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Interpreting the bigger picture

Introduction

This final substantive chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first I will examine two current affairs pieces whose coverage is much broader in scope than those we've been looking at thus far. These items are broad ranging, covering larger sets of social relations, with a greater spatial and historical span, than those covered in the last chapter. I want to explicitly thematize the *plural character* of causation within these pieces, and also – drawing on the analysis of types of knowledge introduced in the last chapter – to thematize the ways in which these pluralistic, spacious, stories with a large historical or geographical sweep are typically made up of a patchwork of different types of knowledge. It is necessary for critically adept audiences to be sensitized to these characteristics and their implications. I continue the method of approaching these items from the perspective of a reader or viewer who has no previous knowledge of the issue at hand, for the reasons outlined at the beginning of Chapter 4.

The first analysis focuses on a newspaper feature which argues that key aspects of Germany's recent economic success have been dependent on a deep, embedded, set of structural preconditions, and the second analysis examines the script of a radio broadcast situating the Rwandan genocide of 1994 in its historical and political context. The strengths of these kinds of account come, first, from their expansiveness, including their recognition that momentous outcomes – both successful and tragic – flow from a plural combinations of causes, and secondly, from their ability to see things with a wide-angled lens, with historical depth, or with both. However, because the characteristics of the knowledge they provide are uneven – as a result of sometimes zooming in on details and diligently tracking processes as they unfold, and at other times seeing things from a distance and losing sight of processes for substantial periods – there is a premium on being highly attuned

to this fact. The implications for plural causation is that some of the relevant processes will be brought much more sharply into focus than others, and tracked more assiduously than others. The more attuned that audiences are to the status of the knowledge offered by any one part of a text, and to the mix of knowledges within the text as a whole, the more likely they are to be alert to both the inherent strengths and limitations of that text.

In the second half of the chapter I will continue the theme of plurality, approaching two sets of news and current affairs accounts on very different issues with a view to foregrounding the complexity of relevant causal forces at work within their respective fields. I will also, however, introduce a new theme of making creative connections *between different items*, either from within the same genre or from different genres. We will have prepared the ground for this with the emphasis on the patchwork of different types of knowledge *within* the single items on German manufacturing and ethnic genocide in Rwanda. This theme of making connections between items is a natural corollary of recognizing the patchwork quality of the knowledge provided in a single item. We can remind ourselves that, in single items, the detail and quality of some parts of a piece are usually more richly textured and contextualized than others. One needs to notice the thinner, sparser parts of accounts, as these tend to be the places where these single items fail to live up to the lofty rhetorical pretensions of their own claims and arguments. Instead of the consistently solid weight of evidence required to substantiate a strong and vigorous line of argument, one so often finds, instead, patches of relatively convincing and compelling empirical reference nestling among a diffuse and motley array of vaguer, more threadbare, fragments. These swatches of variegated status and quality are typically all stitched together into a less than satisfactory whole by the tropes of imprecise and hazy summary. The recourse to creative connections between items is a way of supplementing, filling out, the uneven knowledge provided within these single pieces – filling them out with complementary, enriching and completing, kinds of knowledge gathered from other items and genres. Connections can be made to sources that provide more detail and coverage within areas already encompassed, or they can be to sources that extend the analysis into new domains, domains that have been ignored but which have a bearing on the issues and claims at hand.

The audience is at the heart of this approach, as the implication is that audience reception and interpretation of single texts about an issue needs to be integrated into a slowly evolving stock of knowledge about this issue, and about the same complex of questions with respect to this issue. From this perspective, a television news bulletin is potentially just one source from a kaleidoscope of sources that a viewer can access and draw from in making sense of a particular event or outcome, and of the things that have brought

it about. This places a significant onus on the creative capacity of viewers to combine information from different sources in a manner that is conceptually coherent and empirically adequate.

The two news and current affairs issues focused on in the second part of the chapter are the violent clashes on Bangkok's streets in May 2010, and the revelations about the chronic ill-treatment of patients in a UK National Health Service hospital run by the Mid-Staffordshire Trust between 2005 and 2009. Both involve a good deal of complexity, and it is no straightforward matter to be able to combine the information provided by different sources in a way that adequately addresses the four dimensions of stories identified by media frames. To remind ourselves again, these are: (i) ascertaining the appropriate definition of the situation or problem-to-be-explained; (ii) identifying the relevant causes of that situation; (iii) identifying moral judgements made with respect to this causation (and we should want to seriously probe and evaluate these judgements); and (iv) formulating strategies to improve or remedy the situation.

We've seen that social theory allows us to approach these preoccupations of media frames with a greater level of sophistication, and a greater degree of conceptual refinement. It allows us to identify the status of the knowledge provided within a current affairs account, and therefore to judge how adequate such knowledge is for the questions we want to address, or for the claims that have been made for it. Having this capacity to identify the status of the knowledge we already have, incorporating a sense of how such knowledge has been conceptualized, makes it easier to think about what knowledge we still lack. These are powerful capabilities, and all the more so if they can be combined with a sensibility alert to the full range of avenues through which to extend the conversation so as to deepen the interpretation. Such a combination allows us to be open to the possibility that the further knowledge we are looking for might be provided by, for example, one or other of a specific news report; a documentary film; a specialized essay; an academic text; official documents or reviews; or a memoir, literary novel or photograph; or such serendipitous sources as, say, the unexpected surfacing of hitherto hidden items of personal correspondence. In extending the range of the sources we look out for, and are ready to examine, we hope to find, on those occasions when we are lucky, that a new source provides us with some of those pieces of information that were missing and which we were looking for. At other times we will discover illuminating, and highly relevant, pieces of information that it would never have occurred to us to look for. The key, in both cases, is to be able to identify, with some precision, exactly which bits of missing knowledge have been provided, and what their implications are.

In analysing how to combine texts in order to make better sense of the political conflict in Bangkok, and of the mistreatment of patients within Stafford

Hospital, I will draw attention to the accompanying process, introduced at the end of the previous chapter, of recovering the status of knowledge in any one piece from the rhetoric of the text. For, as we have seen, the textual tropes and rhetoric that have their own intrinsic power to rouse, direct and persuade audiences, quite apart from any question of their truth or accuracy, should be taken seriously. The insights and tools of social theory, with the idea of the contextual field at the heart of these, can be invaluable in facilitating and guiding this process of recovery, as well as in the subsequent assessment of the knowledge that has been excavated from the text. The *media frames* literature is a useful bridge here as it directs us to typical aspects of media texts, training us to look for how a media text defines the situation it is covering and how it then, in one way or another, avers certain causal claims, makes moral judgements and advocates particular remedies with respect to that situation. The *social-theoretical frame* adopts these guidelines but provides greater focus and rigour; it also asks us to think carefully about the links between the different aspects of the media frame. What, for example, are the links between a documentary film's definition of the situation and its causal claims? Is it saying that a particular cause has been solely responsible for a particular aspect of the defined situation, or has it combined with other causes to produce this outcome? In either case, the combination of media frame analysis and social-theoretical frame analysis guides one to look for, and to recover, specific kinds of knowledge and knowledge claims contained within the text.

It is only once one has a grasp of the recovered or excavated status of the knowledge provided that one can start to consider what further knowledge is required. As noted, the identification of the problem or outcome to be explained – the *explanandum* – is key to being able to ascertain which different sets of causal forces might provide the key to the explanation. The outcome to be explained (as in Bourdieu's outbreak of violence in a high school) helps to guide one towards the networks of social relations that are 'relevant', relevant to a causal explanation of how that outcome came about. Care must be taken to show how processes within certain networks, within certain clusters of institutional practices, interact with other networks in producing the outcome. The process of thinking things through must be conceptually astute if it is to be able to identify this interaction in a coherent and plausible manner. The performance, within this, of creatively, but systematically, combining information and understandings from different items is of particular significance now, in the age of information technology and communication, an age in which one internet link can lead seamlessly to another, but which all too typically results in a simple overload of random, inadequately integrated, fragments of information. The alternative to drawing on the guidelines of social theory, even in a pragmatically 'light' way, is for audiences to settle for

information being received in an *ad hoc* and fragmentary manner, and for us to be content that interpretations and arguments are based on nothing more than this.

If this is something we don't want to settle for then we need to develop ways of being able to combine seemingly endless quantities of information with disciplined, systematic and adequate ways of conceptualizing and making sense of them. In order to combine knowledge from different sources on a particular news issue in a systematic and coherent way, audiences need to know how to excavate, conceptualize and contextualize the information they receive. Once they can do this effectively, and they begin to stick with particular stories, seeing them through from one day to the next, the background knowledge they will have on hand to bring to the interpretation of each new item *within* this issue at hand will, soon, consist both of generalized typifications drawn from other places, times and social domains and of a developing body of conceptualized knowledge on this particular issue. At each stage of this process, each new item will be subjected to scrutiny in ways analogous to those discussed in the previous chapter, but now on the basis of a slowly accumulating stock of situational knowledge.

Large sweeps of the social world: Patchworks of knowledge from single texts

The broader, more pluralistic accounts, we shall look at in the first part of the chapter, texts that cover larger sweeps of history, geography, or both, tend to share the shortcomings of the more narrowly directed reports examined in the previous chapter, but to also have other limitations that are more specific to type. One might say that these limitations are the flip side of their strengths, as concern with detail is sacrificed for the sake of breadth of vision. It is a particularly fruitful exercise, when confronted with such texts, to pay close attention to the patchwork-like quality of types of knowledge they rely on. In these accounts, for example, one is more likely to encounter the pithy and sententious summary that condenses into a few words the narration of what are, in fact, complex, enduring and deeply networked processes. Such processes may have persisted for years and have taken many years before they produced certain outcomes, and they could have involved the co-ordination of many different kinds of differently situated practices over large tracts of space and have involved the combination of several key causal mechanisms. But they are often dealt with in a sentence, where they are mentioned at all.

It is certainly the case that it is just not possible to do full justice to all the elements involved in large-scale processes. One must necessarily engage in

a complex scheme of selection and judgement about what to focus on at all, and about which of these elements to treat with greater or lesser degrees of reflection and awareness. The summaries within texts thus necessarily highlight only some processes, and only some salient parts of these processes, pushing into the background key dimensions of their entanglements with other aspects of their context. They therefore typically compress or efface many of the details of the sum total of all relevant entanglements and the processes and mechanisms they are a part of. They routinely conceal significant gaps in the analysis. More than this, their scale means that the details and aspects of processes they do focus on are typically, inevitably, wrenched away, uprooted from, the contexts in which they were embedded, in which they made sense. The scale also means that many aspects of the things that are perceived are perceived from afar, from a bird's eye view rather than through the eyes and ears of an actor at the heart of the action. The credibility and integrity of the accounts should begin with the extent to which their authors are able to successfully believe in, and convey, the value of their narratives. However, in order to be appropriately robust intellectually, and not just simply persuasive, an author's own conviction about the value of the narrative must also be able to withstand and incorporate any valid charges that, for example, their narrative is uprooted and decontextualized in one way or another; that their point of view is a distant one; or that there are many significant gaps in their coverage of key processes.

