even a term for public opinion. Journalism exists in history and in our American constitution so that people have the information they need to self-government. And to earn and keep that protection, I believe journalism has to provide people with accurate information that rounds out over time into some version of a practical, larger truth. To do that, it needs to maintain fidelity to fact, and as we say in the Elements of Journalism, to maintain loyalty above all to the public. And I believe that journalism works best when it maintains independence from faction from the people it writes about.

So how do you best arrive at the idea of journalistic truth? That brings us to the simple, and of course, fully settled question of "what's objectivity?" What was behind that idea? Where did it come from? It didn't come, as I've heard in the last few weeks, from marketers, from radio, from Anchorman, from Reuters. This is an unwitting falsehood that I've heard on the air, covered a lot lately.

It actually came from people who were worried that journalism was failing at a critical moment in the world about 100 years ago. They were trying to figure out how journalism could get closer to the truth, and they were worried about journalism having an inaccurate and an establishment biased view. And it was a moment like this about whether democracy could survive. World War I had just ended. The world was in crisis. Monarchical empires were falling all over the world, and it was unclear what would replace them. The Russian Revolution had just happened. Democracy was in doubt, and Marxism was rising. And a new science called propaganda was gaining force throughout the world, and fascism was about to be born.

And thoughtful people believed that journalism needed to be better for democracy to survive. One crystallizing influence was a major study called "A Test of News" of The New York Times's coverage of the Russian Revolution was published in 42 pages in The Atlantic magazine in 1920. And the authors Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz had found what they call "unconscious bias," among other sins, in the coverage of The New York Times. In other words, although they didn't use this term, they found a "default culture" in the Times. And the reason that the study was so significant was it captured its moment when people were beginning to think about migrating objectivity from the academy. But it was because of a growing recognition that journalists could never personally be objective.

And to address that, journalists had to begin to embrace methods of reporting and presentation that could be objective, and those methods needed to include what today we would call transparency.

In other words, bring the scientific method into journalism. And there were for many, many reasons, this notion of objectivity of method has been lost or confused. Deep anti-intellectualism in the field. An apprenticeship model, and the way we teach journalism. Failure to teach method the way we do in social sciences, like ethnography and anthropology. Our relativistic and post-modernist academic disputes about objectivity in other fields. A virulent fear of theory by journalists. A lot of reasons that we got confused about this.

But what I would call objectivity as method, or the way that the early proponents of it thought of it, it lives. It lives and is actually quite healthy, not very well articulated in the best work, at the best newsrooms, in the personal methods of the best journalists I know, in the best long-form journalism that we all read. Now, many of us know the term, "the view from nowhere," popularized by my friend Jay Rosen. What fewer know is that this term comes from a book by an NYU philosopher named Thomas Nagel, written in 1986. Even less well-known is that the book is one of the most eloquent philosophical defenses of objectivity ever written. Nagel said, "I want to both defend the possibility of objective ascent and to understand its limits." For Nagel, "objectivity is a method of understanding." Now the guy is a philosopher. OK, not a journalist.

So I'm about to get a little wonky. I could get even more wonky, but I'm not going to. "To acquire," Nagel says. "To acquire a more objective understanding of some aspect of life or the world, we step back from our initial view of it and form a new conception, which includes that view along with others, so that we can place our view or our understanding of the world," in a place that in what Nagel calls "in relation to the world."

In fact, here's how Nagel defines the "view from nowhere." "The question is how limited beings like ourselves can alter their conception of the world so that it is no longer just the view from where they are, but in a sense, a view from nowhere, which includes and comprehends that the fact that the world contains beings, human beings, who view the world from different standpoints and then explains why the world appears to these people as it does and explains how they arrive at their conceptions." So for Nagel, that's the view from nowhere. It's not that you don't have a view. It's actually that you start with your view and then add to it.

Now, he says that philosophers and historians argue about objectivity all the time. They are confused by it. And he says that the people who underrate the idea of objectivity are the ones who don't regard it as a method of understanding. And he says that people who overrate it also confuse it because it's overrated by those who believe it can provide a complete view of the world on its own, replacing the subjective views from which it's developed.

