

A Foucauldian Foray into How Power Operates When Journalists and Public Relations Officers Meet

Chantal Francoeur

This paper addresses two pressing questions facing journalists and journalism educators today: What are we to make of the ever-increasing presence of the public relations industry on the contemporary journalistic landscape? And how can we modernize our teaching so that it accurately reflects the current relationship between these two professions? This paper proposes a theoretical framework that will help us unpack these questions and that contains within it a dynamic and generative understanding of power – a crucial component of the relationship that reporters and PR officers share. For though journalists and PR officers work together, interacting on a daily basis, their agendas are not the same: the former claim to serve the public interest; the latter work on behalf of a client’s “best” interests. In a context in which many organizations are setting up websites that look like journalism to promote their activities, and where forms such as sponsored content (i.e., native advertising) are experiencing rapid growth, the boundaries between journalism, advertising, and PR are becoming more difficult to delineate. What is lacking is a theoretical framework that is complex enough, and nuanced enough, to shed light on the workings of power within this tangled relationship.

I will be applying a Foucauldian theoretical framework to the interaction between journalism and the PR industry in order to demonstrate how a journalistic discourse that produces truth/knowledge, and hence generates power, not only has the capacity to work *against* PR but in fact is more likely to work *alongside* PR. More importantly, I argue that the journalistic discourse cannot work *without* PR – PR, in this context, being itself a “knowledge system, a discourse technology, a power effect and a subjectifying practice” (Motion and Leitch 2009, 92). Foucault (1982), in describing how a power relationship functions, puts his finger on the dynamics: “Every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not super-imposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal” (794). It is precisely this “permanent limit,” this “point of possible reversal,” that I want to focus on here, to show not only how it is constitutive of the relationship between journalism and the PR industry

– each acting as a permanent limit, a point of possible reversal, to and for the other – but also how it underlies and informs journalism’s determined struggle to not “become confused” with PR.

In the first section of this paper I review the scholarly definitions of these two professions and how they intersect and interact. I then detail how PR manoeuvres its way into and through the journalistic profession. I also unpack the journalist’s role as gatekeeper and suggest how gatekeeping allows journalists to exert powers of their own. Delving, next, into official documentation issued by the Quebec Federation of Professional Journalists (FPJQ) and the Quebec Society of PR Professionals (SQPRP), I highlight the similarities between these two sets of texts and discuss why they matter when it comes to analysing and assessing how power operates in the relationship between these respective professions. In the latter part of the paper I link these observations to Foucault’s work. I then outline how the resulting theoretical framework can be applied to a range of research questions pertaining to the relationship between PR and journalism. For example, I am currently using it for a research project examining how Quebec reporters talk about their relationship to PR (Boulay and Francoeur 2013, 2014; Francoeur 2015).

Two Professions Interacting

The Definitions

There is no single definition of PR. Some refer to it as “communicating to serve a client’s needs” in order to convince or influence various publics (Grunig and Hunt 1984; Maisonneuve 2010). For others, its primary obligation is to defend a client’s point of view and reputation at all costs, even if that means lying (Dagenais 2011). Still others talk about PR as an enterprise devoted to the “control of information” (Charron 1994; Davis 2002), or they liken it to a “propaganda machine” (Stauber and Rampton 1995; McChesney, cited in Sullivan 2011). More recently, PR has been dubbed “responsible communication” or “fair communication” (Durif and Corriveau 2012).

In the same way, no single all-encompassing definition exists for journalism. Sometimes it is referred to as the fourth estate. Journalists themselves have been described variously as gatekeepers, agenda setters, and democracy watchdogs (McCombs and Shaw 1972), or as professionals working either in the public interest or in the interests of the elite (Chomsky and Herman 1988).

The Work

Though their personal job descriptions and broader mandates might differ, journalists and PR officers are closely connected. Press releases and other communications issued by PR sources take up a significant amount of space in the news (Davis 2002; Manning 2008; Sullivan 2011; Sissons 2012). In 2008, in a British study, Lewis, Williams, and Franklin found that 54 per cent of print stories and 58 per cent of broadcast news stories “are informed by PR” (10). Twenty years earlier, Tremblay and colleagues (1988)

had studied the same phenomenon in Quebec and concluded that 47 per cent of regional news stories were derived from what they termed “le discours promotionnel” (promotional discourse) (16).

Given the dramatic changes over the past decade in how news is produced, these percentages are probably increasing. Reporters have less time to research their own stories. With more deadlines to meet and more platforms to feed, reporters are increasingly treating PR material as “ready for online” content (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008; Francoeur 2012). The Pew Research Center’s (2010) study of Baltimore’s media “ecosystem” found, for example, that “as news is posted faster ... official press releases often appear word for word in first accounts of events, though often not noted as such.”

The Product

Explanations vary as to why journalists are using press releases and other PR-based communications more and more often in their news stories. Some attribute this to a lack of meaningful independent journalistic activity (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008); others talk of a “colonization of news discourse by PR” (Erjavec 2005, 173); still others see it as a sign and/or symptom of “alienated journalism” (Larsson 2009, 132). Davies (2008) has coined the word “churnalism,” while Davis (2002) speaks of “public relations democracy.” Then there are those who suggest that PR officers and journalists are “co-constructors” of the final news product (Heath 2000; Maisonneuve 2010).