Plural conditions for Germany's manufacturing success

The lead article in the *Guardian Weekly* 7–13 June 2013 announced a causal argument in its headline: 'How Germany Rode the Storm: Progressive Business and Labour Principles Underpin Europe's Economic Giant'. In reflecting upon and assessing any causal argument it is first necessary to establish what the state of affairs is that has been brought about. What is the end state of affairs, the definition of the current situation, we are focusing on? If a current affairs item does not tell us what this outcome is, then it will naturally be more difficult for us to look seriously at what has caused it. While this is all very clear at a logical level, it's not something we would necessarily notice as readers or viewers, and this makes it necessary to place a premium on ways of making ourselves alert to it. It is necessary to find ways of heightening the awareness of audiences on this issue as it is on so many others.

To begin with, in defining the situation to be explored, one needs to rule out one clear possibility raised by the first part of the headline. The focus of the

article was not, as might be assumed, about Germany's direct management of all the elements that are usually raised when discussing the global financial crisis. It doesn't cover the exposure of banks and savings institutions, home loans, the ratio of national debt to GDP or balance of payments positions and their composition.¹ Neither does it target the performance of the financial and service sectors more broadly. Instead, the focus is, rather unfashionably and possibly unexpectedly, on manufacturing. The state of affairs the article draws to the reader's attention as a prelude to explaining how it has come about is the health of Germany's manufacturing sector. This is the *explanandum* – the outcome to be causally explained by the article: that is, the success of these German companies, despite intense global competition from low wage economies, and the attendant contribution of the manufacturing sector to continued economic growth in 'a recession haunted eurozone'. The performance of Volkswagen is cited as an illustration and indicator of this success, with a 'reported \$15bn profit for 2012, making it the most profitable car manufacturer in the world, ahead of Toyota and General Motors. The new VW Golf also won "world car of the year" at the New York motor show in March – not a bad way to celebrate the company's 75th anniversary'. Another illustration is provided by Tital, a leading manufacturer of precision parts for aircraft and racing cars, which has increased its exports around the world 'by 50% over the last decade, as the market for high-class titanium products booms. Revenue is up. Apprentices are being taken on. A new plant for small aluminium castings has just been opened in the Chinese town of Nantong, near Shanghai'.

The article presents these indicators of success as a narrative puzzle that it sets itself to solve. The core of its answer, its explanation, is that German manufacturers have concentrated on the high-quality niche product end of the market, the upper part of a trading triangle which is said by Tital's managing director, Philip Schack, to be protected from the global competition. It is, he says, only if you are producing in the much wider base of the triangle that globalization is a threat. It is this that explains why Germany has been able to buck the global trends. This is clear enough, but it is only really the beginning of the explanation rather than its end state. This is because the reasons that Germany came to concentrate its ambitions on the high-quality market and then was able to pull this off are things that themselves need explaining. And in a modern, complex society with a finely tuned division of labour one would expect such an explanation to involve the coming together of several facilitating factors. In other words, in looking for an explanation the reader should be on the lookout for a contextual field that contains several causal factors, and to look at how these combine to help bring about Germany's success.

The author of the article, *Observer* journalist Julian Coman, approvingly quotes an academic, Wolfgang Streek, the director of Cologne's Max Planck Institute, in framing an overall argument that Germany was in a position to seize

current opportunities because, for many years, it had been pursuing a different kind of economic agenda to that of the many other advanced economies, based on a different set of structural arrangements. In the 1980s and 1990s when all the talk was of Silicon Valley, the dotcom boom, financial deregulation in both the United States and the United Kingdom, and the Conservatives' erosion of Trade Union power under the leadership of Mrs Thatcher, Germany continued to embrace an alternative model. Streek is quoted as saying that it

remained a manufacturing economy, true to its artisanal roots. That was strongly criticised at the time. . . . Worse, Germany's economy was highly regulated. Power was locally held. Employers had obligations to their workforce and the local community. Wages were high and workers had the right to influence decisions and sit on boards. In countries like Britain and America, that way of organising things was seen as a kind of death sentence for the economy.

The twist in the unfolding of events was that German management and labour are said to have been able to convert these conditions, which from the Anglo-American perspective of the time were seen as severe constraints, into a set of potentials to be realized. The challenge this posed was met by innovating in relation to the global market-place, focusing on quality rather than price, and tying customers into various forms of dependence as a result of this quality. This was another way. In taking up this idea of an alternative model, Coman's argument has two overlapping strands, which are readily apparent. One of the strands deals with corporate giants, where the emphasis is on the importance of skilled and progressive management and consensual labour relations. In articles of this kind it is standard for general claims to be enlivened and given weight by one or two illustrative examples that show the general trends at work in particular instances, with local detail and colour. The literary trope at work is that of metonymy, where a part stands in as an illustration of the whole. This is duly the case here. In 2001, Volkswagen, in a context in which its plant at Wolfsburg had been relatively low-tech for years, threatened to transfer production of new cars to cheaper locations such as Portugal. Making a strong causal claim the author of the article tells us that this future was avoided because the Wolfsburg workforce, through the mediation of the IG Metall union, agreed to new flexible hours and pay, along with performance targets and training schemes which combined with strong leadership from management to make the Wolfsburg plant, by 2013, 'one of the most sophisticated in the world'.

Indeed, the Volkswagen case turns out not only to be an illustrative example of a wider phenomenon, but we are also told, through the use of the direct speech of Streek, that it was instrumental in the consolidation of

such a strategy nationwide: 'The then Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, urged other industries to follow the example of VW and IG Metall to create new jobs in Germany'. Coman then indicates that Schröder's admonishment had a powerful causal impact. This claim is not, of course, conveyed by an explicit statement about causation, but through the simple and routine textual technique of simply following Streek's comment with the observation that 'Labour market reforms, negotiated between employers and unions, followed across German industries and have been embraced by today's chancellor, Angela Merkel.' This combination of sequence and authoritative summary gives the impression of solid and unproblematic knowledge about the order of events and what caused them to happen. The Volkswagen Wolfsburg case and the chancellor's championing of this model, it is strongly implied, played key causal roles in creating a kind of cultural revolution among management and unions throughout the nation. These key players within industry internalized this world view, and it directly affected the subsequent nature, direction and strategic complexion of employer-labour relations. One knows there was much more to this process, but the constraints of the genre require that the narrative is selective and pithy.

The creative thought of Yale Sociology Professor, Jeffrey Alexander, which has provided the inspiration for the setting up of Yale's Centre for Cultural Sociology, has devised an approach that characterizes this kind of process as primarily a 'cultural' revolution or 'cultural' process.² It encourages the acknowledgement that a significant causal factor in the relevant developments is a cultural change of mind. In the current case, this change of mind was brought about by a change in the guiding ideas about how key actors should work together to meet the challenge of cheap labour, low-quality economies. The article's message at this point is that this cultural message was diffused throughout Germany, in particular within its industrial 'supergroups'. Coman may or may not have possessed this degree of knowledge about the nature of this cultural diffusion and the chancellor's direct impact upon it, but for good or ill he leaves the unguarded reader with the overwhelming sense that he does. The presentation of his argument, relying as it does on summary and implication, means that if we are to believe him, then we need to do so on the basis of trust, because we are not actually told anything about the unfolding processes that connected the chancellor's admonishment to subsequent developments. The textual form of the causal argument here is, again, *summary*, and the degree of detail we get is akin to that we would get if looking down from up on high and from a great distance, so that the details and mechanisms within the relevant processes, within the relevant networks, cannot be seen. Because these networks can't be seen, it follows logically that we know nothing about the interweaving of objective and subjective factors within them.

In the terms of **Figure 4.3** (on page 108 of Chapter 4), the status of the knowledge in this part of the analysis should be placed at the very bottom of box 2b), that is, at the lowest possible level of contextual detail from a perspective that purports to say a great deal about the combined subjective and objective elements of a causal process, but does so with hardly any evidence of either of these elements. When confronted with this kind of sweeping account of processes putatively taking place in plural sites across a nation, it is worth pausing for a moment to remember our point that the distinction between *contextualizing* and *floating* accounts is always a relative judgement. For when, earlier, we positioned most of the account of the contextual field recounted by the report on the West Bank as having a 'floating', objective status (box 3b), we didn't really need to say where in that box it should be placed. But now, as we compare that account, with its thin but discernible networks of relations – allowing a degree of mapping to take place – with the part of 'How Germany Rode the Storm' we are now focusing on, we can see that the network of relevant relations it provides is significantly greater. Both are floating accounts, but the account of the cultural revolution within Germany's manufacturing companies sails much higher, making it even harder to make things out in the fields down below than it is from the narrative of the potential bulldozing of settlers' homes on Palestinian land.

The second strand within the explanation put forward by the article to account for Germany's miracle recovery from the low point of being talked about as the 'new sick man of Europe' in the late 1990s to being 'the last economy left standing, following the hurricane of the debt crisis', focuses on small to medium-sized (*Mittelstand*) businesses. This strand has a similar structure to the first to the extent that it starts with a generalized picture, and then picks out – zooms into – a particular company to illustrate a thesis about the broader whole. Adhering to this logic, it begins by noting that Germany's *Mittelstand* businesses, of which Tital is to be the primary exemplar, are often family owned, typically have up to 500 employees and specialize in high-quality niche products. They are said to own an astonishing 499,525 patents for specialized technological innovations that are developed, typically, for niche markets. The concept of interdependence comes into play again here, and we are told that Tital itself developed a patented casting process that uses a unique cooling liquid, which has 'made it indispensable to its clients'. *Mittelstand* enterprises as a whole employ more than 70 per cent of the country's workforce and provide 83 per cent of apprenticeships. Tital, Sennheiser, the audio equipment manufacturer, and Lunor, a six-person manufacturer of high-end spectacles, are used to indicate the variety within the general phenomenon. It is implied that these companies shared in the general cultural process outlined above in relation to the industrial supergroups, but their success is also said to owe a great deal to another set of more specific, localized conditions.

To highlight this, the article again uses the trope of metonymy, using the example of one particular part to illustrate the whole. The main illustrative focus of attention is, as noted, Tital, and the *status* of the knowledge in this part of this strand of the argument now comes much closer to the ground, as if the hot air balloon has lost height, and its occupants are taking a close interest in a particular stretch of land, able to make out in more detail a series of social actors and institutions within a relatively dense networks of relations. We learn that Tital employs 520 people in Bestwig, a town of 11,000 near Dortmund in North-West Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia). The journalist, Coman, is crystal clear about the generalization he wants to make: 'What goes for Tital goes for Germany'. Geography is important, as Tital's embedded-ness within localized socio-structural relations is offered as the causal explanation for its success, illustrating what is also said to be the case on a general level for such companies. These socio-structural relations are mapped out in the contextual field of **Figure 5.1**, below, and involve links to communities, and the banks, businesses, schools and other institutions, that go back generations. The continuity and stability of these links are said to be key to giving *Mittelstand* companies a competitive edge. This embeddedness over time, indicating the continuity in actor's lives and consciousness of enduring institutions, together with the interdependencies that sustain them, is represented in Figure 5.1 by the explicit inclusion of a historical dimension. This is accompanied by a representation of the density of the spatial configuration of objective relations between key actors at any point within this stretch of time. In addition to what we already know of these relations, we learn that Tital is financed by the investment arm of the local co-operative bank, that the company takes 18 apprentices each year from local schools in Bestwig and the surrounding area, that it pays a grant to allow the more academic to go to university on the condition that they return to work for Tital after graduation, and that it provides in-house supplementary education for the others. The enterprise also has a works council 'with power and influence over company strategy', including one full-time paid member.