So just let me take a minute on this. In other words, in Nagel's notion of it, the original notion that he was articulating in the 80s, which influenced Jay, the objective method, does not deny the subjective. It starts with. It starts with what Nagel calls "our initial view." We have to understand to be conscious of that, and then we expand our view by trying to understand the views of others. And that's how we can acquire what Nagel calls an expanded consciousness that takes in the world more fully.

Now one's own initial subjective thoughts, feelings and experiences in this conception, are integral to making inquiry authentically human. They help us identify our unconscious biases. We can correct for a default view if we know what our initial view is, and it helps us form hypotheses. But those things, that initial view, that subjective view, is where our inquiry begins, not where it ends.

OK, enough philosophy. Let's put some of this in journalistic terms. What Nagel means is that to get closer to the truth, we actually need to widen our lens and recognize that this view, could also look like this view. Notice that the woman in the first picture is in the second picture. Or that what looks like this at first, the Capitol on fire, and by the way, it was reported that the Capitol is on fire, could look like this from another perspective. Or even look like this from another perspective. And still to another standpoint, could look like this. This, by the way, are pictures of the same fire taken at the same time.

Imagine that you are interviewing a white supremacist. Instead of going and saying, "Here I am from The New York Times, and I have no point of view. I want to ask you some questions. What if you acknowledged who you were and said to the white supremacists, "Hey, I'm a white liberal, old Jewish guy, and I disagree with everything you say." Or "I'm a young LGBT," or "I'm a Black journalist," or whoever you are. Help me understand what you are saying, with an eye to really understanding what that person is trying to say. Not to suggest that it's a legitimate view, but to try and understand where he's coming from.

Or imagine this little reporting technique. My friend Paul Taylor used to say that he would write down what he thought the story was going to be before he went out to report. And when he was done, he would check what he'd written down. And if he hadn't gotten any further than his initial point of view, he either hadn't done enough reporting, or as Kathleen says, he wasn't really listening. Some of you may know Amanda Ripley's work about complicating the narratives, which is that we in journalism are guilty of stereotyping and oversimplifying conflict, and trying to put things into simple buckets. And that if we actually complicate the conflicts and controversies and really try and understand the nuances of the people that we're talking to, it will become more interesting, and more open, and people will be more open to learning.

I dislike the word "objectivity." Journalists didn't invent it. We're not the first to be confused by it. But we're massively confused by it, and it's hurting us. I also, by the way, don't love the term "the view from nowhere." Nagel meant it one way, and Jay uses it in a different way. And people probably understand better in the way that Nagel intended it. Journalists, by the way, have never stood nowhere. They stand for a number of bedrock things even before we bring in our own personal experience. We stand for factualism, for empiricism, for government transparency, equality in law, and racial justice, looking out for the voiceless. There's a whole host of bedrock journalistic principles that are commonly held in the field. Those are then informed by our own personal experiences, our gender, our ethnicity, our individual consciousness. And it's a mistake to deny that. And it's a mistake to not invite those experiences into the discussion in newsrooms that form story choice, and training, and all the other things we do. The biases that hurt us, that become a default, are the ones that are unacknowledged or go unexamined.

In other words, the default culture is a failure of objectivity of method, as Nagel means it. It's not created by it. It is in fact a failure of self-examination or the illusion of self denial. What's a better term for objectivity as a method? Well, Wes Lowery in his column, which I noted at the top of this talk, suggested moral clarity instead of objectivity. I liked Wes's column, but I worry about that term as a replacement for objectivity. I think it's unclear, and

it invites misinterpretation. The Boogaloo Boys have more clarity in their minds, sort of Nazis, white supremacists, people that you think are crazy. The more you actually understand points of view, the more reporting we do on anything, the more information we process on anything, the more complex reality becomes. The more accurate, but actually, sometimes the less clear. Knowledge creates doubt.

Here are some other terms that I've heard lately to try and capture what we think of as objectivity, a method of great reporting. Rounded inquiry. Passionate open minded independent inquiry. Kathleen's suggestion, fully dimensional reporting. Moral curiosity, in the Twitter thread that I did after Wes's column that would surface. For years, I thought about a skeptical way of knowing. I heard somebody the other day use the term comprehensive reporting. Genuine inquiry. I invite us to have a conversation about what term better captures what we mean, but we should not choose this term selfishly. We need a term about method and understanding, not one that justifies ending up with what we already believe because we think that somehow it's the truth.

