

Piercing the PR Shield: Aleatory Intervention as a Method for Disrupting Narrative Control in Qualitative Interviewing

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Abstract

In the contemporary media landscape, the qualitative interview has increasingly devolved into a performative exchange of rehearsed narratives. This paper argues that standard linear questioning allows subjects to utilize a "PR Shield," a defensive cognitive posture that deflects genuine inquiry. To counter this, this study introduces the methodology of "Aleatory Journalism," defined as the use of a randomized semantic system (specifically Tarot) to act as an impartial disruptor in the interview process. By analyzing case studies involving six subjects from literary, technical, and performance backgrounds (Lara, Leigh Alexander, Scarlet Vikki, Sacha Coward, Treasa McCabe, and C.B. Lee), this paper demonstrates how randomized visual stimuli force associative thinking, bypass rehearsed talking points, and extract data regarding subconscious drivers that linear questioning fails to access.

1. Introduction: The Crisis of Linearity

The fundamental efficacy of the standard journalistic interview is currently compromised by the prevalence of media training and the calcification of public persona. The interview has become "rehearsed theatre," where the subject arrives armed with pre-fabricated answers and "Key Messages." The journalist, constrained by resources and convention, typically employs a linear questioning structure, asking about inspiration, process, or future projects.

This linearity is the fatal flaw of standard journalism. Logic is predictable; if a subject can anticipate the trajectory of a line of questioning, they can prepare defences accordingly. The result is a stalemate where no new truth is uncovered. To "pierce this shield," the physics of the conversation must change through the introduction of an element neither party controls: chaos.

This study proposes "Aleatory Journalism" as a solution. Derived from the Latin *alea* (dice), aleatory methods introduce chance into the creative process. By utilizing Tarot cards not as divination tools but as "Randomized Semantic Generators," the interviewer forces the subject to engage in associative thinking. The subject cannot access a rehearsed talking point for a random image; they must instead construct a novel semantic bridge between the visual metaphor and their internal reality.

2. Methodology: The Tri-Card System

To standardize this study, a specific "Tri-Card Spread" was employed across six interviews conducted in late 2025. This system balances control variables with random variables to ensure comparative rigor. The spread consists of three distinct variables:

- **The Anchor Card (Control Variable):** A card pre-selected by the operator that remains constant for a specific thematic period (e.g., "Devil Season" or "Moon Month"). This acts as the control group, allowing for comparative analysis of how different subjects respond to identical stimuli.
- **The Wild Card (Random Variable):** A card selected via true randomness during the interview (the subject instructs the operator to stop shuffling). This forces immediate improvisation and tests the subject's ability to engage in rapid associative thinking.
- **The Guest Card (Community Variable):** A card selected by the previous interviewee to be gifted to the current subject. This establishes a "meta-narrative" or community chain.

3. Analysis of Variable A: The Anchor Card

The Anchor Card serves to set the thematic stage. By presenting the same archetypal image to multiple subjects, we can observe how professional background influences semantic interpretation.

3.1 The Moon: Cultural Heritage vs. Creative Process During the "Moon Month," the Anchor Card presented was The Moon (XVIII), traditionally associated with illusion, dreams, and the unconscious.

- **Treasa McCabe (Game Designer):** McCabe, a creator of supernatural detective games, did not interpret the card through a technical lens. Instead, the card triggered a deep reflection on cultural heritage. She connected the "illusion" of the card to Irish folklore, stating, *"People still don't walk in fairy rings. We still avoid cutting down fairy trees... It's kind of drawing from those stories and fears and beliefs of your childhood... What it is to be Irish while sitting in the darkness."* The Anchor Card successfully bypassed technical discussion to access the subject's cultural foundation.
- **C.B. Lee (Author):** Conversely, Lee interpreted the same image as a metaphor for the creative workflow. She projected her current professional status onto the card, stating, *"I think The Moon really works well pointing to that stage of the unknown... It's really fun being in this space where I'm still dreaming up the story... It's not like a solid thing yet."*

3.2 The Devil: Agency, Addiction, and Identity During "Devil Season," the Anchor Card was The Devil (XV), representing bondage, temptation, and shadow selves.

- **Leigh Alexander (Narrative Designer):** Alexander utilized the card to discuss the mechanics of game design. She reframed the card's traditional meaning of "bondage" into a critique of player agency: *"Whenever I see the devil... it asks me to think about where I'm giving my power away. And my work is about empowerment in a storytelling context."*
- **Scarlet Vikki (Performer):** For Vikki, the card acted as a mirror for her stage persona, "Miss Scarlet." She admitted to the "addictive" nature of performance, specifically the

power dynamics of the gaze: *"There is that element of saying to your crowd 'Desire me, look at me.' ... That is also really addictive."*

- **Sacha Coward (Historian):** Coward used the monster archetype to discuss historical re-evaluation. He selected the Minotaur as an unfairly demonized figure, deconstructing the myth to reveal the tragedy of a "child" rejected by its family, thereby projecting a queer reading onto a classical monster.

4. Analysis of Variable B: The Wild Card

The Wild Card represents the "Aleatory Shift," the moment the interview moves from a controlled exchange to a chaotic one. This variable consistently produced the most vulnerable and authentic data.

4.1 The Tower: Trauma Externalization Sacha Coward drew The Tower (XVI), a card depicting sudden, catastrophic collapse. This highly negative card immediately accessed a specific professional trauma: the bankruptcy of his publisher.