Phillip Schack has a clear vision, from the position of managing director, about how this structural nexus facilitates, and is reinforced by, an ethos of mutual trust and autonomy, which is said to be a critical factor: 'We need continuous improvement and collective ideas: employees who think as they work. The system functions because we need to be up there at the quality end of the market. So we pay top dollar because we need to compete at that level, and that gives us the luxury of having this consensual way of acting.' As with the national 'cultural revolution' mentioned above, the argument is that the ethos encompassing the structural nexus in which Tital is embedded is also in some ways cultural. The implication is that Tital works because the objective nexus is matched by the cultural diffusion of a shared set of dispositional meanings,

FIGURE 5.1 Conditions for German manufacturer's global success.

values and norms. The difference between the two parts of the account is that, in the Tital case, these more specific cultural or ideological factors are now embedded in a concretely identifiable configuration of institutional practices and relations. A virtuous circle is implicit within this vision, with the people involved subjectively responding to a working environment reliant on (causally sustained by) the various sets of relations sketched out in Figure 5.1 and overlaid by the broader cultural-political climate.

Despite the emphasis on the cultural and the consensual ethos that is a part of it, however, *this aspect of the report* doesn't include the perspective of any of Tital's employees besides that of Phillip Schack. To this extent it remains as overwhelmingly objective account, more 3b) than 2b), but with a status much higher within its box than that of the more generalized parts of the report. Nevertheless, the cumulative picture presented by the various objective factors, along both spatial and temporal axes, provides a rich initial context for anyone wanting to think more deeply about the issues involved. For example, we have a solid basis on which to consider how these objective factors became interwoven with the subjective elements we see much less of, and of the implications of such interweaving for the causal claims of the *Guardian Weekly's* report. On its own terms, the account leaves us with a powerful, if provisional, sense that the personal fates of each of the apprentices taken on each year, the fate of Philip Schack, and of all the other people employed by Tital are closely bound up with a set of social relations which has developed over time, and which has been sedimented in a series of complex interdependencies within which the parts are dependent upon the whole.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994

In 1996 the BBC reporter, Fergal Keane, highly respected for a trademark blend of combative politics, personal compassion and compelling prose, put together a compilation of his own favourite pieces of journalism from the past 6 years of his work, *Letter to Daniel: Dispatches from the Heart*. He concluded the book with two extracts from radio talks exploring the issues of identity, ethnicity and nationalism. I had recently heard the second of these, 'A Letter from Africa', on its original broadcast earlier that year, and it had stopped me in my tracks. I couldn't ever remember a report so moving me and educating me in the same breath. There was Keane's consummate ability to conjure empathy with a few well-chosen sentences, but there was also his ability to place the people whose suffering he invoked in a social context which explained how that torment had come to be. The talk was about a subject I was interested in knowing about, felt I should know about – the Rwandan genocide of 1994 – but which, amidst the busy flow and demands of day-to-day living, I had not

managed to get any decent grasp of. In a matter of minutes I felt that this had changed. It wasn't that I now knew all that I wanted to, but I now knew enough to feel I could easily learn more, and that I had an idea of how to make sense of further information.

'Letter from Africa' had done exactly what the sociologist C. Wright Mills, mentioned earlier, had advocated and fostered in promoting the idea of the 'sociological imagination'.³ It had combined an acute sensitivity to individual lives, with a very broad mapping out of some of the macro-level social and historical forces that had positioned those lives, and that had also infiltrated and inhabited them. Moving between the larger picture and the human experiences that took place within it, Keane's account provided a way in to those horrific events, a way in that somehow managed to combine the intellectual with the emotional, hard analysis with the sensitivity of human concern, which has always been the enduring appeal of Mills' vision to generations of scholars in the social sciences.

Keane's earlier pieces from Rwanda, some of them included in *Letter to Daniel*, had been powerful and numbing evocations of what it had been like to be there during the riot of cruelty and killing, among the machetes, the rotting corpses and the haunted survivors. There was little, however, at this point in the life of Keane's relationship to the events that was able to position the horrific, emotional texture of being there within a set of social relations that would help one to understand how they came about. Two years later, in 'A Letter from Africa', Keane writes candidly that when he had been dispatched to Rwanda, he wasn't able to adequately situate the events he was to witness in any meaningful social and historical context. As such, he wasn't able to properly question the received and simplistic Western stereotype of Africa, which was that if there was slaughter, if there was genocide, then it was simply 'a matter of tribalism. A crazy African thing. A horror somehow mitigated by the knowledge that Africans have always been prone to this kind of behaviour. Genocide prompted by implacable and ancient tribal antagonisms'.⁴

There are some hints in the 1994 pieces that Keane was searching for more adequate explanations, and beginning to find his way towards his later account. In writing about the 'hundred-day orgy of killing' in 'Seasons of Blood', dispatched from Nyarubuye in 1994, elements of the wider context responsible in great part for these events begin to emerge. In a room at the very back of the abandoned building housing the Office of the Bourgmestre of Rusomo, Sylvestre Gacumbitsi, one of the most influential perpetrators of the carnage, Keane and his colleagues come across a library of index cards. Each of these is an identity card for every local resident:

[T]here are thousands of these thin paper cards on to which are fixed the photographs of the bearers. Each card is marked with the name, address

and ethnic identity of the resident, Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, or other. Dust has gathered on the cards, and when I flick through it rises up and stings my eyes and nose. The colonial government introduced this system of population registration and their Rwandan Hutu successors entrenched it as a means of political control.⁵

In 'A Letter from Africa' these remarks have been consolidated into a more developed conception of the socio-historical forces signified by this incident. In the terms we've been using, Keane now places the genocide more squarely within a historically informed contextual field, and advances the broad features of a causal argument on the basis of this. He believes that such an account can mount 'a profound challenge' to the kind of analysis that reduces all to unfathomable tribal antagonisms: '[S]cratch below the surface of this genocide and you will not find a simple issue of tribal hatreds but a complex web of politics, economics, history, psychology and a struggle for identity'.⁶ Beginning the process of translating this complexity into a more focused causal account, *three key categories of explanation* emerge from within Keane's later, more reflective, account. He doesn't use these terms, but the *first category* of explanation is clearly bound up with the large forces of history and social structure. This category can be broken down further, and using social-theoretical language, we can say that these involve elucidating three temporal moments in the following ways: identifying the social positionings and relations within the broad contextual field of Rwandan politics at the beginning of 1994; identifying the role that history had played in creating and consolidating these forces (historical depth); and specifying how this configuration of forces, of power and culture, were necessary, causative, conditions of the genocide that was to unfold.

The *second category* has to do less with broad contextual conditions in themselves, and more to do with the biographical history of particular men and women growing up within these conditions. That is, with the ways in which forms of socialization prevalent in Rwandan society moulded and forged the deeper dispositions and potential orientations of its citizens. This is explanation by way of societal influences on the lifetime development of what we have called a person's *habitus*, profoundly affecting not only their own sense of identity, but also the way they perceive others and can behave towards them. The workings of these first two sets of explanatory forces were intertwined with each other, as they always are, blending to create the profound effects that societal forces have on the way people behave. But a *third category* is also required. This is to think about how, for example, an individual Rwandan Hutu, socialized over years and finding themselves positioned in a certain place within society, sees an immediate situation, and responds to it in a particular way. The genocidal response is both personal and

collective, and its potential is present within the habitus of its perpetrators and in the configurations of forces and culture that have slowly moulded that habitus. It is also something brought forth within and made possible by the current web of social relations. Finally, it is something that requires the agency of people who actively, purposively, translate their habitus and their immediate social context into a multiple series of unfolding – never entirely inevitable – scenes of unimaginably harrowing human interaction. When Keane gave the title ‘No Man is an Island’ to his concluding chapter, some or all of these categories would have been lurking somewhere, somehow, in his mind.

The social relations of the early 1990s in which – and in large part because of which – the Rwandan genocide took place had deep roots in colonial times. In what I’ve called a ‘floating’ mode (see Figure 4.3), Keane relates how in colonial Rwanda and Burundi the German and then later the Belgian rulers ‘cultivated the notion that the Tutsis were somehow less African, more European and, by extension, superior to their Hutu fellow countrymen. They ruled through and with the assistance of a Tutsi elite built around a king and a group of land-owning clans’.⁷ All kinds of what Keane calls ‘racial nonsense’ was invoked to justify this form of rule, including the Belgians citing the tallness of the Tutsis, their aquiline facial features, and their preference for cattle rearing over tilling the land as evidence of a superior civilization. Keane is clear that the purpose of this raising of the Tutsis was to ‘create and preserve an inherently unjust power structure’. In reflecting on the subsequent consequences of this he moves from a concern with these objective cultural, ideological and positional aspects of the colonial period to claims about their effects on the subjectivities of those who were subordinated and oppressed within this process:

The effect of this injustice and of the stereotyping of Hutus as lesser beings was to create murderous feelings of inferiority and resentment among the majority. When, at the end of the fifties, the Belgians relinquished power, the Hutus rose up and began the first of many campaigns of massacre against their former Tutsi rulers. . . . The eruption of violence which seemed to the world like a matter of tribal hatred had its roots in the politics of power and privilege.⁸

In thinking about the 1990s it is again important not to slip into the lazy and distorting supposition that the genocide is simply another variation on the crazy tribal hatred thesis of African history. All major social events are anchored in one way or another in socio-structural relations, and history works through these, both being shaped by them and, in turn, affecting them. If we look to the 1950s for clues about the 1990s, it is not because we will find in the latter an identical manifestation of deep and timeless tribal hatreds. Rather, it will be

because we have a sense that specific, time-bound, forces emanating from the configuration of the 1950s could have played a part in the configurations and actions of the later period. Keane has suggested how the social structure bequeathed by the colonial regimes created resentment and backlash, and he goes on to relate how the historical legacy of this hatred manifested in the immediate post-colonial period was to play a direct part in the genocide of 1994. It did so, however, in specific historical conditions which, as with understanding Bourdieu's more local outbreak of violence in a high school, need to be grasped in order for the role of that legacy to be understood.