As Nagel warns in "A View From Nowhere," to redefine the aim of inquiry so that its achievement is largely guaranteed, if objectivity is hard to achieve, to redefine it so that you can't miss, so that it's guaranteed by reductionism, relativism or historicism, or say basically, "We're all subjective. We'll never get past that. So why even try?" He calls that a form of wish fulfillment, and he said we cannot take refuge. And he's talking about philosophers and historians, but it applies to journalists. We cannot take refuge in reduced conditions.

So this takes us back to the start. What do we owe the public? I would submit that we owe them the public square with common facts that are accepted, with a continuing search for those, and an evolving understanding of what facts are true and can be held in common. We have to place those facts in context. I'm not sure, frankly, how much we as journalists need to add more opinion to the opinion ecosystem. We need a recognition that media is not hypodermic. In other words, if we say something to people, it doesn't enter their bloodstream and become what they think. People supply their own meaning to what we say. They adjudicate what we say. And the more we tell them as journalists how to think, the more they will resist. And we owe them verification, and humility, and open mindedness, and more verification.

Each generation creates its own journalism. You're right. And thanks to a new generation, I believe we will have a clearer sense of the evils of default culture and unconscious bias in journalism. We will become more accurate. The President of the United States Donald J. Trump has already made us better as journalists. And this new understanding will come from understanding our history accurately, not misreporting our history. And I submit the professional discipline that we believe in collectively, but we don't have a good name for it. This skeptical way of knowing the world. This passion to learn and inform, which, by the way, distinguishes us from propagandists and political advocates, whose primary aim is always to persuade. This is what will save us. But if we abandon this common purpose or replace misguided understanding of objectivity by taking refuge in subjectivity and thinking that our opinions have more moral integrity than genuine inquiry, then I fear we will be lost. Thank you.

Kathleen McElroy Oh, Tom, that was fascinating and enlightening. You and I have had this sort of mini debate over objectivity. And it becomes clear to me that I'm going to quote Cool Hand Luke here, and you can imagine what that quote is, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." It seems as if that we're all talking about the same thing, but the

word objectivity has been misused by the default culture. That sort of said, my white patriarchal objectivity is better than your in my case, Black female, quote unquote, "objectivity." So I think that's part of what we're seeing now is that the term as it has sort of evolved, has a kind of way of lessening the value of voices outside of white patriarchy. And I think that's what we're reading a lot of, and that's what we're seeing.

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, I agree. And I think that's a failure of journalism. That's a failure of craft. If you really understand this notion, which is both philosophical and and journalistic, that to understand the world, and communicate it effectively, and to know what to think about it, you have to, in effect, live in other people's shoes. Not live in their shoes, but at least understand what they think. That's how we are going to be able to do a better job of reporting things more accurately. So rather than thinking that, well, you know, everybody thinks like me; therefore that's the truth. Or everybody around here is a liberal. Or everybody around here, and everybody I know is a 64-year-old Jewish white guy. They all think like me because my thoughts are universal. That's an intellectual failure and a journalistic failure. It also means that you've got to create an environment in your newsrooms where rather than avoiding tricky conversations, because you want to pretend that we all think the same way, which really is a straight line to a default-like culture. You actually have to create an environment where people can disagree and in fact bring their personal experience into it and say, "Hey, look, you know what? This room is totally secular. I'm deeply religious. And I got to tell you, I'm offended by this thing we've done because of that. Or you know, "I'm Lithuanian," or "I'm a WASP" or anything. I mean we have to actually bring in our subjectivity to arrive at a wider, more fully, as you put it, Kathleen, a more fully dimensional understand. So it's not denial of the self. It's placing itself in relation. Yeah, it gets philosophical, but that's what we are talking about. We just don't think about it that way.

Kathleen McElroy You know, and this is going to be a shameless plug. Moody College of Communication is working with the Press Forward, which sprung from sexual harassment in newsrooms. We're developing a newsroom curriculum to help journalists find their voices in newsrooms, and to sort of help them say, "Instead of what you wrote offended me." How can we get to the point where you can safely say how you feel about the product? Like we think such a safe newsroom that people can be at the front end of the product. And I think that's another thing that we're seeing now, is that people feeling voiceless in their own newsrooms, or that they're only valued in a particular way.