Clearly, the links between PR and journalism are receiving a good deal of scholarly attention. At the same time, a new lens through which to assess and analyse the relationship in the post-convergence age is badly needed. Such a lens must be sensitive to the workings of power within this relationship; it must also lend itself to the development of a theoretical framework that can adequately account for the nuances inherent in all power relationships. In the next section I show how PR can manoeuvre its way into what I will describe later as the *technology* of journalism discourse.

PR Here, There, and Everywhere versus Journalists as Gatekeepers

From choosing a topic and an angle, to gathering sounds and/or quotes, to sourcing and collecting appropriate images, PR professionals know all about newsrooms’ routines. They can step in at any stage of the process, passing out press releases, putting journalists in contact with sources, arranging reporters’ access to people, locations, documents, and so on, and in so doing, advancing their own agendas. With their “ready for publication” material that can easily be transformed into news, the PR industry is able to infiltrate, influence, transform, and exploit the newsroom’s routines and formats.

The job of journalists is to cast doubt, to double-check, to look for the contradictions, to refute, to supplement, to reject the information that comes to them from PR. Reporters are in fact *required* to be sceptical and critical. Articles 2 and 3 of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ)

Code of Ethics state that “a journalist’s work is based on fundamental values, such as thinking critically and by extension, questioning everything,” which means “applying rigorous standards to the collection and verification of any information they use”.¹

Furthermore, it is journalists who ultimately decide what gets broadcast, printed, or posted online. It is journalists who make that final editorial decision as to what makes it into a news story. To quote Article 5(d) from the FPJQ’s (1996) Code of Ethics: “Journalists are under no obligation to broadcast or publish information in accordance with the wishes of a source. It is up to individual journalists to decide what information is pertinent, has merit and is in the public interest.”² In other words, journalists have a crucial role as “gatekeepers” (Shoemaker 1991). Gatekeeping not only gives journalists a means of imposing their own limit on PR but also ensures that the PR industry does not, to use Foucault’s (1982) term, “super-impose” itself on journalism.

Here is Cottle (2003) on the subject of this journalistic dance: “Here, then, a *processual* view of ritual is opened up, one in which the script is not thought to be exclusively owned by any one party whether news producers or particular sources, and where ‘ritual’ is often mobilised and contested in an unfolding ‘social drama’” (17). Cottle’s unpacking of the “processual view of ritual” bears a striking resemblance to Foucault’s “strategy of struggle” as it unfolds in the context of a power relationship; likewise, Cottle’s “script” that is not “exclusively owned” is another way of talking about Foucault’s “two forces” that are not “super-imposed”; finally, Cottle’s “unfolding ‘social drama’” with its mobilization and contestation of “ritual” resonates with Foucault’s own site of struggle: a site where each force becomes, to and for the other, as much “a kind of permanent limit” as “a point of possible reversal” (1982, 794).

The ongoing power struggle between these two professions does not end there, however. The struggle also takes place across a textual terrain – that is, in the official documentation that describes the playing field and designates the positions taken up by the players in each profession. In the following section, we examine documents produced by the associations representing these two professions in Quebec: the FPJQ (1996) for journalism, the SQPRP (2014) for the PR industry. What emerges from this brief survey will be incorporated into the Foucauldian theoretical framework developed later on in the paper, when the *apparatus* of journalism discourse will be discussed.

Turning the Spotlight on Textual Practices

Journalism as PR: Articles 1, 2, and 3 of the FPJQ Code of Ethics

The FPJQ represents 1,972 journalists; the SQPRP has only 600 members.³ At first glance, what is striking about these associations’ official documents is how similar they are, from the general layout, to the descriptions of tasks, ethical codes, and standards, to the very vocabulary used. The documents issued by these associations define who their members are and what they do, for whom.

The FPJQ (1996) states in Article 1 of its Code of Ethics that “the term ‘journalist’ refers to anyone who works as a journalist for a news media institution.” It then gives a dozen or so examples of what that work might consist of: researching, reporting, interviewing, editing, assigning, managing (the newsroom), and so forth.⁴ As for the purpose of this work, it is laid out in the preamble to the FPJQ’s Code of Ethics: “The primary role of journalists is to accurately report, analyze and comment upon what is happening around them so that their fellow citizens can learn more about the world they live in, and have a better understanding of that world.”⁵

PR officers, for their part, are described in the SQPRP’s Code of Ethics (2014⁶) as “professionals” who are “experts in managing organizations’ relationship to their environment” and who help a particular organization reach its goals by providing “quality analysis” and by proposing “communication strategies and communication means that are both pertinent and effective.” The document goes on to explain how PR professionals go about this task, placing a particular emphasis on their communication skills: “They manage an organization’s communication requirements with a view to narrowing the gap between an organization’s knowledge, perceptions and attitudes, and those of their public.”⁷

Both professional associations also provide details of the institutions on which their members rely and from which they derive their legitimacy. Thus, the lifeblood of the journalist has its source in democratic values. Terms like “freedom of the press” and “the public’s right to know” crop up frequently in FPJQ documents; its members, the association’s Code of Ethics emphasizes, work in “the public interest,” acting as “watchdogs” when it comes to safeguarding democracy and curtailing abuses of power. Journalists are seen by the FPJQ as having core values, among these, fairness, rigour, honesty, exactitude, integrity, and truthfulness.