Rwandan society remade itself in the years that followed the withdrawal of the Belgians, and Keane maps out how he sees the new configuration in a way that embeds the events of 1994 within it, at the same time as emphasizing its deep links to the past. The panoramic picture Keane paints in a few broad, carefully applied, brush strokes is one of a society that is unjust and divided, but one that is also relatively stable. A corrupt aristocracy from within the Hutu was led by former army chief Juvenal Habyarimana and a clique of his supporters from northern Rwanda. While the dictatorship flourished, with wealth and power concentrated among its elites, most Hutus eked out an existence at subsistence level, so the objective social hierarchies cut across ethnic lines. The Tutsis, for their part, 'were a cowed minority, discriminated against in every sphere of life but left largely unmolested because they no longer represented a political threat'.⁹ This equilibrium of forces was not disrupted arbitrarily and ahistorically but by the reappearance of a group initially formed by the colonial regime and forced into exile by the post-colonial regime – again, traces from the past emerging powerfully within the present. This was the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RWP), made up of those children of Tutsis who had escaped death, unlike thousands of their family members and friends, and been driven into exile in Uganda in 1959 when the Tutsi aristocracy had been overthrown. The RWP swept into Rwanda, ready:

to claim a share of power. The reaction among Habyarimana and his supporters was one of barely concealed panic. They called in French military support and without this would have been defeated by the RWP in 1990. Worse still, Habyarimana now faces growing calls for democratization from moderate Hutu groups, tired of his corrupt and authoritarian rule. There is strong evidence to suggest that Habyarimana feared losing power to the moderates. Threatened from within and outside, Habyarimana and his northern Hutu clique seized on the one element guaranteed to mobilize public support behind the government: hatred of the Tutsis.¹⁰

Keane thus sketches in the situation on the eve of the genocide, taking a wide-angled view on the current contextual field and its colonial and post-colonial

history. As a 'floating' account, surveying the landscape in a panoramic mode, much of the fine grain of actual events is inevitably sacrificed. This means that claims made within it are open to further scrutiny on the basis of greater detail and contextualization, and as audiences we should be keenly aware of this. Such scrutiny, however, is made easier by the fact that the picture provided is historically and socially anchored, with the main actors identified and some of the dispositions, power hierarchies, vested interests and stored resentments briefly indicated. These are all said to be components of the causal nexus that provides the conditions necessary for the genocide to happen. However, it is apparent that the most proximate cause, according to Keane's account, involves the utterly cynical and self-interested creation by the ruling clique of *a cultural process* designed to demonize the RWP and the Tutsis. At the same time, the creation of militias, the Interhamwe, among the Hutu meant that the means were in place to translate the cultural demonization into violence. The cultural process was one of the diffusion of crude typifications of the character and intentions of the Tutsis. Its effective production relied on a range of positioned social actors with investments in the current regime, and a related infrastructure of performance and dissemination.¹¹ Newspapers and radio stations began to exhort the Hutu 'to drive the Tutsis out and show them no mercy.'¹² The impoverished Hutu peasantry were told that the Tutsis were about to take their land, the rhetoric summoned up cultural memories of the not so distant past when the Tutsis and the colonial overlords had combined to subjugate the Hutus. Keane's textual presentation draws on indirect and free indirect speech, reporting and mimicking the voice of the exhorters, and melds this with more sober commentary in order to both evoke and condemn the atmosphere of hysterical fear the discourse was intended to bring about:

Remember your shame. Remember how they humiliated us. Be proud of your Hutu blood, they told the peasants. Intellectuals were recruited into the cause of creating a pan-Hutu consciousness. University professors, churchmen, journalists – all travelled the country disseminating the propaganda of hate. The Tutsis were characterized as vermin. *Inyenzi in Kinyarwanda* – cockroaches who should be stamped on without mercy. Mercy was a sign of weakness. Show them any mercy and they will make slaves of you again (*italics in original*).¹³

Specific, embedded, details of local memory were involved in the production and power of this discourse, and the argument is that its efficacy couldn't be understood without these. Little Tutsis, the message went, will grow into adult Tutsis, and sparing them in 1959, when the aristocracy had been overthrown, meant that they had now returned to make 'eternal slaves' of the Hutu. The

only way to avoid this mistake again was to 'kill the children'. The peasantry, it is implied, were primed to be receptive to these messages by the selective resurrection of deep cultural memory combined with the invocation of a current socio-structural terrain in which one of the only things they had left, their land and livelihood, was in imminent danger. Keane's overriding moral message, grounded in his mapping of causes within this historically stretched contextual field, is that it is not humanity, or preordained ethnic hatreds, that are to blame. Rather, one needs to look at what the wrong kind of society can do to humanity, and to ethnic differences. Moral culpability lies first and foremost, for him, with the powerful men who knew how to connect their own current interests to the fears and the socialized, latent, prejudices of the vulnerably positioned peasantry.

Creative connections between different sources

From Keane's powerful evocation of the structured presence of the past within current affairs, we will now, in a long final section, focus on two cases – political conflict in Thailand and the ill-treatment of patients within Stafford Hospital – in which the scope and vision remains that of the wide canvas, involving many actors, relations, and interdependencies within the processes relevant to the outcome-in-focus. But we are now adding the issue of how audiences can combine their knowledge from one source with knowledge from other sources. The emphasis is on making connections between different sources, amalgamating what they each tell us into a richer, more developed, understanding of specific processes.

In the course of the book I hope that it has become very clear just how important the 'outcome to be explained' (the *explanandum*) is to the whole process of grasping which knowledge is *relevant* and which is not. In terms of the four key elements within media frames, this is something that links the 'definition of the situation' – which, among other things, identifies the outcome to be explained – with the second element of 'causation': the actions and processes that do the explaining, that indicate how and why the outcome has come to be as it is. We have seen that these aspects of media frames are indispensable guides to help one home in on the essential claims within a text, and that social theory provides additional tools that can refine this focus, allowing greater conceptual refinement and empirical precision. I now want to make some additional, generic, points about media frames and their relation to social-theory frames as they help to further sharpen the focus. These points are about the *close internal relationships* between the first two aspects of media frames, which we've just indicated, and between these and the third

and fourth aspects, namely, moral judgements and remedies, once these are considered from within a social-theoretical frame.

Let's start with moral judgements. Moral judgements made within a media text are closely entwined with how the surface situation is defined and with causal questions of what brought this situation about. This is because moral judgements, by their nature, point towards the process that produced the outcomes that are judged, morally evaluating certain aspects of that process and the actors involved in them. Put another way around, the aspects of situations or outcomes that are thought to be problematic, and therefore to demand a causal explanation as to how they came to be as they are, are typically those that attract moral judgement of one kind or another. It is clearly essential that care is taken to properly characterize the moral judgements that are being made, and to match these assiduously with an investigation of the corresponding networks of relevant relations within the contextual field. And if a current affairs text makes moral judgements about specific aspects of a state of affairs but does not focus on the actors, networks, forces, situated judgements and processes that brought about these outcomes, then there will almost always be something remiss about the text. I say this on the reasonable assumption, already noted, that moral judgements should usually be made not only with an eye on moral principles, but also with an eye on the context in which such principles are applied.¹⁴

Looking at this from within a social-theory frame, one can see the need to have a defensible grasp of the relevant contextual field before making all but the most fundamental moral judgements. One can say without compunction, for example, that genocide is simply wrong whatever the circumstances, but most moral questions are not as clear cut as this. And in these other cases, in order to subject the practices of particular actors to moral judgement, one needs first to position those actors within the relevant contextual field. Part of this will involve trying to grasp the contours of that field from the perspective of an external observer, but another part of it will involve attempting to understand how the context looked from the perspective of the key actors whose decisions and actions are being morally questioned (their *agents' context analysis* – see Chapter 3, pp. 60–2 and pp. 64–6). In looking at the contextual field through their eyes one would hope to grasp something of their perception of the constraints and possibilities, risks and potential costs and gains afforded by the situation, and of the motivational grounds behind them taking the actions they took. These two points are themselves closely connected as the actor's perception of the risks and potential consequences of alternatives, including those implied by moral critique, will usually have played some role in their following the course of action they decided upon. This needs to be taken into account in casting moral judgement. It might well be that the judgement of the

actors-*in-situ* was that pursuing the alternative strategy advocated in the moral assessment of the media frame would have led to unpalatable, unintended, consequences. Without a situated sense of constraints, possibilities and likely consequences, moral judgements can very easily be blindly utopian, and sometimes disastrous in their outcomes.

We've already journeyed right into the heart of the fourth element of the media frame, which directs attention to the 'remedies' advocated by a current affairs account. The strategic question about *what future-oriented remedies actors should pursue in the present*, and how to pursue them, is structurally very similar to the question we have just been discussing with respect to morally evaluating past actions.¹⁵ There, we were discussing the considerations that should have come into the picture *when situated actors, acting in the past, decided on a particular course of action*. The only difference is that now we are explicitly focused on remedies, on fixing things, or improving things, rather than on why someone did something in the past. This considers actors' orientations to the future from a perspective in which this orientation is benchmarked against some conception of a future that would be an improvement on the present. This conception will be more or less well defined, and, in fact, will often be very ill-defined, notwithstanding the moral intensity with which any departure from it is condemned.

Moral judgements should enter into this picture about the future in a similar way in which they entered into the picture about the past. There should be an eye on whether someone's actions are motivated by self-interested or narrowly instrumental values, or are underpinned by more expansive, ethical considerations. In either case, as we've previously noted, in order to genuinely grapple with issues of moral responsibility it is important to not only look at *pure moral principles* (what moral philosophy discusses under the heading of 'deontology'),¹⁶ but also at *the probable consequences* of advocating the pursuit of a particular set of remedies. For exactly the same structural considerations apply with respect to the constraints and possibilities, risks and potential costs afforded by the situation. We've seen that the future is not as open and pliable as we too often fancy it to be.¹⁷ Not only are many avenues already entirely closed off, but the power dynamics, trajectories and action orientations already in play within a contextual field can provide heavy intimations of the consequences that will follow from attempting to mould the future according to an alternative plan. In order to negotiate the best way through the openings that are still possible, and to avoid unintentionally calling down the wrath of the gods in the shape of social forces, it is necessary to have a keen grasp of the relevant contextual field. Again, without this, the consequences can be unintended and, at times, catastrophic.

We will explore these close internal relationships between the four aspects of media frames – their characteristics deepened by social theory – as we

look at both of the case studies in this section. How a media text *defines a situation* is always the place to begin, moving out from there to linkages with one or more of the three other elements of causation, moral judgement and proposed remedies. Sometimes it will be one of these three themes that have primarily determined the definition of the situation, and sometimes the definition of the situation will have a different rationale – often, in news and current affairs items, dictated by issues of drama and spectacle – and the connection with the other three elements can be tangential, dispersed and fragmented. In addition, it is noticeable how frequently the presentation of current affairs issues, and the subsequent discussion of these, is dominated by moral judgement unencumbered by any genuine concern with the relationship of such judgements to the other three perspectives on the contextual field.