So I just find this fascinating. I really do hope people will help us come up with terms, so we can say that, "Hey, yes. This is my perspective." But I want, and as you say, we are like approaching truth, a closer version of the truth. Just one last thing I'd like to add that when you were talking about that report that came out in the 20s about the Times, yet ten years later, Duranty, got a Pulitzer for his completely flawed reporting on Ukraine. So there's always been this disconnect about, you know, philosophizing about journalism, whether it's the Hutchins Commission, or Kerr, or whatever, and the actual practice of journalism.

Tom Rosenstiel Yes, right. I mean, as we critique the field, there are two tracks. There is the aspirations that we want people to understand, to raise their work, what Nagel the ascent. And then there are the many sins, all the ways we fall short. And if we focus only on our sins, that actually is an invitation to what Nagel calls reductionism, these reduced aims. If we say objectivity is bogus, that seems very binary, and the alternative seems subjectivity. But if we can say actually the goal, is this more fully dimensional understanding. Yeah, fill in the blank. But fully dimensional genuine inquiry, then we are

approaching something that is not just subjectivity. It starts with that. But, you know, one of the things that I have said for the last four years is, and I feel it acutely now as we are in another election year, but I felt it in 2016, if the outcome of an election is inexplicable to us as journalists and to our audiences, that is a failure of journalism. Our obligation is to understand why and how events happen, and not to say, "Well, half the country is crazy." Or whatever your critique is. That leads us nowhere. And that's a failure of us to live up to our responsibilities.

Kathleen McElroy You know, we're going to end on that and then take questions. What I find fascinating is that after the election, it's like everybody ran to the, you know, the book on Appalachia, or let's talk to more white people to find out what happened. While, a lot of us people of color expected the result. So even then, I feel as if journalists or the profession ends up not asking the right people the right questions. You know, so I think that's a great way for us to introduce questions from the audience.

Kathleen McElroy Hello. And as it turns out, we have plenty of questions from the audience. And the first one, I'm going to just read the translation, which I actually knew. Some have said that objectivity is a method with an attitude. What are your thoughts on that?

Tom Rosenstiel Well, I don't know whoever said that, what they had in mind, but what it suggests to me is that what I think of is that skeptical way of knowing. Some uncertainty that any one side in something has the answer. As I said in the talk, journalists stand by certain bedrock principles. We may absolutely want to say Black Lives Matter, which policy is the right one for police reform, or defunding, or correcting what goes on in law enforcement. Which one are you advocating? Which policy are you trying to persuade people to? That's where journalists step back, I think. We're unsure. We don't go into these things with any answer, even if we go in with a certainty about about what the goals are.

So that's one part of the attitude. I guess another part of that attitude would be, and this is an old journalistic adage, "both sides lie to me equally," which isn't to say that both sides are equally wrong or equally right. But politicians on both sides, even people whose policies may be really bad, they're in the same business of persuasion and exaggeration. And, you know, the old line, "What do journalists do? They wait in the hallway for politicians to come outside and lie to them." So that's part of our attitude too. A certain skepticism.

Kathleen McElroy You know, that leads into the question that someone else asks. And it's a leading question, by the way. Why do the media focus more on fairness and accuracy? It seems that balancing truth with falsehood obscures the truth. And I think what we've been talking about is getting away from that "he said, she said" type of reporting.

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah. So I think accuracy is a great goal. I mean, in the Elements of Journalism, the truth is the first principle. And the way you start that is first you get accurate information. I've always had a problem with the word fairness. People like it because it's a great goal, but it's pretty squishy. Fairness is a pretty subjective notion. What I think is fair and what you think is fair, may be pretty different. So that doesn't get us very far in terms of arriving at method. And balance, which was a method used very long ago, we know how flawed that is. I mean, I think Ellen Hume may be in this. She was the first person I saw to write a piece, I think maybe for Neiman, many, many years ago, probably more than twenty years ago, about false balance. And that's a term everyone in journalism knows. I mean, so when people talk about objectivity is false, balance and false

equivalency, and both sideism, those are all terms that journalists are extremely familiar with, know our bad practice, and by the way, have been understood to be bad practice for more than 100 years.