The SQPRP documents make similar resort to democratic values, in particular “the right to free speech.” They also call for recognition of the “professionalism of the PR practice.” The keywords found throughout the SQPRP’s Mission Statement and Code of Ethics are much the same as those found throughout the FPJQ documents. Besides possessing the same “core values” as journalists, PR professionals are described by their association as demonstrating excellence, leadership, innovation, and confidentiality. And like journalists, SQPRP expects its members to “work in accordance with the public interest when exercising their profession.”⁸

With regard to both the FPJQ and the SQPRP, membership is not mandatory for practitioners, nor are journalists and PR officers in Quebec obliged to comply with the Codes of Ethics issued by their respective professional associations. In fact, in legal terms, neither is even a profession. Anybody can call herself a “journalist” or a “PR officer”; nothing exists to protect either job title. The FPJQ makes this very clear in the foreword to its Code of Ethics: “Given the particular nature of journalism in Quebec, whereby membership in a professional order is not mandatory, neither the title of ‘journalist’ nor the activity known

as ‘journalism’ is reserved for a specific group of people. The world of journalism is an open world.”⁹ In practical terms, this means that if a reporter violates the FPJQ Code of Ethics, a citizen can lodge a formal complaint with the Quebec Press Council. The latter is an honorary tribunal with no formal disciplinary powers. The Quebec Press Council’s decisions are public, however, and the council can issue an “official” warning that could lead to a reporter being publicly held to blame for the violation.

No similar tribunal exists in the PR world, but the SQPRP clearly states that one of its members (though not an ordinary citizen) can denounce a fellow member who is believed to be violating the association’s Code of Ethics. If that should happen, “any offense will be dealt with by the Public Relations Profession society directly concerned, or passed on to the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), depending on what the National Ethical Committee decides.”¹⁰ There is, however, no requirement for the SQPRP (or the CPRS) to make such a decision or the ensuing disciplinary process public knowledge.

This brief survey of documents suggests that there is little in either association’s Code of Ethics that would help us distinguish between the two. This renders journalism even more susceptible to “infiltration” by the PR industry. Both professions produce copy intended to serve the best interests of “the” public (or at least, of “a” public). Add to this, journalists and PR officers often work together: the former chase down the latter for access to, or a statement from, a source; the latter often use the former to reach a wider audience. All of which only fosters the idea that they overlap substantially.

But journalists and PR officers are not the same: they do not share common goals, and their intentions are different. They have neither the same relationship with the public nor the same obligations toward that public. They each have their specific nature: journalists work on behalf of citizens, and their primary purpose is *to serve* the public interest; PR officers work for their clients, practising their profession *in accordance with* the public interest. How, then, do journalists make sure they are not being confused and conflated with PR practitioners? The answer is found in Articles 5 and 9 of the FPJQ Code of Ethics.

Journalism Is Not PR

Article 9(a) of the FPJQ Code of Ethics clearly states: “Journalists should abstain from engaging in certain communication-related activities that fall outside of the journalistic domain: among these, public relations, advertising, promotion, motivational speaking events that teach techniques for dealing with the media ...”¹¹

Article 5(d) in the same document is equally clear about the distinction between news and publicity material: “News copy and advertising copy are not the same, and should not be confused. Journalists do not write infomercials, for example. If they do, they must never put their signature on this kind of material.”¹² Here, journalism is marking out its territory and distinguishing it from that of the

publicist and the PR officer. The public must be left in no doubt that the information they are consuming bears the journalistic stamp: that it has been produced by a reporter, that it conforms with the profession's Code of Ethics (whether or not that "code" is legally binding), and that it is in the public interest. One could say that this "checklist," like gatekeeping, serves to maintain and reinforce journalism's power – that it pushes back against the PR industry's efforts to *act on* journalism; that it draws a clear boundary between itself and the PR industry to create "a kind of permanent limit" so that journalism "does not finally become confused" (Foucault 1982, 794) with PR. With these thoughts in mind, let us turn now to some basic Foucauldian concepts.

Journalism as a Discourse That Produces Power/Knowledge

Discourse, in this context, suggests construction – that is, construction of meaning, construction of signification, the kind of construction that "structures the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking" (Rose 2007, 142). Discourse, when used in the Foucauldian sense, is embodied in "sets of statements that form the objects, concepts, subjects, and strategies within the discourse" (Motion and Leitch 2009, 87). Discourse has its rules and its conventions, and it relies on those institutions within which and through which it is produced, circulated, reaffirmed, and reinforced.

In other words, discourse has power: the power to produce subjects, objects, ways of thinking, and ways of acting; the power to structure institutions. The power of discourse is not a repressive kind of power. Rather, it is a productive power – a power that ultimately produces knowledge and truth.¹³ Discourse emanates from powerful social institutions (themselves already created by discourse) that diffuse and spread "truths." Their processes of production and circulation – their very routines and practices – all serve to confirm that particular discourse's "truth." So truth is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Motion and Leitch 2009, 133).¹⁴ This is how Foucault (1980) summarizes how discourse works: "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (93).