The precise focus of a current affairs account, and its linkages with other elements, will vary from case to case, which means reflection has to be both disciplined and flexible, creatively adapting general categories to the specifics of the case. Whatever the specifics, however, systematic thought is required, and will always be illuminating. In looking at the two cases, I will draw attention to how close reflection on the relationships between the four different elements of media frames can help audiences to decide on the extent to which they have been offered appropriate and sufficient knowledge by an account. Such awareness provides the grounds on which it is then possible to search for the relevant additional knowledge from complementary sources and genres.

Democracy and conflict in Thailand 2001–10

For the Thai case I will begin by organizing my comments around the striking similarity of the narrative form shared by four news and current affairs accounts of the political conflict leading up to the street protests of May 2010, in which more than 90 people died.¹⁸ In the process I will indicate aspects of the distinctive contributions made by the different genres of current affairs within the four accounts, and how they complement each other. I will also use social theory to reveal the limitations of these accounts, pointing to the precise *status* of the knowledge conveyed by their preoccupations and arguments. In the process I will bring to the fore the close internal relationships between the definition of the situation, moral judgements, implications regarding causation and strategic advocacy regarding remedies. In the texts that I will discuss the most prominent moral theme is that of democracy, which *guides the definition of the situation* in a similar way in every one of the items, directing the analysis to look at certain aspects of the contextual field and not at others.

This common thread is very striking. We shall see that the characterization of the moral theme of democracy is skewed and partial, as the accounts emphasize only one out of four key aspects of democracy, to the detriment of the others. This has a knock-on effect in guiding the analysis of the contextual field to just the domains and networks that are *relevant* to this one aspect of democracy while neglecting or downplaying the others. We shall see that this has clear implications for reflecting on moral and causal responsibility and strategic remedies, as only part of the truly relevant field is in vision.

Finally, I will indicate how audiences could begin to address the limitations of the four current affairs accounts by turning to other sources to complement the knowledge they already have. The other sources in this instance are readily accessible items of academic literature in both empirical and normative domains, which, likewise, can be judiciously sifted and guided by social theory towards the appropriate actors, dispositions, forces, interdependencies and so on within relevant networks of relations. The academic literature on these events and processes, as needs to be the case with any source or genre, is itself subjected to a reading and interpretation that is informed and organized by the guidelines of media and social-theoretical frames. An advantage of approaching academic literature in this way is that straightforward connections are made to the concerns of the public sphere, providing points of mutual engagement. It also serves to demystify academic accounts of the social world, refusing to ring-fence them as a separate domain of 'expert' knowledge, immune to meaningful critique. Instead, they are subject to the same theoretically informed criteria of status and adequacy as other media sources.

The four initial accounts on the Thai case cut across genres and include two accounts that formed part of double page reports in the UK broadsheets, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, on, respectively, 14 and 15 May 2010; a substantial article in the *London Review of Books* (LRB) by Joshua Kurlantzick, fellow for South-East Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations (Kurlantzick, 2010); and an hour-long BBC2 documentary, *Thailand – Justice Under Fire*, directed by Jonathan Jones and presented by Fergal Keane, broadcast on 7 August 2011. The newspaper reports were written in the midst of the tense street stand-offs and eventual bloodshed of May 2010, the documentary was produced during the year after these events, and the LRB piece was published in the month before they took place. The report in the *Independent* was combined with an informative table of the timeline of events leading up to May 2010; the *LRB* article made close reference to academic studies and the writer is clearly knowledgeable about the history of the events; and while the documentary doesn't eschew the moments of spectacle, it embeds them in exposition, interactional dialogue with academic experts and with a range of differently situated actors relevant to the events in question, including those within powerful organizations at the apex of the state.¹⁹

Rich as they are in many respects, the definition of the situation provided by all of the accounts is oversimplified in a way that leads them to neglect key dimensions of the relevant contextual field when making moral judgements, discussing causation and suggesting remedies and political strategies to secure those remedies. All of this raises serious questions about the ethical judgement of the pieces, and reinforces the argument for more intellectual engagement with social theory. Keane's piece is interesting in that many of the strengths we met in the Rwandan case are also here, including the sense of eye-level visual and emotional involvement with people at the heart of the events, and the framing of this in a broader historical and political context. However, the virtues of switching between individual experience and the broad sweep that is so effective in the Rwandan case, where the moral judgement is beyond doubt, lead to misapprehension in the Thai case. This is because the moral issues are more complex and because the additional focus on future strategy in relation to those issues demands a more fine-grained grasp of the contextual field and the forces and dynamics that populate it.

Each of the accounts highlights the following elements, in more or less detail: the electoral victory of Thaksin Shinawatra and the *Thai Rak Thai* (Thais Love Thailand) party in 2001; the ensuing success of populist schemes in health care, village credit and other forms of financial support directed by this government towards the rural poor; the success of Thaksin in presiding over the first elected Thai Government in history to see out a full term of office, followed by a stunning increase in its mandate in the 2005 election, gaining 377 out of 500 seats, and raising its number of votes from 11.6 million in 2001 to 19 million in 2005 (FTN – Pasuk and Baker 2009: 237)²⁰; the overwhelming concentration of Thaksin's electoral support in the poorer, agricultural, regions of the north-east and the north of Thailand; the subsequent formation of the anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD – the 'yellow shirts') in February 2006; the military coup that ousted *Thai Rak Thai* later that year, with strong intimations that this was backed by the monarchy; dubious legal interventions that forced two successor governments (led first by Samak Sundaravej and then by Somchai Wongsawat) loyal to Thaksin from office in 2008 after electoral democracy had ostensibly been restored; the civil disobedience protests by the PAD – including the occupation of Suvarnabhumi airport that left 350,000 travellers stranded – designed to force the resignation of the Somchai government; the military-brokered collation agreement that saw the installation of Old Etonian, Abhisit Vejjajiva, as the Prime Minister; and the reaction of the rural poor to all of this, with the revival of the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) in May 2008, and their identification with the wearing of red shirts; and the ensuing violent confrontations on the streets of Bangkok in May 2010.

It is a relatively simple affair to recover a shared master narrative of causal explanation from these accounts, a narrative that is organized in terms of a simple binary antagonism between two sides, one bad and one good. The clearly implied argument of the accounts is that it was one of these sides, the Bangkok elites, which repeatedly drove Thaksin and the rural poor he represented away from the power they had legitimately achieved through the ballot box. The moral and expressive tone of the pieces is that it was patently wrong, because undemocratic, for Thaksin and the subsequent governments allied to him to be ousted from power by the military, the monarchy and others in what is presented as an unflinching and unchanging alliance. The strong, ethically informed, strategic message is that this situation must be reversed immediately; the bad must be ousted by the good.

The definition of the situation is one in which democracy has been defeated by anti-democratic forces, represented most visibly by the yellow shirts, but including the most prominent and powerful institutions of the Thai establishment. This is the outcome that the four pieces set about explaining and judging. The problem, however, with this presentation is that the situation has been defined from the outset in an overly narrow, and therefore misleading, manner. The perspective offered by this master narrative is inadequate because while the moral principle invoked by its definition of the situation is that of democracy, it focuses attention on only one aspect of this – the electoral dimension of democracy, which I will label Democracy 1. It neglects three other defining aspects of democracy widely accepted within the normative literature, and hence it also neglects the correlative networks of *relevant* relationships and sequences of action these further aspects of democracy would draw attention to. The three are: open and accountable government with respect to the rule of law, and responsiveness to public opinion (Democracy 2); issues of civil, political and human rights (Democracy 3); and a democratic, participatory, civil society (Democracy 4).²¹ If these other aspects of democracy had been included in the defined field of investigation of the *explanandum*, then it would have made it very difficult for the four pieces to concentrate their dominant moral and emotional tone, and their attendant ethical-strategic advocacy, so exclusively on Thaksin's electoral mandate. The other dimensions of democracy, demonstrably held in contempt by Thaksin, would have had to be considered.

It is possible to explore what the consequences would be of defining the situation more appropriately, which would mean introducing the other three aspects of democracy into the analysis. This can be done by combining these generalized theoretical points with evidence that can be gleaned from a series of additional academic sources covering these other dimensions of Thai politics. A concern with Democracy 2 would highlight the moral and causal significance of Thaksin's involvement in major asset concealment and

myriad abuses of position to further his multi-billion baht business interests, and his government's illegitimate interference with institutional actors such as the National Counter Corruption Commission and the Constitutional and Administrative Courts designed by the progressive 1997 Constitution to strengthen democratic accountability. Likewise, such guidance would draw attention to the appalling record on civil and human rights of Thaksin's governments (Democracy 3) and the increasingly autocratic and unresponsive nature of his rule when it came to social movements and active expressions of local, grassroots opinion (Democracy 4). If the pieces had identified these practices, and the four different configurations of socio-structural relationships that provided them with their context, they would have needed to construct a much more complex narrative.

As it is, the neglect of those areas of the contextual field pertaining to these key areas of democracy means that much of the structural background informing resistance to Thaksin and his government is missing. The narratives of the four pieces are consequently informed by an analysis in which prominent actors are largely uprooted from their relevant contexts. Order is imposed on events by means of a de-contextualized analysis that subsumes the many differentiated organizations, groups and individual actors from the four configurations, as well as their varied specific concerns and activities, into a simple binary opposition, summed up in the title of Kurlantzick's article, 'Red v. Yellow'. In reality, it is highly misleading to treat all the forces relevant to the downfall of Thaksin as one collective grouping, the 'Bangkok elites', and to represent all of the forces involved in bringing about the coup as motivated primarily by the wish to deny the rural poor their rightful voice in politics. There is little doubt that this was the motivation of some, but a more adequate understanding would really have to consider the plural sequencing and configuring of events. Academic literature on the anti-Thaksin movement of 2006, for example, suggests that the PAD was in fact a broad coalition of differentiated forces set up in direct response to various anti-democratic actions of Thaksin in his first 5 years in office. The yellow shirts' movement thus combined within itself a variety of more sectional interests, each of them bruised, in a significantly varied range of ways, by Thaksin's governments.²² The provisional and unstable degree of unity and cohesion consolidated within the yellow shirts' protests against the *Thai Rak Thai* and successor governments thus emerged over a period of time as a response to their policies and behaviour.

The resistance was produced by co-evolving processes in a range of different socio-structural domains related, primarily, to Democracies 2, 3 and 4.²³ The unity was a provisional outcome produced by this plural combination of processes. It was, in turn, reinforced through 'sacred' rituals and celebrations around the King's Diamond Jubilee, which produced a heightened emotional intensity within the political culture.²⁴ This emergent cultural, ritual, process,²⁵

in its turn, produced a mood that facilitated subsequent responses from the Monarchy, the Privy Council, the opposition parties, and sections of the military. It should be pointed out that these responses were themselves dubiously justified by their own very selective appeal to democratic principles, often singling out activities in Democracy 2, in highlighting Thaksin's putative corruption with respect to activities of the executive branch of government, and to his interference with the impartial rule of law. Not only was this opportunistically selective, but it also quite brazenly neglected to consider the long-term culpability of many prominent members of many of these groups in similar practices, practices which seriously, and persistently, undermined the impartial functioning of the institutions of democracy. Any genuinely adequate telling of this story would have to move well beyond a simple, exculpatory, reversal of good and bad.