When Homer Bigart was sent by The New York Times to Vietnam in 1961, and there were some young reporters there, David Halberstam was one of them, he taught these guys just because these generals tell you they're going to do things, you can't just write that. You have to find out whether they're right, or whether they're lying to you, or whether they're engaging in their own wish fulfillment. So you have to go out with troops and see, can they do what they say they can do? That's your responsibility not to write down what they said. That's political stenography, and lots and lots of great journalists going back many generations. Again, my friend Bill Kovach, who grew up in Tennessee, is a tough Albanian. Now that's a guy with attitude. You know he worked for the National Tennessean and other papers in the South, uncovering abject, the worst kind of racism, the worst kind of Jim Crow policies, where the sheriff were Klan members, and that kind of stuff. And so they were not political stenographers. And they were righting wrongs that were obvious. Which solution was the right one? That was probably a step beyond in which they went. But what's wrong? Is this wrong? They were not doing balance.

Kathleen McElroy And it's a fair question that the commenter is asking, because I think there has been that, as you say, that kind of a false balance. And we need to work in journalism schools to make sure our students understand that. There's another question. Where is the objectivity when editorial standards tell you what to say, and what not to say? And I don't know if this is written editorial standards. I know in certain countries, in certain cultures, there is a partisan form of journalism. So I don't know if he's talking about U.S. culture or journalistic cultures in other countries.

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, I mean, one of the things that happened in the United States was that our media was advertising driven. We didn't have much in the way of government-funded media. And we did have a lot of newspapers going up and really into the '60s that were highly partizan. We had papers that represented the Republican Party, and the Democratic Party, and pro-labor papers. But as as those papers died out and the newspaper industry contracted and we got started in the late 1950s and early 60s, down to basically one newspaper in every town, and the model gradually shifted to being advertising driven or more advertising driven, it made papers more centrist. But it also pushed them away from partisanship. Now, that started in the 1830s with the first non-partisan newspaper in New York. But it was a long journey to this. And then, of course, when we had the introduction of television, it was highly regulated to be nonpartisan. And the reason for those regulations were we came out of World War II, and we were very mindful of the way that the fascist governments controlled electronic media, which was new. Radio, and then the emergence of film, and television as a political science. And we were terrified of that happening in the United States because we had limited electronic media, a limited bandwidth. So we put those restrictions in place. We ended them in the 1980s, starting with Reagan.

Kathleen McElroy We ended a lot of things in the 1980s.

Tom Rosenstiel And it continued by the Clinton administration as we went into cable and then the internet. But it is useful to remember that what we consider talk radio or even a lot of cable news would have been in violation of federal regulations for the first 40 years of our electronic media life.

Kathleen McElroy I will challenge you a little bit on one thing. I do think that papers became, quote unquote, "more centrist." But you can see that there is still you can see a conservative or liberal facet to papers that are even considered centrist now. I think if you were to examine their roots, you'd see that there's still vestiges of the past in a lot of these.

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, I agree with that. I mean, I'll tell you a different Tom Johnson, who was the publisher of the L.A. Times, and then later the president of CNN told me, although he's from Austin, I think originally. Tom, on the death of Otis Chandler said to me that the most important influence in any media company beyond anything, beyond the structure of the company, whether it's privately held, publicly held, anything else, are the values of the owner. And because they make the decisions about who they put in charge, and there's just a trickle-down effect that is profound. He said having worked for many different bosses, including Lyndon Johnson, who owned TV stations, he said, "Look, that's the single biggest thing." There's also academic research out there that shows that media have some chameleon like quality. In other words, the Hearst Company owns a newspaper in San Francisco, and the attitudes of that paper are different than the Hearst paper that's owned in Houston or San Antonio. You know, a paper in Tulsa, if it wants to survive, is going to have different tones and highlights than a paper in Austin, Texas.

And those are commercial realities. I think they probably are secondary to not just to the political values, but almost the existential values. If an owner is greedy and doesn't really believe in journalism, you get one kind of product or you get that that profoundly influences the product.

Kathleen McElroy I'm going to go on to the next question. Can or should we teach journalism students empathy in order to enhance objectivity as you outlined it?