Medical discourse, for example, refers to the specific language and vocabulary of medicine, to the specific knowledge that medicine produces, and to the professional institutions and social spaces that medicine occupies. It also refers to identities, occupations, and professions (i.e., to doctors, nurses, and patients) and to sickness itself. The medical discourse "constructs" what a doctor is and what a doctor does; likewise, the nurse and the patient; likewise, what qualifies as sickness and what does not. In the same way, journalistic discourse "constructs" what journalism is, who the journalist is, what the journalist does, and what constitutes news. Journalistic discourse defines what a "good" story is, how that story is put together and presented, who that story's appropriate sources are, and which institutions produce the

“good” stories, when, and in what circumstances. Journalistic discourse also establishes what journalism is for, what its place in society is, and how it fits with other societal institutions. Each journalistic story confirms journalistic discourse. The same with journalistic institutions such as professional associations, those associations’ Codes of Ethics or Charters, laws that incorporate terms like “freedom of the press” or “the public’s right to information,” and the ombudsmen and Press Councils and regulatory boards that enforce and uphold those laws. Each and every one of these constructs and confirms journalistic discourse. So do notions like fairness, transparency, rigour, protection of sources, and public interest; so do those routines that underlie production in a newsroom. Journalistic discourse produces truth/knowledge about itself, which gives that particular discourse power. That power, in turn, ensures and enables the production of more truth/knowledge.

Seen through a Foucauldian lens, everything previously analysed in this paper amounts to journalistic discourse. It is all there: the rules that govern the formation of “the objects, concepts, subjects, and strategies within the discourse” (Motion and Leitch 2009, 87); the rules that determine what can be said, how it can be said, who can speak, after which procedures, in what context, under whose authority, from which position, with what viewpoints, in whose interest, within which institutions, and, in every case, why. In other words, we have seen how power functions in the journalistic discourse, and we have seen how the journalistic discourse produces truth/knowledge. For the purposes of this paper, we have conducted our journalistic discourse analysis with the aim of ascertaining the place of the PR industry in journalism and establishing the relationship of the one to the other. Framing this relationship in Foucauldian terms, we have seen that journalism’s power derives from its production of subjects, objects, institutional structures, and ways of thinking and acting; PR, as “a knowledge system, a discourse technology, a power effect and a subjectifying practice” (Motion and Leitch 2009, 92), exercises its power through its ability to infiltrate, transform, become part of, manoeuvre within, take advantage of, and act upon journalism.

In the next section, it will become clear that PR makes use of journalism’s *technology* and *apparatus* and has the ability to subjugate journalists. It exercises its power in journalistic discourse precisely in the way that Foucault (1982) describes this process: “The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome” (789).

Reassessing Journalism’s Relationship to the PR Industry through a Foucauldian Lens

According to Foucault, an institution functions at two levels: at the level of its *apparatus* and at the level of its *technology*. An institution’s *apparatus* includes many forms of truth/knowledge as evidenced by its regulations, its philosophical underpinnings, its moral codes, its laws. As for an institution’s *technology*, it

refers to those *practices* that are used to exercise the power linked to truth/knowledge production: methods, processes, strategies, manoeuvres, and mechanisms.

The links between an institution's apparatus and technology, along with the "strategic imperative" (Andersen 2003) underlying those links, create what Foucault calls a *dispositif*. The *dispositif* reveals how a discourse is monitored as well as how it self-regulates – that is, regulates itself from within. The impact of the *dispositif* on each individual within an institution is to subjugate that individual: individuals are produced by an institutional discourse, the individual in turn reproduces that discourse, individuals are therefore "caught" – trapped – within the *dispositif* of an institutional discourse, which means that individuals end up in a position of *subjugation*. Thus, closer scrutiny of the apparatus, technology, *dispositif*, and subjugation process inherent in the journalistic discourse sheds important light on the PR industry's presence in and effect on journalism.

Apparatus

Documents issued by a professional association like the FPJQ are part of the journalistic discourse. By constructing, as they do, what journalism is, who journalists are, what journalists do, what journalism is for, and where journalism fits into the wider society, texts like these *materialize* the apparatus of those institutions associated with journalism.

Comparing the FPJQ Code of Ethics with that of the SQPRP revealed marked similarities between the two texts. But the latter document suggests a desire on the part of the PR industry to integrate the power/knowledge of journalism so as to be seen as a profession, as just like it, whereas the FPJQ makes a concerted effort in Articles 5 and 9 of its documentation to distinguish journalists from PR officers. By way of an explanation, Article 9(a) insists that the kinds of tasks undertaken by PR officials generally "serve private interests and send a partisan message to the public." The FPJQ maintains that journalists are not in a position to serve up "partisan information one day and impartial information the next" and points out that to do so would "create confusion" for the public and cast permanent doubt on the "credibility and integrity" of the journalistic profession.¹⁵

One could venture that Article 9(a) sets up a "permanent limit" between the profession of journalism and that of PR. But that "permanent limit" becomes, in fact, a Foucauldian "point of possible reversal": by insisting on the difference between the two professions, by going so far as to mention PR in its own Code of Ethics, the FPJQ – a key institution in Quebec's journalistic discourse – gives PR a central role in its very apparatus. For when a journalistic text goes to such lengths to point out that PR and journalism are not the same profession and do not serve the same purpose, it becomes clear that journalism in fact needs PR in order to define itself. By integrating PR into its discourse in order to distinguish itself from PR, journalism defines itself in relation to PR; it also demonstrates that it cannot

achieve what it wants to be without PR. In other words, a journalist becomes a journalist by not being a PR officer. And by extension, the parameters or limits of journalism – where journalism begins and ends – end up being determined with and by PR.