Against this backdrop, one can see clearly the importance of the guidelines we've constructed for dealing with complex narratives – ones that can integrate differentially situated and relationally configured actors into a conception of plural and co-evolving sequences of events. The need for these can be highlighted by the quandary, or *aporia*, encountered by all four current affairs pieces under consideration. For each of the accounts does mention or allude to, at one time or another, negative, anti-democratic, aspects of the Thaksin governments, and this honest acknowledgement threatens to subvert their binary opposition between good and bad. However, and this is a key point, it is conspicuous that none of the pieces finds a satisfactory way of thinking about these anti-democratic practices in the same breath as their master narrative on the putatively homogeneous Bangkok elites and their supposed antagonism to democracy. The master and minor narratives are kept separate rather than brought into dialogue with each other, with propositions in the minor key systematically relegated in each text's hierarchy of significance.

Once discerned, these interdependent intellectual and narrative deficiencies can be seen to run right through the form and surface rhetoric of each of the texts. Let us focus on just one characteristic example taken from *Thailand – Justice Under Fire*. At nearly 8 minutes into the film, against a visual backdrop of farmers working in the rice fields intercut with images of exuberant, flag waving, supporters at a rally for Thaksin in the capital, Fergal Keane's commentary declares that 'here in the rural heartland, a charismatic politician started a social revolution'. After switching to a farmer, Manot Triprawat, speaking side-on to camera – his words translated in simultaneous voice-over – extolling the virtues of life under Thaksin, Keane resumes in the same vein, with visually illustrated remarks on Thaksin's notable biographical accomplishments culminating in an emphasis on the two popular electoral victories that made him 'Thailand's longest serving Prime Minister'. The reporter is then shown on a train journey in the countryside, in and among

rural people, metonymically juxtaposed with shots of shanty-style dwellings flashing by along the side of the tracks. His next words mention, only to subordinate, Thaksin's dark side: 'Despite widespread allegations of corruption and of major human rights abuse, he remained hugely popular with the poor'. Not only are Thaksin's anti-democratic, and sometimes abhorrent, practices confined to a subordinate clause within the sentence, the sentence itself is also positioned between the positive traces of what we had just seen and heard and the immediately ensuing return to images of Manot, walking by the fields, continuing his exaltation of Thaksin: 'Every household had a better life, better living. They had money that belonged to them, and which they could spend. The economy in the village improved'. The minor narrative is thus not ignored or entirely effaced, but the *aporia* is evident in its positioning as the subordinate clause, and in the tone and sequencing of the commentary and the visual editing, and also in the sympathetic identity relations set up between Keane and the rural poor within the text. The negative comments on Thaksin and his record thus remain marginalized, awkward and irrelevant supplements to the argument.

A critical reading of these texts on Thailand, all focused on a curtailed notion of democracy, reveals an *aporia* – an inability to resolve a significant quandary – resulting from the failure to create a narrative complex enough to acknowledge the full configuration of forces and processes relevant to the outcome of the dramatic and deadly conflict of May 2010. The consequence is a stark contrast between the certainty of the rhetoric of the texts and the inadequacy of support – morally, conceptually and empirically – for those certainties. By way of contrast, reference to a contextual field truly appropriate to a 'definition of the situation' focused on a more appropriate and satisfactory conception of democracy, makes it clear that the character of Thaksin's and *Thai Rak Thai*'s practices in each of the four democratic domains during the years they were in power was directly relevant to the emergence of oppositional forces and to their subsequent sense of the dangers inherent in his return to power. Moral judgements and strategy for the future need to be thought about in this context. These aspects can't be marginalized without distorting the causal explanation of events or the genuine moral choices to be made.

Power and hierarchy within the UK National Health Service: The case of Stafford Hospital

I will end this final, substantive chapter by returning to where we began, with television news. Through an analysis of a BBC news report, 'Scandal Hit Mid Staffs "Faces Being Dissolved"', entered on to the BBC News Website

on 28 February 2013,²⁶ I will continue the theme of combining sources and genres. This time, however, I will do this through indicating the junctions in the narrative where other sources are required in order to address issues that are raised but not adequately addressed within the news bulletin. I will draw on the conceptual device of contextual fields to indicate how audiences can gain from what is available from television news, but can combat its limitations by knowing how to identify the points at which its claims exceed its substance, and how to think about finding and drawing from complementary sources in a conceptually consistent manner.

Between January 2005 and March 2009, an estimated 400–1,200 patients are believed to have died at Stafford Hospital, in the English Midlands, as a consequence of inadequate care. The scandal that ensued was one of the most severe and damaging the National Health Service (NHS) has ever endured. In February 2013, the 31-month public inquiry chaired by Robert Francis QC, set up to look into what happened at Stafford, published its report. The report was widely interpreted as providing a 'damning indictment of NHS attitudes, practices and organisations.'

The BBC news report came in the wake of the publication of the Francis Report, and this was a significant part of a background context in which the BBC bulletin makes links between its definition of the situation, including the outcome it focuses upon, and what it indicates has brought about that outcome (its causes). Notwithstanding this, the link between the actual 'outcome to be explained' and what is supposed to do the explaining turns out to be remarkably weak within the bulletin. The report is driven by a combination of aesthetic and dramatic spectacle and moral judgement, and works more through impressionistic intimation and connotation than through sequential, logical reasoning about the contextual field. It begins with the off-screen voice of the reporter informing us that, 'Stafford Hospital failed badly on care resulting in the unnecessary deaths of hundreds of patients. Now, the trust that runs it is failing financially, heading towards administration, its board likely to be dismissed and services cut back'. The words are spoken against a visual backdrop that begins with an external view of the front of Stafford Hospital, and which then pans away to the interior of the hospital through a series of stylized soft lens images. The images fade into view from different points in the centre of the screen and then drift slowly away towards its bottom left hand side, the movement set against the stable background of a gleaming corridor rendered in the same shades of light green and blue. The images include a glimpse of a human figure – a nurse or a doctor – engaged in activity by a wall of shelves above a desk, medical equipment, documents, filing labels and so on, evoking the many kinds of activity that go on in this or any NHS hospital.

The invocation of the deaths of hundreds of patients at the beginning of the bulletin is entirely appropriate given the public interest that followed the

revelations of events at Stafford Hospital. Defining the situation in the way it does, combining the deaths with the issue of financial failure, is a reasonable enough means of engaging the interest of viewers by moving to the main focus of financial failure through the already familiar, and emotionally compelling, theme of the failure of care. The introduction has made it clear, however, that the focus of today's report is finance – '(n)ow, the trust that runs it is failing financially'. Some kind of causal link is intimated, through association, between financial failure and the failure of care but this is not spelt out. There is also intimation that the financial failure is the result of mismanagement as we are told that the board of the trust that runs the hospital is likely to be dismissed. We are left with an indistinct impression of incompetence on two fronts, and with the sense that there is some connection between the two, the most straightforward inference being that financial incompetence played a notable part in the unnecessary patient deaths. The argument of the bulletin continues in this melodramatic, vein. It is built up in successive steps as the piece develops, constructed almost entirely through connotation and rhetorical suggestion. The sequence following the introduction takes up a third of the entire bulletin and, given this, is worth describing in some detail. The scene immediately following the opening shots I've described shows protesters from Cure the NHS who, according to their own website, are 'a small group of relatives, patients and community members who successfully campaigned for a public inquiry into the failings at Mid Staffs Hospital' under the Inquiries Act of 2005. The camera shows members of this group holding placards, grouped together on the pavement outside a meeting of the NHS Commissioning Board in Manchester. They are, the commentary tells us, 'calling for the chief executive to resign'. This off-screen narration is accompanied by a visual close-up of one of the placards showing a photograph of the bespectacled head and suited shoulders of the chief executive, Sir David Nicholson, with the word 'RESIGN' in large bold red upper case letters above the photograph and, below, the phrase "The Man with No Shame" written in black and wrapped in quotation marks. This was a phrase used about him in an orchestrated campaign for his resignation conducted by the English newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. The other type of placard held by protesters showed a gravestone indented with a row of skulls and the letters RIP, with 'Too Many Deaths, No Accountability' written above it and 'RESIGN' in the same font as the first placard.

The piece then segues into a shot inside the meeting of the Commissioning Board, capturing Sir David mid-sentence, addressing his colleagues, appearing comfortable, without his jacket and with hand gestures of measured involvement, declaring ' . . . when actually what you need to do is to absorb the criticism, understand it in a deep way, and . . . '. His voice is muted as the reporter's off-screen commentary explains the intercut of images: 'inside, that man, Sir David Nicholson received a vote of confidence. These pictures

were provided by the NHS Commissioning Board. What they don't show is the moment when some members of Cure the NHS walked out in protest'. There is a concerted combination of both irony and conspiracy in the narrative here, irony in the decision to select the business-as-usual message for the commentary that the chief executive received a vote of confidence, and in the knowing, sardonic tone in which the reporter delivers this line. There is drama in the focus on the moment when the NHS members walked out, and conspiracy in the attention given to the point that this is 'what the film doesn't show'. The reporter's spoken reference to the source of the pictures, just before he tells us about the walk-out, reinforces and underlines exactly the same information conveyed in a caption on the screen reading, 'Pictures from NHS Commissioning Board'. This belted and braced emphasis is presumably there just in case we are in danger of missing the point. The next shot in the edited sequence takes us back out onto the street to a close-up of the spokesperson for the Cure the NHS protesters, speaking to an out-of-shot reporter, saying they were not asking for the resignation of an innocent party as 'this man failed as the leader of the NHS'.

Almost a minute into a 2-minute bulletin on a story whose ostensible topic is the financial failure of an NHS trust, all of the coverage has been on the much more emotive subject matter of the poor and inadequate care given to patients. All that has been achieved by a few strokes from an impressionistic and ill-defined narrative so far is a vague and free-floating binary opposition²⁷ between the forces of light and the forces of shade, both positioned around the issue of care, but not embedded in any meaningful way in the networks of relevant relationships. Lined up on one side, there are: Cure the NHS; the patients they represent; Julie Bailey, the spokesperson for Cure the NHS, whose mother died in the hospital in 2007; and wider populist sentiment appalled at the poor care, the suffering, and the perceived irresponsibility and insensitivity that led to it. One could also make a strong argument that the report itself is lined up on this side of the divide. The primary framing of the story focuses squarely on this perspective, and a value perspective takes shape in the respectful and sympathetic way in which relations are set up between the reporter, Dominic Hughes, and the identities and concerns of key actors on one side in the unfolding drama. On the other side of the divide there is the NHS Commissioning Board, and its chief executive, Sir David Nicholson.