Tom Rosenstiel Yes, certainly. Empathy is an important quality, as is humility. And empathy, by the way, of course, means not agreeing with someone, but it means understanding them, understanding why they think the way they do. So if Tom Nagel were here in this talk, he'd probably tell me I didn't understand his book properly, but I think he would say, "Yeah, that's an integral part of what he thinks of objectivity as method."

Now, how do you teach empathy? That's the hard part. There are, in anthropology and ethnography and sociology, there are methods that have been developed to acquire empathy. In our business, we say go interview that person and come back with quotes. Do we even teach them how to interview, or how to understand, or how to double check what they heard, if that's really what the person meant?

Kathleen McElroy I gave a lecture yesterday to incoming freshmen, incoming first-year students on the art of the interview. And one of the things I said is sometimes it can be the third or the fourth time when you finally start taking notes. If you really want to empathize with that person, it's not always just writing down what that person says.

Tom Rosenstiel Right, I mean, we teach interviewing. Maybe we should teach listening. And Amanda Ripley in the work she's done, she has a technique where she; and I really highly recommend "Complicating the Narratives" if people haven't read it. It's a long piece, but it's worth the time. She says when she's interviewing somebody, she'll she'll say something like, "Let me see if I've got this right. Do you mean blah, blah, blah?" And then she picks up a cue from the way they respond. And if they say, "Yeah." Then she knows I didn't get that right. She says, "I must be missing something. Explain it to me again." And if they say, "Yeah, that's right. And." That opens them up to provide more nuance, because

the first time they give you an answer, they don't know who you are. They don't know how much to trust you. And that answer is probably a little bit careful and platitudinous. And our job has to be to open folks up. And Nagel would absolutely agree with that.

You know, if I were going to reinvent journalism curriculum, I would start with a class called Evidence and Inference, and I would have a class on listening. And I would really try and instill not how to write stories, but how to acquire information, verify it, understand when you're being Heisenberg, or the Heisenberg principle, and you're intruding on and changing the event, by the questions they you are asking by your presence. These are big issues, deep issues, that we've just never really thought all that much about on a practical level, because, you know, we were manufacturing journalists to get jobs to go into the manufacturing of news. And there's more to it than manufacturing.

Now that we're in this existential crisis, a crisis caused by distrust of the press, by political actors, and distrust of the press, by people in the press, it's time for us to take on these deeper challenges.

Kathleen McElroy Wow, I mean, I wrote that down because those are classes I'd love to teach. And this is about you, but when I did research on Civil Rights obituaries, I found out that the Civil Rights figures were quoted when they talked about violence. So they learned to just discuss violence because the other quotes weren't making it into the newspapers. So what you're saying is spot on, and we have to be aware of that.

Tom Rosenstiel There's a question that we got that I just want to touch on, because it's a follow up to your question about empathy. And that is, how do we teach empathy at a time when there's such rampant distrust of us? One of the advantages and disadvantages that we have as journalists is that most people have never met a journalist, and we know this from research we've done at API. That's why I think if you go to people and you level with them and say, "Hey, this is who I am. This is what I think. Tell me why you think the way you do." If we introduce ourselves as something pretty different than the images they've seen of us on virtually every fiction television show that you can see on Hulu, Netflix or Amazon these days, if we can demonstrate that we're actually human beings and not this sort of grotesque piece of technology, I think we can open them up. I mean, we need to show empathy to earn their empathy.

Kathleen McElroy Oh, yeah, and which is why in a lot of small towns, the journalists feel closer, and more responsible, and more trusted than in big cities because you're shopping at the same grocery stores, going to the same churches, going to the same Kiwanis dinner. So I know I need to get through these.

So someone asks how can we explain objectivity to our audience in the time of prevalent anti-media propaganda? And I think there are other questions sort of similar to that. Should objectivity be enforced by rules against subjective speech, which I don't really know?

Tom Rosenstiel I mean, I think what we need to do is. And I found I mean, look, these are ideas that I learned and began to develop 20 something years ago from doing the reading of that period of time when journalism began to shift and become more professional.

Even today, if you say to somebody who's been in the business for a long time, "You know, objectivity has nothing to do with you. It's a method man." That opens people up,

like, "Oh, you know. Yeah, that's right. That's what I think. But I've never thought of it. That's actually what I think. But that's not the way I have understood the term."