This point is crucial to our analysis of the power relationship between the two activities. As Foucault (1982) suggests, no understanding of how power operates is possible until we take into account “the system of differentiations which permits one to act upon the actions of others: differentiations determined by the law or by traditions of status and privilege.” And he goes on to argue that “every relationship of power puts into operation differentiations which are at the same time its conditions and its results” (792). Journalism, for example, differentiates itself from PR through its laws (or its rules), its traditions, and its status – in large part because it needs to make sure it does not become confused with PR. But the system of differentiations that journalism puts into place also permits PR to “act upon the actions” of journalists – with greater efficacy and success, in fact, precisely because PR officers are not journalists. Since they are neither the subjects of, nor subjected to, journalistic discourse, PR officers are under no obligation to comply with its codes and rules, to conform to its institutional demands. PR officers can look like journalists and act like journalists, but they have none of the responsibilities that go along with being a journalist. In an ironic twist, journalism’s concerted and deliberate effort to escape being associated with PR merely ends up handing a lot of power over to PR. This is the first disturbing discovery that a Foucauldian theoretical framework reveals about the relationship between PR and journalism.

Technology

As already discussed, PR can manoeuvre itself into each and every step of the journalistic process. This action on the part of PR – this ability to influence the selection, the tone, and the content of a news story – involves participation (in Foucauldian terms) in the technology of the journalistic discourse.

PR officers play a significant role in deciding which stories make it into the news, which angles those stories take, and which sources are called upon to back up those stories. PR officers also know how to play one reporter off against another, as well as how to adapt their press releases and communiqués to fit with the different styles and needs of a wide range of media. This is partly because journalistic discourse has strict rules of diffusion and distribution – what Foucault (2004) would term “framing superimpositions.” The fact is that almost every utterance in the news is an utterance “to which certain rules of acceptability apply” (Andersen 2003, 3). These rules – these “framing superimpositions” – regulate the approach that journalists take when producing stories. They also regulate journalists’ relationships with others and with their surroundings (Andersen 2003). The very fixedness of these rules provides PR officials with yet another avenue along which to exercise their power over journalism –

guiding, to borrow from Foucault (1982), the “possibility of conduct” of journalists and the “possible outcome” of journalism (789).¹⁶ This, then, is the second discovery that the Foucauldian theoretical framework helps reveal.

The third disturbing discovery resides in journalism ethics: in those core values such as fairness, balance, integrity, impartiality, and rigour. These values are integral to journalistic texts and thus to the journalistic apparatus. And in their capacity as tools and strategies, they qualify as journalistic technology. These core values help journalists play their role as gatekeepers. But these core values also encourage the subjugation of journalists: journalism’s ethics end up benefiting PR by creating an effective surveillance *dispositif*.

Dispositif

Foucault’s (1993) notion of a *dispositif* is developed most fully in his study of prisons and punishment. Prisons, he argues, gave birth to a new form of architecture: Jeremy Bentham’s¹⁷ “panopticon.” It is a building that allows prison guards to keep watch over prisoners without being seen. A panopticon is the surveillance *dispositif* par excellence, and its brilliance lies in its invisible yet all-pervasive presence – it leads prisoners to think they are always being watched, that they can never hide, and as a result, prisoners become their own guards, so to speak – the ultimate exercise in self-discipline.

The panopticon is effective as a means of surveillance because its power is automatic and effortless. Prisoners, from one moment to the next, cannot know whether they are being watched, but they know they could be being watched – and that, alone, is enough to turn them into “model” prisoners. Their relationship to power might be based on a fiction, but its effects are very real. Successfully applying this particular *dispositif* to other institutional contexts – to the school, for example, or to the factory, or hospital – Foucault (2004) insisted that with just a few “necessary modifications,” it could reveal important insights into the workings of power within any establishment where, in a limited space, a group of people were being subjected to some form of surveillance (531).

When applied to journalism, the surveillance *dispositif* functions like this: Journalists work in a specific and precise space – the media. It is easy to watch them, to make them feel as if there is a surveillance *dispositif* at work, that they have no choice but to submit to the exigencies of “power through transparency” – an expression used by Foucault (1980, 154). This *dispositif* is made up of those ethical obligations with which journalists must comply. The FPJQ (1996) Code of Ethics states, for example, that journalists must be “fair” – that is, treat everyone equally and with respect. They must also produce “balanced” news stories in which a range of viewpoints are given fair representation (Article 2). Failure on the part of a journalist to uphold the ethical obligation of “fairness” means that the Quebec Press Council, or the ombudsman, can step in with a warning or a reprimand. Journalists can also be sued for libel.