These binary oppositions prepare the ground for the issue of finance that does, eventually, follow. Key actors introduced in such a way as to be associated with financial rectitude are added to the first side of the binary divide, to the side of light. The report indicates that misguided choices about financial arrangements made by the Foundation Trust were ultimately responsible for the failures in patient care. In the scene that makes the transition to the financial segment of the bulletin, following the scene of the Cure the NHS

spokesperson calling for the resignation of Sir David Nicholson, Dominic Hughes speaks directly to camera. He speaks precisely and authoritatively: 'This is the first time a Foundation Trust Hospital has failed in this way, but in Stafford's case that's significant, because many believe that it was the push for foundation trust status that led to the terrible collapse in the quality of care.' Great emphasis is given to the words 'Foundation Trust', 'significant' and 'quality', as if a revelatory answer to a grand conundrum is being revealed. In reality this is an extreme form of textual 'summary' of elements directly relevant to the bulletin's argument. Summary is no doubt always necessary, and particularly necessary within a 2-minute news bulletin, but critical audiences need to be aware of what it does. For summary typically serves to subsume and efface the details of the relations, processes and social mechanisms it purports to relate. Reflection on the reporter's words from the perspective of a contextual field, using this as a benchmark, would indicate just how much there is to unpack in terms of the various trails of causation within configurations of relevant relations.

The subsequent scenes are very simple in content, straightforwardly providing some headlines of a situation of financial failure, establishing in sound and pictures that Monitor, the relevant financial regulator, has decided that the trust is 'not financially or clinically viable'. The chief executive of Monitor, Dr David Bennett, speaking to an out-of-shot interlocutor to the left of camera, notes that 'at the moment' the trust 'is losing money. It's losing around £15 million a year, so we have to address that, but they have also said that while they are providing safe care today, the current arrangements aren't sustainable in the longer term.' On the face of it, this comment indicates that there is good patient care at Stafford Hospital in 2013, but that it is costing more money than is affordable under current financial arrangements and accounting systems. This clearly suggests a tension between prevailing conceptions of financial rectitude, on the one hand, and adequate patient care, on the other. Although this tension seems to be a key aspect of causation, the moral judgements to be made, and the optimum remedies, it isn't explored at all in the bulletin. Such issues are subordinated to spectacle and melodrama. If the financial issues around the push for NHS trust status are significant regarding the quality of care, and invite the suggestion of moral condemnation, then, one might expect a greater exploration of how this came about. Also, logically, one might expect that the same kind of moral rebuke should be aimed at the current financial forces militating against adequate care. There is a striking absence of any attempt to place action within networks of relevant relations in which one could genuinely understand causation. There is no attempt, for example, to look closely at the external forces, pressures and constraints being internalized by key situated actors, such as Sir David Nicholson and the trust's board members, as they

assess the *in situ* alternatives available to them. As it is, the simple, us versus them, melodrama we are provided with – reflecting the dominant popular simplification of news, uprooted from all meaningful context – manages to place Monitor, which has financial rectitude at the apex of its value priorities, and Cure the NHS, which has care at the apex of its value priorities, on the same side. This provides a bogeyman but simplifies the configuration of forces to the point of distortion.

It's worth spelling out explicitly what kind of contextual field the BBC news report does allow us to construct. Starting with identifying the key actors, the institutional actors included in the report are the Commissioning Board, Stafford Hospital, Cure the NHS and Monitor. We have also seen that a number of individuals belonging to these institutional actors have also been identified, with an indication that at least two of these individuals are in positions of authority within these organizations. However, this is virtually all we have, and perhaps all that television news bulletins can be expected to provide. There is no account of the hierarchies, relations and processes that connect the institutional actors to each other, or of the nature of the roles inhabited by particular individuals, with the duties and obligations these roles carry with them. To make even rudimentary sense of the bulletin viewers would need to already know that Sir David Nicholson was chief executive of the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority, the strategic health authority overseeing the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust during the period when the poor care and resultant deaths occurred. Without a sense of this basic positioning there cannot be any appreciation of those various forces and pressures to act in particular ways, mentioned above, that the incumbents of relevant positions experience and respond to. All this means that we need to be aware that we have no account at all of social mechanisms. The link between the outcomes to be explained by the bulletin and what is supposed to do the explaining can be seen to be extraordinarily weak.

These points raise serious questions, not about whether news bulletins should take a particular point of view, as this is inevitable, nor about their ability to be objective from within a point of view, as this is indeed possible, but about how much they should claim for a point of view on the basis of so little evidence. They should almost certainly claim less, and should also attach more appropriate levels of uncertainty and confidence to what they do propose or imply. The implicit suggestion of this bulletin, which is really quite complex at the same time as it is left entirely unsubstantiated, seems to be the following. It is that Sir David Nicholson is guilty as charged by Cure the NHS because of a process involving two stages. The first is that, due to his position within the organizational hierarchy of the National Health Service, he would have had a connection of causal, and therefore moral, responsibility with the Mid-Staffordshire Trust. The second is that the pursuit of foundation

trust status was bound to lead both to financial failure and to a 'terrible collapse in the quality of care', and that he should have predicted this and, accordingly, should take responsibility for it. This implied argument may ultimately be right or it may be wrong, but in either case the presentation of the news in this form makes it very difficult to formulate any kind of independent critical response to it.

The contextual field in this bulletin is virtually empty, with the focus on the character of individual people rather than on people embedded within organizations that are in turn embedded within networks of relations. The consequence is the same as that identified by Djerf-Pierre and co-authors in their account of the mistreatment of the elderly in Swedish care homes, discussed in Chapter 2. That is, both mistreatment and financial failure are construed as moral scandals rather than policy failures that need to be unravelled. In the Swedish case as in this case the question of the marketization of social and health services remains mainly in the background, while it should be recognized as a key factor in the kinds of pressures experienced by situated actors within such organizations. This does not settle any moral or political argument, but it is indisputably a significant part of the structural context in which individuals are positioned, and in which they have to act. If a government has endorsed and legitimized such a context then they need to be able to defend and justify it, and this means, in turn, that citizen-audiences need to know how its processes work.

Highly relevant additional information about how such processes worked within the NHS were already available in the public sphere at the time of the BBC bulletin. They were most readily accessible in the Francis Report, the result of a public inquiry into the scandal at Stafford Hospital that had lasted nearly 3 years, chaired by Robert Francis QC. A brief, even gestural, acknowledgement of some of the evidence given to this inquiry, and to the conclusions of the report, would have given viewers a more adequate sense of the real, *in situ*, causal mechanisms, policy choices and operational dilemmas. For this report contained a good deal of evidence on the character of the organizational context of the NHS, its relations with Whitehall and various other organizations, and on the perspectives of many of the situated actors within this terrain. The report would certainly have played a significant role as background knowledge for the specialist journalists preparing the BBC bulletin. Whatever the constraints on television news, making it difficult for bulletins to go into much depth on issues, audiences should be made aware that evidence available in the public sphere militates against an overly simplistic account of causality, attribution of responsibility, and strategic solution. Audiences with typified knowledge of contextual fields, and of the ways in which organizational hierarchies work within these, would be in a strong position, if they were so minded, to make meaningful links with such sources. They could do so by

challenging more simplistic accounts precisely by bringing to mind the themes the media frames' perspective directs one to. Routinely working with such a perspective would immediately make one conscious of the kind of thing that is happening when a television news bulletin, such as this one, focuses on a particular outcome and makes causal and moral judgements in relation to it. Social theory can then provide the general concepts and protocols to guide more nuanced reflection. This, in turn, would provide the basis for a search for additional sources to complement the surface, rhetorical account of the television bulletin.

Audiences, without the time or inclination to directly consult the Francis Report, could find information in newspaper accounts, such as the *Guardian's* item, 'Mid Staffs report calls for sweeping changes to improve patient safety', written by Denis Campbell and James Meikle, appearing 3 weeks before the BBC bulletin.²⁸ The *Guardian* piece, understanding its assignment to be one of conveying the key points of the Francis Report, is much less ambiguous than the BBC account in clearly identifying an undesirable 'outcome' that needs to be explained.²⁹ This was simply the shockingly poor care provided to patients at Stafford Hospital, resulting in the 400–1,200 deaths between January 2005 and March 2009.

The *Guardian* article identifies a strong primary causal argument in the Francis Report, which is that one key actor, the hospital trust, 'bore most of the responsibility for allowing the "appalling suffering of many patients" to go unchecked between 2005 and 2009':

In a scathing assessment of the trust's board of directors, Francis accused it of a 'serious failure' of its duties. 'It did not listen sufficiently to its patients and staff or ensure the correction of deficiencies brought to the trust's attention. [It also] failed to tackle an insidious negative culture involving a tolerance of poor standards and a disengagement from management and leadership responsibilities', he said.³⁰

In terms of a contextual field the picture painted here focuses on one key actor, the Mid-Staffordshire Hospital Trust, indicates that the trust had 'duties' and responsibilities attached to its position within a network of relations, and that it failed in specific ways. These failings, which would seem to be related to each other and to reinforce each other, were that (i) it did not listen to either patients or staff when they raised issues about deficiencies; (ii) it did not attempt to correct any of the deficiencies; and (iii) it tolerated negative poor standards of care among relevant staff, and, it seems, allowed a disengagement from management and leadership responsibilities, both on their own part and by unspecified others lower down in the organizational hierarchy, many of whom were presumably situated in a variety of roles within Stafford Hospital itself.

The degree of autonomy possessed by the trust in its culture and operations would depend not only on the interdependencies it had with actors further down the hierarchy, but also, of course, with the forces and pressures emanating from the interdependencies it had with actors whose authority it was subordinate to. The *Guardian* account incorporates some of these connections as it notes that Francis doesn't attribute the causal process culminating in poor patient care only to the hospital trust. Rather, according to Francis, the failure of the trust was combined with 'multiple failures by a wide array of organisations and individuals across "the NHS system"', which allowed poor care to persist and meant 'opportunities to intervene were not taken'. More specifically, Francis is said to cite:

. . . the hospital's A & E [Accident and Emergency] unit's need to treat 98% of patients arriving there within four hours to meet the government's key NHS targets, the trust's attempts to balance its books and its 'seeking foundation trust status . . . at the cost of delivering acceptable standards of care' as contributory factors.³¹

Thus, on the one hand, the *Guardian* account conveys the message that there is a clearly stated *primary* casual argument in the Francis Report, in that it identifies a series of activities clustered around one key actor, the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust, that should bear 'most of the responsibility' for the failures around patient care. On the other hand, however, this is combined with the acknowledgement of an additional series of secondary causes, interweaving with the primary set of causes. Included in these secondary causes are sub-actors such as the hospital's A & E unit, which has a subordinate hierarchical position with respect to the trust, although it will have had a degree of operational autonomy and hence independence from the trust. Also included, though, are indications of the presence and force of institutional actors in a superior position within the organizational hierarchy. This is readily apparent in the mention of, and in the negative assessment of, the government's key NHS targets, but is also there, albeit more vaguely, in the references to 'the trust's attempts to balance its books' and its 'seeking foundations trust status . . . at the cost of delivering acceptable standards of care'.