OK, so what are those methods, and what is it that people use, and what are the methods that good journalists already are using? You could even say, skip the word objectivity, and use fully dimensional inquiry. Or you're going to have to pick a term that if you want to communicate it to a member of the public, that they're going to understand. It can't be something wonky or academic, not to put off all of the PhDs who are listening to this talk. But it's got to be something that is a colloquial power. Then we need to teach that and recognize that that it is a journey ourselves. We don't have all those tools. We need to get better at those tools. And then one of the advantages we have in this business is, especially at the local level, our work is public. And if people can see that we've done the work well, and it's useful to them. Look, I've been involved in either drafting or writing about almost all of the trust in media surveys that have been done since 1980, literally. I wrote hundreds of them at my years at the Pew Research Center. And there are many factors that have converged to create the trust crisis. But a lot of them occurred before the Internet. Half of the decline in trust that's happened in media happened from 1980 to 1996 before there was an Internet. It was choice. Choice that began to dislodge people, starting with conservatives, from the kind of media that we produced. And that tells me that we probably have I mean, part of our default culture that we need to reexamine in journalism, is a kind of white establishment liberalism. Not just white male oldness, but it has a political component to it that we do not come to grips with.

Kathleen McElroy Another commenter asks how can journalists be successful in providing facts? I mean, if there is no objectivity in journalism, how can journalists be successful in providing facts, even suppressed by opinions?

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, well, there is objectivity in journalism. It's objectivity of method. OK, that's the point of this talk. There is no personal objectivity. That's an impossibility. But you can arrive at, you know, Nagel's notion of the view from nowhere through the discipline and professionalism of thought. Facts by themselves may be important or may not be. If the car was green, not blue, may or may not be an important fact.

Kathleen McElroy And that's, by the way, a question that someone asked. If truth is relative and facts are not, why not stick to facts?

Tom Rosenstiel Because they're insufficient. And he said this. He said this. He said this. He said this. These things are all in conflict. What am I supposed to make of that? So we need context. We also need to recognize that our level of ability to verify or know varies depending on the nature of the facts. We are much stronger in journalism on the physical externalities of the world. These words were said. This many people were in the room. Now, why did he say those words? What did he or she have in mind? What was their motivation? That's more subjective and is going to require a higher level of proof. We only need to actually have the the audio recording to know what was said, but to know why something was said, we now have to interview a lot more people who were in that room and get a sense of what they thought the motivations were. Or maybe someone who talked to the person who said the words, or was involved in developing the strategy behind those words. So these are knowable things, but they go beyond simply facts. We owe the public more than facts. But we have to have a lot of humility about how much do we know this? Just because one person said, "Well, this is why he said it." And if you go with that one person saying, "This is why he said it." If that person's guessing, then you've got nothing. But if it's the person who actually sat down, wrote the speech, edited the speech

and was involved in the strategy behind the speech, that's a much better source. So that's a case where the evidence, the rule I need two sources is meaningless, if both sources are fourth hand sources. We need to start thinking epistemologically about what we mean by evidence.

Kathleen McElroy Here's a question about when the subject attacks and discredits the reporter, or the media outlet. Gee, I don't know where that's happening? Where isn't it happening? What can they do to keep a fully dimensional view and not become the story? Which has happened to reporters recently.

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, well, I mean, Trump, when he says we are the enemy of the people, or the fake news, or fake media, he's setting a trap for us. He wants us to lose our stuff. He wants us to have our hair on fire and go off the rails. He wants to enrage us. And then he can say, "See, I told you so." The metaphor I often think of is if I went into the E.R. and I was injured, I would not want the doctor to lose their professional, clinical attitude and say, "Oh, my God. You are in really bad shape. This is going to be a tough surgery I'm going to have to do. I'm really nervous." That's not what I want. Or if I'm stopped by a cop, I don't want that cop to be enraged, and pissed off, and ready to come at me. I want that cop to adopt his or her professionalism at the highest level and keep their cool. And so when Trump begs us and tries to bait us, we need to keep our cool. When he goes low, we need to go high.

Kathleen McElroy There are a couple of questions about corporations and media ownership. And one says, "Can corporations produce journalism as we see it?" And another one is, "In India because of corporate communications have started their own media organizations to safeguard their business, because of this news becomes commodity, and what do you say about this?"