These ethical and legal obligations mean that journalists have to consult with, or interview, anyone who is negatively implicated in their story. A PR officer can turn this obligation to his or her own advantage by forcing a reporter to include a client's point of view or a client's reaction. A PR officer can also impose his or her own rules: deciding who gets to speak, how long an interview will be, and which questions can or cannot be asked. A PR officer can also refuse to give an interview, which places the reporter in an ethically awkward position. These examples point once again to how journalistic ethics, simply by virtue of their existence, give power to the PR industry. From the perspective of the surveillance *dispositif*, the power itself could be said to come automatically – to require no effort on the part of the PR officer. All of this suggests that fairness, balance, and diligence are not only ethical obligations on the part of the journalist; they are also “windows of surveillance” (Foucault 1980) that act as control mechanisms within this particular *dispositif*, that impose self-disciplining regimes on journalists and prompt them to feel – watching the PR officer maybe watching them – much like prisoners in the panopticon.¹⁸

Subjugation

This surveillance *dispositif* is so effective that it can lead to the subjugation of journalists. As discussed earlier in this paper, subjugation happens when journalists are not only transformed into subjects by the *dispositif* but do so willingly, submitting themselves voluntarily to, in this case, the power of PR, opting for the easier and less costly route, which here amounts to “following the source” and complying with PR's way of doing things. Taking on a PR officer's press release or communiqué, reproducing it word for word in a news story, is a form of subjugation that a journalist doesn't have to work hard to justify. The PR officer goes away satisfied, and the journalist can rest easy, secure in the knowledge that all the boxes in the journalistic ethical code – fairness, balance, impartiality, rigour, and so on – have been ticked off, at least in the eyes of one party: the PR officer's client. It takes a lot of energy and confidence to confront a source, to refuse to replicate or use PR material, or to find other sources. This is what Foucault (2004) means when he talks about the “effectiveness” of power. Seeing how power works, coming to know it through being subjected to it and opting *in* to its binding force: all of this is part of the process of becoming the master of one's own subjugation (527).

In other words, journalists can end up doing more than merely complying with PR. Journalists can end up becoming PR. In interiorizing the “inspecting gaze” of the PR officer, journalists “thus exercise this surveillance over, and against, themselves” (Foucault 1980, 155). And thus, too, PR's power circuit comes full circle: moving its way through the journalistic discourse, infiltrating journalism's apparatus and technology, making sure the surveillance *dispositif* does its work on journalists and journalism, and watching the process of subjugation.

A Fertile Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework developed here provides a revised picture of the relationship between PR and journalism. Something that was quite unexpected and impossible to foresee came up. Journalism, initially understood as a practice largely defined by its ongoing struggle not to become confused with PR, was suddenly in the throes of becoming PR – and mainly because of this very drive towards self-definition. Moreover, journalism ethics – seen from a textual vantage point as a key signifier of journalism’s integrity and distinctiveness as a profession – in fact turned out to be an ally of PR. Peering deep into the inner workings of a surveillance *dispositif* taught us that much.

New questions and new ways of asking questions also arise from the Foucauldian theoretical framework. Among these: When, as a power effect operating within the journalistic discourse, does PR become too effective? For example, would it not be in PR’s best interests to occasionally refrain from “putting in order the possible outcome” so as to ensure a more lasting and sustainable outcome for journalism and, by extension, for itself? After all, the primary reason the PR industry is keen to ingratiate itself with the journalistic discourse is because, “first, publication in the media has a higher level of credibility than other communication channels do. Second, compared to advertising, media publicity is a cost-effective method” (Larsson 2009, 34). So is there a moment when the PR industry should consciously step back and stop exercising its power over journalism?

For journalists, too, important questions emerge when the profession is squeezed through the wringer of a Foucauldian theoretical framework. For example: What kind of manoeuvring is available to journalists within the journalistic discourse? Is this a different space for news reporters? public affairs reporters? investigative journalists? And how does it vary from beat to beat – if you’re covering, say, the cultural sector? the health sector? education? Under what circumstances might a reporter choose not to be in a relationship with PR officers and PR material? Should journalists systematically speak out about their relationship with PR, exposing it for what they believe it to be? How can journalists best exercise their own power? How can they be more than mere gatekeepers? What suffers because journalism is infiltrated by the PR industry? And at what point do PR’s “squatting rights” render journalism a valueless entity?

As for journalism educators, it is in their interest to integrate this line of questioning into their courses – when dissecting the journalistic process, for example; when addressing the journalist’s need to scrupulously check his or her facts or systematically cross-examine what a source is saying; or when talking about the power relationship that exists between journalists and their sources. Journalism educators should also generate and encourage classroom discussions that look into the similarities and differences between professional communicators and journalists and that get to the bottom of just whom journalism is serving these days, and to what ends. Other group reflections should address whether the traditional idea of the journalist as the “watchdog of democracy” is still relevant in today’s journalistic climate, and in

what ways is it a lot less feasible than it used to be. In addition, journalism educators should be initiating and animating creative thinking sessions that provide students with opportunities to develop concrete tools and techniques that they can use to challenge and/or sidestep the official discourses circulating out there: more independent research, developing expertise in one or two beats, diversifying and enlarging the circle of sources, practising ethnographic journalism, and so on. Through all of this, journalism educators have to walk a fine line: ensuring, on the one hand, that the contributions made by professional communicators to the realm of journalism are recognized, and guaranteeing, on the other, that the distinction between the two professions is both clarified and maintained.

These are crucial questions for journalism, for PR, and for the public in general. As Cottle (2003) says, “who secures media access and why and how, inevitably raises fundamental questions about the nature of media participation, processes and forms of mediated citizenship, issues of media performance and the play of power enacted between the news media and their sources” (3). It is towards that “mediated citizen” that some might turn the Foucauldian lens next.