Embedded in networks of relations, duties and reciprocal obligations, the trust would have been more autonomous, more able to be master in its own house, in relation to some of these activities than it was in others. With certain activities, such as the 'trust's attempts to balance its books', there were strong external forces pushing it in this direction, with the threat of sanctions hanging over it in the event of failure to do so. In a different but overlapping way, the trust's project to seek foundation status was also palpably not an entirely internal affair, for the move to foundation hospitals

was a nationwide, government-sponsored enterprise promoted by a set of ideological justifications, and encouraged, structurally, by a series of institutional inducements.

These external forces are part of the relevant contextual field in which the flash bulb events inside Stafford Hospital were also strongly influenced by causal forces spatially distant from it. These are forces that would have been internalized by more and less powerful individual actors within the configuration of organizations that together constituted chains of command, influence and causation ultimately affecting the local setting of Stafford Hospital and what went on within it. This is the kind of process Francis is reported as pointing towards when he is quoted as referring to the 'wide array of organisations and individuals across "the NHS system"'.³²

Ultimately, there is something more than a little arbitrary about the Francis Report concluding that the hospital trust, 'bore most of the responsibility', while also acknowledging that blame also lay with a wide array of actors across the NHS system. For the attribution of primary causal weight is a complex issue, requiring *counter-factual judgements* about what would change if one factor or another were removed or altered in a non-trivial way. And it is at least a plausible hypothesis to suggest that the creeping emphasis on financial criteria to the detriment of other factors was the overriding causal influence, permeating the external structures and interior worlds of actors throughout the NHS. A key counter-factual question here, challenging the conclusions of the Francis Report, would be whether the poor care could have been avoided by more responsible policy-making within the centres of power. Genuinely, rigorously, thinking in this way is a difficult exercise. It would include thinking seriously about the spatial distance of relevant centres of power in Government and Whitehall from the poor care in the hospital wards. One would want to ask whether the incumbents of such institutions might have a deficit of intellectual and moral imagination regarding the consequences of their actions. This is a sensible question because they are indeed very likely to lack much of the knowledge and moral empathy possessed by actors working more locally. Such a deficit will, in large part, be simply because significant spatial distances between decisions and their consequences make it harder for decision-makers to genuinely understand the contextual field in which their decisions will unfold. In turn, this makes it more difficult for them to grasp the moral implications of what they are doing.³² The counter-factual test – very difficult to construct, but essential to attempt – would involve ascertaining if negative standards of care within the hospital would ever have occurred if the financial pressures exerted by the Government and Whitehall on the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority had been less intense, or had been managed with more skill and judgement.

This counter-factual test about causation would require an analysis of the relevant networks of relations keenly focused on the conditions required for

this alternate outcome (adequate care). The nature of the task would require the kind of conceptual and evidential detail suggested by box 2a) in Figure 4.3, and so is not something we can pursue in any depth here. However, just a few excerpts taken from the *evidence* contained within the Francis Report, once combined with our social-theory perspective, quickly unsettle and challenge too easy an acceptance of its own causal thesis.

The report contains a good deal about the external pressures exerted by Central Government on chief executives of NHS trusts, with the centre admonishing the chief executives to balance their books. The report quotes from a letter written by Sir Nigel Crisp, then Chief Executive of the NHS as well as Permanent Secretary, which was sent to all NHS trust chief executives but was 'addressed principally to those whose organisations had been in deficit in 2004/5. He cracked the whip in no uncertain terms . . .', pointing out that:

poor financial performance in a few organisations can erode public confidence in the management of the NHS as a whole . . .

If planned recovery is not delivered, this represents a failure by their Boards to meet their duties . . .

. . . An aggressive pursuit of efficiencies, in the way we deliver our business and maximising productivity from the resources we consume, are essential parts of the contract we have with Ministers and the public we serve.³³

These generalizing, anonymous and distant, pressures from Whitehall to cut deficits through an 'aggressive pursuit of efficiencies', conveyed together with a conviction that there was a 'well-evidenced' case that it was possible to deliver 'better care for patients while reducing costs',³⁴ are a significant part of the contextual field within which the poor care of patients at Stafford took place. The NHS's West Midlands Strategic Health Authority (SHA), which was a key mediating institution further down the social hierarchy, was acutely aware of this context, as were other mediating actors. They were also aware that the Mid Staffordshire Trust had a deficit of £509,000 in 2003/4 and that this had grown to £2,158,000 in 2004/5. Sir David Nicholson's role as chief executive of the West Midlands SHA needs to be placed at the intersection between these forces and pre-existing duties, responsibilities and orientations. He described the atmosphere at the time to the Francis Inquiry as 'fevered', and while denying that the proposed measures were about compromising clinical services, he admitted that '[T]he criticism of our stewardship of the financial affairs of the NHS was under great scrutiny and great comment, and there is no doubt that the response of NHS management to all of that was to redouble their efforts to balance their financial position.'³⁵ Mr Peter Bell, a non-executive

director at the trust, noted close parallels between the pressures on the trust, and the warnings issued to them, with the 'departure of the board of a nearby trust over financial issues'³⁶:

This is particularly pertinent; it sets the scene that as a board it was unacceptable not to balance the books. If we, as Non-Executive Directors, were overlooking an organisation where things were going wrong financially, we would probably have been expected to go if we couldn't demonstrate that we were in control.³⁷

One can see very clearly here the power of external pressures on the board of the trust, pressures that would have been experienced as *independent causal forces* in the sense that the actors sitting on the board – the actors-in-focus – had no power over them.³⁸

Evidence provided to the Inquiry by both Karen Morrey, director of operations at Mid Staffordshire from 2006 until 2009, and Toni Brisby, non-executive chair of the trust, indicated concerted pressure from the West Midlands SHA for the trust to 'break-even and by implication to cut staff'.³⁹ It is clear that both women believe that 'hitting the financial target' was at the apex of the ordering of concerns or hierarchy of purposes⁴⁰ conveyed to the trust by key actors further up the organizational hierarchy, and that little more than lip service was paid to safeguarding the standards of clinical practice and care in the process of achieving those cuts.⁴¹ Whitehall and the SHA were careful to say that balancing the books did not have to mean staff cuts, as it could entail cuts elsewhere and 'efficiency gains'. However, it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that, in the context pertaining at the time, the external financial pressures conveyed from Whitehall through the West Midlands SHA and the Mid Staffordshire Trust were encouraging the creation of a precarious situation. The tension between financial pressures and obligatory duties seems to have expressly incited the performance of a precarious balancing act in which one slip one way or the other would have led to charges of incompetence or worse. The question arises as to whether health managers and administrators at various levels, and doctors, nurses and patients, should ever be positioned within structural complexes requiring judgements and calculations with such fine margins for error. Should such risks ever be taken? And, also, should those involved in the implementation of such unstable regimes be exposed to the intense demands and acute stress that are their inevitable accompaniment. Faced with this degree of structural strain, there is only so much that can be done with even the tightest system of regulatory control. The Mid-Staffordshire Trust was expected to make cost reductions of 8 per cent in 2006–7, which was 'the highest level of savings planned for any trust in the West Midlands, where the average was 5%'.⁴² The finance director

and deputy CEO of the trust at the time, John Newsham, noted that the staff establishment was in reality to be reduced by 370 posts.

Much is gained from situating other aspects of the Francis Report within the networks and power relations of the broader contextual field. For example, Francis takes members of the trust to task for failing to make clear statements about the risks entailed by proposed staff reductions. Jan Harry, the director of nursing up to July 2006 is particularly criticized, both in the Francis Report and in subsequent fitness-to-practise hearings,⁴³ for not raising the issue of risk assessments. One would indeed want to look closely at the absence of response at this level, and at other failings at hospital level reported by the *Guardian* article as having been listed by Francis in a letter to the health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, accompanying his report. These were such things as: 'Too great a degree of tolerance of poor standards and of risk to patients', and 'an institutional culture which ascribed more weight to positive information about the service than to information capable of implying cause for concern'. The situations these failings describe are clearly unsatisfactory, and imply the need for profound reflection on causal and moral responsibility at all levels. But it ultimately seems unjust to treat such moments of role inadequacy as discrete moments of personal failure, as if they are somehow unaffected by the powerful financial forces and pressures that have left roles without the resources they require. Rather, it would be much more appropriate to acknowledge that these forces may well have exposed the people who inhabit the roles to unconscionable demands. Reality is distorted when each separate site is treated too atomistically, where each one site within the system is insufficiently connected to relevant others, is treated as overly free-floating and autonomous, with the responsibility for too much of what goes on in each setting laid at the feet of the actors who are most immediately involved.

A further contributory causal factor to include in this mix involves the drive to large-scale reorganization that affected the efficient functioning of the NHS at every level during this period. Macro decisions within organizations such as the NHS, where the decisions of a powerfully positioned few filter out to many different middle-level sites and micro sites, can upset equilibriums and drastically reduce capacity at the local level.⁴⁴ A *Guardian* article reports Sir David Nicholson as saying that at the time of the Mid-Staffs scandal he was responsible for delivering a large-scale change within the NHS. This involved 'delivering three SHAs into one [and] for moving 70 primary care trusts into about 40'.⁴⁵ Change on this scale almost inevitably disrupts positive, well-functioning social systems, which derive much of their effectiveness from habituated, organically embedded, skills and capacities. It disrupts such systems by uprooting material, technological and informational infrastructures, and through disrupting embedded human practices and the routine skills,

norms, knowledge and interactions that underpin these. For these reasons, there is something careless, desultory and morally questionable about the way in which contemporary culture has embraced constant change as a good in itself.

Conclusion

In this final section we have come a long way from the crude simplicities of the BBC news bulletin. We've done this by positioning the definition of the situation, and the implicit argument contained within it, in the midst of its relevant contextual field. This theoretical framing facilitated the further move in which we identified those places where there were gaps, with no coverage at all, or where we were given insufficient evidence. It also allowed us to reflect upon relevant issues of hierarchy, power, resources, and the internalization of external injunctions alongside other conceptions of duties and responsibilities. All this, in turn, encouraged recourse to further sources and genres as a means of complementing our knowledge, of bringing it closer to the levels of adequacy required to genuinely address the issues at hand and to assess the claims being made about them. A similar movement through stages was at work in the Thai case. Here, the resort to additional sources and genres was guided by an initial questioning of the definition of the situation and the normative framing of claims made by the various current affairs reports. The re-structuring of the 'problem-to-be-explained' in terms of a broader conception of democracy brought into view a more adequate contextual landscape, and this, in turn, allowed us to identify a broader array of relevant causal features. Both cases built incrementally upon the skills, tools and perspectives introduced in the interpretation of accounts of German manufacturing success and the Rwandan genocide, and in the case studies of Chapter 4. All of these earlier cases, in their different ways and across a range of historical and geographical scales, were focused around the knowledge to be acquired from single texts.