Tom Rosenstiel Yeah, two different questions. First off, and I want to emphasize this, the structure of the owner, the structure of the ownership, does not dictate the values of the corporation. The New York Times is a publicly traded corporation, and it's producing journalism. Times Mirror was a publicly traded corporation run by Otis Chandler, and it produced journalism. He made the company, his family company, better, and better, and better. So ownership structure, the notion that somehow commercial media is going to be bad, and nonprofit media is going to be good. I can tell you I've been in the nonprofit world for 30 years, there are motives behind nonprofits too. So there's a lot more to it than ownership structure. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that the nature of the structure of the ownership is going to solve the problem. It's much more complex.

The second thing, I would say, is I've sort of lost track, I got so impassioned on that. I lost track of the second question.

Kathleen McElroy Well, no, I mean, I think, because there is, as you say, this conflation between corporations and journalism, and the sense that only nonprofits can be committed to pure journalism. You know, when in fact that's not typically the case. But I think you're seeing it in other countries where the motives for starting journalism, and we have it here in this country.

Tom Rosenstiel Look, we've got good billionaire owners and bad billionaire owners. We had it through history. We had local owners, who probably the worst owners were local owners. And the best owners were local owners. We had good publicly traded corporations. You know, I would say at the moment we don't have a lot of hedge fund

owners. There's only a few of them, and the ones that dominate are setting a bad model. We're about to have a test with McClatchy of whether there's another model for hedge fund owners. It's a small sample size, but at this point, not a great one. Is it easier if you're privately owned? Yes. But it also means that the private owner can do whatever they want. And there have been some terrible private owners. A nonprofit that creates some insulation, and I have a lot of hope for that model. But insulation can also create delusion. And that's happened with some nonprofit owners.

Kathleen McElroy So we're out of time. And we weren't able to get to some questions, including a really good one from Jane Singer, who we, I'm sure both, I know I admire her and admire her work. And it's just more about the misinterpretation of objectivity. And I'm hoping.

Tom Rosenstiel Just read the question, and then people can know it.

Kathleen McElroy It's sort of a long one. But why is this misinterpretation of the idea of objectivity, I guess, so entrenched in journalistic thought? And Jane, if I muddled that, because I shortened it, I apologize.

Tom Rosenstiel Well, and it's muddled, by the way, it's muddled in philosophy and history, too. I think the problem is that the word objectivity, the antonym of it is subjectivity. So it invites this notion of this binary choice. Whereas if we attach it to a person, because subjectivity is about consciousness, but if we just think of it as a method. Take the word transparency and use that. That invites actually, "OK, now my method is transparent." Now if transparency is, "Hey, I'm just a liberal, and here's what I'm going to do." That doesn't get you very far. And Negal would say, "Well, you've started, and you've taken no steps."

Kathleen McElroy Well, I invite us all to continue this conversation. I think it's very, very worthwhile, and I hope I can write on this with Tom. And I'm going to send us back to Rosental, so he can close up the session. But I've really enjoyed it. And as I said, we need to have the conversation continue.

Rosental Alves Thank you so much to both of you. I think this was fascinating and so timely. I think this is so important. I have been a fan of of Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel since the very beginning of this. I am so proud that I signed immediately as it went online the Committee of Concerned Journalists manifesto in 1997, I think. And I have been using the Elements of Journalism as a quasi Bible in my classes since 2001, when it was launched, if I am right with the year again?

Tom Rosenstiel You are.

Rosental Alves And I couldn't imagine that a journalism conference this day now without this topic. And I couldn't also imagine nobody better than Tom to take it on. So I'm very happy. Thank you very, very much to both of you.

I want to encourage you all to join us this afternoon during first our brunch workshop about funding for public interest media. And then we have the two other panels this afternoon, one on on how journalists are using artificial intelligence and open source intelligence, OSINT, to investigate. And the last panel of the day will be absolutely fascinating. It is how to fight deepfake and cheapfake videos. So if you haven't already done so, you can go to Eventbrite and register to watch here in Zoom, but we are on YouTube too. So I'll see you

in a few minutes with the new ideas to fund public interest media globally and in the U.S. in half an hour. Thank you very much. Bye.