Conclusion

There is no mention of the words “journalism” or “journalist” in the SQPRP’s Code of Ethics; nor are either of these words mentioned in the CPRS’s Code of Ethics. The same is true of these two association’s mission statements. The profession with which the PR industry is most constantly in contact – most intertwined with and most dependent upon -- Maisonneuve, Tremblay and Lafrance (2004) state that 77% of PR professionals work daily with journalists – does not make an appearance in its core texts.

In a world where everything seems to have been said about the relationship between PR and journalism, yet where such silences still exist, what has been proposed in this paper is a fresh lens through which to view it, a robust set of images and concepts with which to better understand it, and a solid theoretical framework in which to work with it. The step-by-step detailing of how this theoretical framework can be mobilized to shed light on relationships built around power provides media scholars, practitioners, and educators with an essential map as they set off on their own Foucauldian research journey.

Foucault (1982) insists that power exists “only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures” (788). This is what has been rendered tangible in this paper: the disparate field of possibilities where PR power can be put into action upon the permanent structures of journalism.

NOTES

¹ My translation of Article 2: « Les journalistes basent leur travail sur des valeurs fondamentales telles que l'esprit critique qui leur impose de douter méthodiquement de tout.»; and 3: « Les journalistes ont l'obligation de s'assurer de la véracité des faits qu'ils rapportent au terme d'un rigoureux travail de collecte et de vérification des informations. »

² My translation of: « Les journalistes ne s'engagent pas auprès de leurs sources à diffuser l'information que celles-ci désirent [...] Les journalistes jugent de la pertinence de diffuser une information selon son mérite, son intérêt public et en tenant compte des autres informations disponibles. »

³ These figures are clearly not representative of the total number of journalists (4,000) and PR professionals (13,000) said to be working in Quebec in 2011 (Emploi Québec 2011).

⁴ My translation, taken from: « Dans ce Guide le terme 'journaliste' réfère à toute personne qui exerce une fonction de journaliste pour le compte d'une entreprise de presse. Exerce une fonction de journaliste la personne qui exécute [...] une ou plusieurs des tâches suivantes: recherche de l'information, reportage, interview; rédaction [...] affectation, pupitre, direction des services d'information.»

⁵ My translation of: « Le rôle essentiel des journalistes est de rapporter fidèlement, d'analyser et de commenter le cas échéant les faits qui permettent à leurs concitoyens de mieux connaître et de mieux comprendre le monde dans lequel ils vivent. »

⁶ SQPRP documentation does not state when their Code of Ethics was written. The committee in charge of putting it together was created in 2001.

⁷ My translation, taken from: « Les professionnels en relations publiques sont les experts en gestion des relations des organisations avec leur environnement. Ils contribuent à l'atteinte des objectifs de leur organisation par la qualité de leurs analyses et par la pertinence et l'efficacité des stratégies et des moyens de communication qu'ils proposent. »

⁸ My translation of « Les membres doivent exercer leur profession conformément à l'intérêt public. »

⁹ My translation of: « Au Québec, il n'existe pas de regroupement obligatoire des journalistes au sein d'un ordre professionnel. Ni le titre de journaliste, ni l'acte journalistique ne sont réservés à un groupe particulier de personnes. Le milieu journalistique est un milieu ouvert et les journalistes le veulent ainsi. »

¹⁰ My translation of: « Toute infraction au Code sera traitée soit au palier national, soit au palier de la Société membre, selon ce qu'en décidera le Comité national de déontologie. »

¹¹ My translation of: « Les journalistes doivent s'abstenir d'effectuer, en dehors du journalisme, des tâches reliées aux communications: relations publiques, publicité, promotion, cours donnés sur la façon de se comporter devant les médias. »

¹² My translation of: « L'information et la publicité doivent être séparées. Les journalistes n'écrivent pas de publiereportages. S'ils sont tenus de le faire, ils ne les signent jamais. »

¹³ "Knowledge," here, can be understood as each affirmation (implicit or explicit) of a discourse; "truth" is all the knowledge that constitutes a discourse.

¹⁴ Power and truth/knowledge are thus intertwined and have a circular effect on each other. For the rest of the paper, I twin these two concepts as Foucault does – as power/knowledge.

¹⁵ My translation, taken from: « Ces tâches servent des intérêts particuliers et visent à transmettre un message partisan au public. Les journalistes ne peuvent pas communiquer un jour des informations partisans et le lendemain

des informations impartiales, sans susciter la confusion dans le public et jeter un doute constant sur leur crédibilité et leur intégrité. »

¹⁶ The word “possible” is important here: as we have seen, gatekeeping, which is also part of the technology of journalism, provides journalists with a strong counter-power when it comes to limiting the influence of the PR industry on journalistic discourse.

¹⁷ Foucault (1980, 148) says that Jeremy Bentham, the late-eighteenth-century English philosopher and social theorist who designed the panopticon, “invented a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance.”

¹⁸ The surveillance *dispositif* at work here is rendered all the more effective because of the disproportionate ratio of PR officers to journalists. Moreover, since the 1980s PR officers have had access to highly efficient communication technologies. See Cottle 2003; Lavigne 2005; Franklin, Lewis, and Williams 2010. As Stauber and Rampton (1995, 186) observed nearly two decades ago, “in theory, journalism is a ‘watchdog’ profession, which serves the public by finding and reporting on abuses of power. In practice, reporters live under closer scrutiny than the people they are supposed to be monitoring.”