- **The Shift:** A standard question about "career challenges" might have elicited a generic answer. However, the violent imagery of The Tower forced a raw confession: *"It was devastating... It really, really sucked because you have this book that's doing really well... and you're not getting royalties for it."* The card allowed him to externalize the event ("The Blasted Tower") and frame it structurally.

4.2 The Four of Wands: The Celebration Paradox Leigh Alexander drew The Four of Wands, a card typically signifying celebration, stability, and community.

- **The Shift:** The juxtaposition of a "happy" card with the subject's internal reality created cognitive dissonance. Instead of offering a platitude about success, Alexander admitted: *"Oh my God, what a terrible question. I take no pride in myself. I do not celebrate myself. I prefer to dissociate when I get tired."* This stark admission of "dissociation" over "celebration" would likely never have surfaced without the visual provocation of the card.

4.3 Strength: The "Queen Energy" Scarlet Vikki drew Strength (VIII), depicted in her deck as a lion with a flower.

- **The Shift:** Vikki used this prompt to define a specific type of resilience necessary for an older performer returning to the stage after injury. She coined the term "queen energy," defining it not as aggression, but as restraint: *"It's about having strength in holding back. Really value keeping my dignity even if people are trying to provoke me to lose it."*

4.4 The Two of Cups: Queering the Narrative C.B. Lee drew the Two of Cups, representing connection and romance.

- **The Shift:** Lee utilized this card to pivot from a discussion of plot to a cultural critique of "perfect representation" in queer media. She argued against the pressure for marginalized characters to be flawless: *"I would love to see more characters get to be messy or evil or vindictive... It felt like... if you created someone... that wasn't quite perfect, it was a blow to the queer community."* The card provided the safe container to critique the very "perfection" the card often represents.

4.5 The Four of Swords: The Need for Retreat Treasa McCabe drew the Four of Swords, a card of rest and sanctuary.

- **The Shift:** This card validated the "post-release crash" of game development. McCabe confessed that rest looked like "not having to make decisions," revealing the decision fatigue inherent in her role as a lead developer.

5. Analysis of Variable C: The Guest Card

The Guest Card establishes a "Chain" of influence, proving that archetypal images can serve as a universal language between disparate technical fields.

5.1 The Chain: Design to Performance

- **The Donor:** Leigh Alexander (Game Designer) selected The King of Cups (Father of Cups) for the next guest.
- **The Recipient:** Scarlet Vikki (Performer) received this card.
- **The Result:** The King of Cups, representing emotional mastery and compassion, bridged the gap between coding and circus arts. Vikki interpreted the card as a directive for "Compassion" in the competitive world of performance: *"Compassion costs nothing... To me, a good performer is the person who stands up... and presents themselves from the heart... It's not a competition."*

5.2 The Synchronicity: The Magician An unprompted synchronicity occurred between Sacha Coward and C.B. Lee.

- **Sacha Coward:** At the end of his session, Coward chose to gift The Magician to the next guest, citing its "aesthetic" appeal.
- **C.B. Lee:** Independently, at the conclusion of her session later in the series, Lee also chose to gift The Magician.
- **Implication:** This recurrence suggests a collective subconscious desire among the interviewed creatives for "manifestation" and "agency" (core traits of The Magician) following periods of structural collapse (The Tower) or burnout (Four of Swords).

5.3 The Upside Down Ace: The Void Lara (APT) received the Upside Down Ace of Wands from Helen Nesburg. This card, representing a "creative void" or "blocked energy," prompted Lara to critique the media's portrayal of her profession. She utilized the "void" concept to dismantle the inaccuracies of shows like *Silent Witness*, stating, *"I find it very, very, very difficult to actually watch media like that... It makes me so angry."*

6. Discussion

The efficacy of Aleatory Journalism lies not in the mystical properties of the Tarot deck, but in the psychological mechanism of pattern recognition. Humans are "pattern-seeking machines." When provided with a chaotic variable (the card), the subject is compelled to organize that chaos into meaning.

The data indicates that this method shifts the interview focus from the "What" (logistics, dates, products) to the "Why" (motivations, fears, ethics).

- Lara moved from describing mortuary procedures to discussing the ethics of viewing the dead as "patients" rather than "bodies."
- Leigh Alexander moved from game mechanics to a confession of dissociation and the inability to celebrate.
- Sacha Coward moved from historical facts to a raw discussion of financial and professional loss.

These disclosures were not extracted through aggressive questioning, but through the "Third Party" mediation of the image. The card acts as a neutral ground where vulnerability is permissible because it is framed as an interpretation of the art, rather than a direct confession.

7. Conclusion

The "Death of the Interview" is a symptom of an over-controlled media environment. This paper demonstrates that Aleatory Intervention offers a reproducible, rigorous method for bypassing the "PR Shield." By introducing controlled chaos into the interview structure via the Tri-Card System (Anchor, Wild, Guest), the journalist surrenders narrative control to gain access to a deeper, more associative truth. The system provides the chaos; the subject provides the meaning.

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Data Availability Statement

The qualitative data supporting the Aleatory Journalism method consists of original interview transcripts conducted by the Operator, Finbarre Snarey, between 2024 and 2026. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews utilizing the Tri-Card Spread across various Seasons including World, Devil, and Moon. Full transcripts or additional Chain data may be available upon request from the author, subject to participant confidentiality agreements.