REFERENCES

- Andersen, Niels Akerstrom. 2003. *Discursive Analysis Strategies*. Bristol: Polity Press.
- Boulay, Sophie, and Chantal Francoeur. 2014. “Donner priorité aux données: adopter l’induction au cours d’une recherche sur les relations publiques et le journalisme.” *Approches Inductives* 1, no. 1: 38–69.
- . 2013. “Les liens entre journalisme et relations publiques.” *Research Report*, GRICIS.
<http://www.gricis.uqam.ca/recherches>
- Canadian Society of Public Relations (CSPR-SCRIP). 2001. *Manuel d’agrément des relations publiques*. <http://scrp.ca/accreditation>
- Chomsky, Noam, and Edward S. Herman. 1988. *Manufacturing Consent*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Charron, Jean. 1994. *La production de l’actualité*. Montréal: Boréal.
- Cottle, Simon. 2003. *News, Public Relations, and Power: Mapping the Field*. London: Sage.
- Dagenais, Bernard. 2011. *Est-ce qu’un relationniste peut faire carrière sans mentir?* SQPRP.
<http://www.sqprp.ca/contenus/rp-com>
- Davies, Nick. 2008. *Flat Earth News*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Davis, Aeron. 2002. *Public Relations Democracy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Durif, Fabien, and Nancy Corriveau. 2012. “Tableau de bord de la communication responsable.” *Observatoire de la communication responsable*. <http://consommationresponsable.ca>
- Emploi Québec. 2012. *Personnes en emploi en 2012*. Gouvernement du Québec.
<http://imt.emploiuebec.net>

- Erjavec, Karmen. 2005. "Hybrid Public Relations News Discourse." *European Journal of Communication* 20: 155–79.
- Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ). 1996. *Code de déontologie*.
<http://www.fpjq.org>
- Foucault, Michel. 2004. *Philosophie: Anthologie*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1993. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4: 777–95.
- . 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. New York: Random House.
- Francoeur, Chantal. 2015. "Les répertoires interprétatifs des journalistes discutant de leurs liens avec les relations publiques." *Communication et Organisation* 46: 225–48.
- . 2012. *La transformation du service de l'information de Radio-Canada*. Québec: Presses de l'université du Québec.
- Franklin, Bob, Justin Lewis, and Andrew Williams. 2010. "Journalism, News Sources, and Public Relations." In *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism*. Edited by S. Allan. 202–12. London: Routledge.
- Grunig, James E., and Todd Hunt. 1984. *Managing Public Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Heath, Robert L. 2000. "A Rhetorical Perspective on the Values of Public Relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 12, no. 1: 69–91.
- Larsson, Larsåke. 2009. "PR and the Media: A Collaborative Relationship?" *Nordicom Review* 30: 141–47.
- Lavigne, Alain. 2005. "Journalisme, relations publiques et publicité." *Les cahiers du journalisme* 10: 182–97.
- Lewis, Justin, Andrew Williams, and Bob Franklin. 2008. "A Compromised Fourth Estate?" *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 1: 1–20.
- Maisonneuve, Danielle. 2010. *Les relations publiques dans une société en mouvance*. Québec: Presses de l'université du Québec.
- Maisonneuve, Danielle, Solange Tremblay and André Lafrance. 2004. [*Research Findings - The State of Public Relations in Québec - Highlights*](#). Chaire en relations publiques, UQAM
- Manning, Paul. 2008. "The Press Association and News Agency Sources." In *Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analysing Print Journalism*. Edited by B. Franklin. 247–55. London: Routledge.
- McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2: 176–92.

- Miller, David, and William Dinan. 2007. "Public Relations and the Subversion of Democracy." In *Thinker, Faker, Spinner, Spy*. Edited by D. Miller and W. Dinan. 11-20. London: Pluto Press.
- Motion, Judy, and Shirley Leitch. 2009. "On Foucault: A Toolbox for Public Relations." In *Public Relations and Social Theory*. Edited by O. Ihlen, B. van Ruler, and M. Fredriksson. 83–102. London: Routledge.
- Pew Research Center. 2010. *How News Happen: A Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City*. http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/how_news_happens
- Quebec Society of Public Relations Professionals (SQPRP). 2014. *Code de déontologie*. <http://www.sqprp.ca/La-societe/sqprp-en-bref.aspx>
- Rose, Gillian. 2007. *Visual Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Shoemaker, Pamela. 1991. *Communication concepts 3: Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage.
- Sissons, Helen. 2012. "Journalism and Public Relations: A Tale of Two Discourses." *Discourse & Communication* 3, no.6: 273-294.
- Stauber, John, and Sheldon Rampton. 1995. *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies, and the Public Relations Industry*. Monroe: Common Courage Press.
- Sullivan, John. 2011. *PR Industry Fills Vacuum Left by Shrinking Newsrooms*. ProPublica, 2 May. <http://www.propublica.org/article/pr-industry-fills-vacuum-left-by-shrinking-newsrooms>
- Tremblay, Gaetan., Michel Saint-Laurent, Armande Saint-Jean, and Enrico Carontini. 1988. *La presse francophone québécoise et le discours de promotion*. Montréal: FPIQ.