

ETHICS IN OLD AND NEW JOURNALISM STRUCTURES

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ABSTRACT

The academic debate on the relevance of institutional structures for conducting individual choices or the relative independence of these choices is old and fruitful. If for Marx men are condemned to repeat history, for other analysts the preferences that guide choices are formed exogenously with relation to the institutional structure. In the most radical version of this argument, previous choices are of no importance in determining forthcoming decisions. The new generations are not bound by the rights and wrongs of the previous generations. This essay does not fully adhere to either of these analytical lines. It is about the relation between old and new structures in the journalistic field and their possible effects on the ethical choices of journalistic agents. Following Hay (2002, p. 94-95), we define "structure" as the institutional context in which social, political and economical events occur and acquire meaning for the actors. Agency refers to individual conduct, the ability or capacity of an individual to consciously act to accomplish his intentions. It implies free will, choice and autonomy. It indicates that the agent could have made other choices. And also that the choice made is subject to the individual's deliberate conscience. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is quite useful for analyzing the relation between structure and agency. We will go back to it after analyzing, in the first section of this essay, the relation between new and old structures in the journalistic field. After a section on journalistic *habitus*, the essay will explain how the interaction between old and new structures affects ethics in journalism.

Key-words: ethics, journalism; structures

THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD'S "OLD" STRUCTURE

The journalistic field is a social space, a space of relations that define social positions and are endowed with a certain specificity that structures and is structured by a symbolic frontier. This frontier establishes what is "inside" and "outside". It defines what can be properly considered journalistic. As in every field, the journalistic field is structured in positions which are defined and redefined by its agents. The acceptance of these definitions is the condition for the game's functioning related to

this specific space. As in every game, the rules must not be definitively imposed by an autocrat; they must be subject to constant struggle and redefinition

In the journalistic field, the positions occupied by its agents are defined with relation to criteria that structure the space, thus allowing a player to exist in relation to something. To investigate constitutive relations in a field such as the journalistic one requires more than simply describing the occupied positions and strategies of conserving or subverting the current *status quo*. It requires the analysis of the extent to which these structuring axes were defined and redefined throughout the field's specific history.

In its early days, newspapers only published news and articles on politics. The French Revolution, including the period that preceded it, is the clearest example. Dozens, if not hundreds, of pamphlets circulated in Paris, published by small factions that passionately advocated ideas arising from every ideological position. Honoré de Balzac portrayed this fascinating period in his "Lost Illusions".

In his analysis of the different kinds of journalism practiced down through the centuries, Marcondes Filho (2000, p. 11) considers this period as the "first journalism". From 1789 to the first half of the nineteenth century, journalism was "illuminist", in the sense that it sought to take away from the universities and the church their monopoly of knowledge. "It was the *Time* of political-literary journalism, in which the printed pages served as a loudspeaker that disseminated political programs, political platforms and all related ideas. Economic reasoning came in second. The newspapers were written with pedagogic purposes, including political training. This period was also characterized by a partisan press. The journalists were politicians and the newspapers were their voice. Each politician reasonably well-known created his club, which in turn created a newspaper, wrote Otto Groth. "In Paris, only between February and May of 1789, 450 clubs and more than 200 newspapers were created" (Marcondes Filho, 2000, p. 12)

The second period of journalism was characterized by an inversion of values: the exchange value of the newspaper – the selling of publicity space to ensure the economic sustainability and survival – became priority. This change affected the political function of the newspaper.

Marcondes Filho's reminder about the insertion of the news world inside the capitalist system leads us to an observation by Bourdieu (1997, p. 31): "The liberal belief states that monopoly homogenizes while competition diversifies. I evidently have nothing against competition, but

merely observe that, when it occurs among journalists or newspapers that are subject to the same restrictions, the same opinion polls, the same advertisers, it homogenizes. Compare the covers of French papers every 15 days: the headlines are more or less the same. The same happens with television and radio owned by the broadcasting companies where only the order of the information changes”.

The institution of journalistic space requires the imposition of a frontier between those that are ready to get into the game of competitive production of news and those that, while they participate in this production, are excluded from it. This exclusion is due not only to official barriers, but also to the incapability to convert a wide range of references, conceptual and practical such as a particular language.

The constitution of a purely journalistic competition, with its own technical domain and knowledge apart from simple recommendations made by common sense, disqualifies other criteria for measuring the value of apprehension of the real world, made by other social universes. In this way, journalistic assignments, as a daily attribution of a certain purely journalistic value to the event, are constituted by means of an academic and professional trajectory that cannot be confused with other social representations.

The distance between the initiated and non-initiated views of a source of news and of a professional journalist is not accidental. It institutes a relation of power that merges two different supposed systems, two world views. This distance becomes visible, for example, in the familiar discrepancy involving TV technology between the mediator of a public debate, a professional journalist, and the participants.

It is this relatively autonomous body of professionals that we call “journalistic field”. Analyzing its historical constitution, Bourdieu (1994, p. 4) observes that “the journalistic field is constituted as such in the XIX century, around the opposition between journals that offered everything as ‘nouvelle’ and ‘à sensation’ and the newspapers that proposed analysis and ‘comments’, which strived to make a distinction in relation to the former type by vehemently affirming the values of objectivity”.

The definition of field proposed by Bourdieu as a space structured by positions in which agents are competing for specific trophies following equally specific rules demands some preliminary observations. The first is that it is a theory of social fields that does not intend to encapsulate all social life, that is, not everything that may be considered a social activity is carried out inside fields.

It is important to bear in mind that the field theory concentrates

much energy on clarifying the great scenes where struggles for power take place, but overlooks the comprehension of those that prepare the scenes, install the sets or fabricate the elements, sweep the corridors, photocopy documents, type letters, etc.

Likewise, the set of activities in which we include ourselves only temporarily (playing and watching soccer, dating and occasional discussion with friends at a bar or in the street, for example) are not inscribed in specific social fields, because they are not systematically organized or structured in spaces and positions of power between different agents occupying those positions. Field theory shows little interest for life outside professional fields.

In contrast to what more general formulas may lead one to believe, not every individual, practice, institution, situation and interaction is connected to a field. In fact, the fields correspond to: 1) the domains of professional (and/or public) activities that limit the access of the general population; and more precisely, 2) to the professional (and/or public) activities that comprise a minimum (or even maximum) of prestige (symbolic capital) and can organize in competitive spaces of struggle for the conquest of this specific prestige (in relation to professions or activities that are not particularly engaged in struggles inside these fields).

For Bourdieu, every social field produces in its members a certain kind of *illusio*. It is an illusion that the struggles, the rules that define the prizes typical of each field are the result of subjective deliberation and not defined in the intersubjectivities of the social relations and apprehended socially. It is necessary to admit, however, that other social universes that are not framed in the notion of field also count, in order to exist, on non-assumed conventions.

It does not matter whether we consider the political field (the struggles among parties, professional politicians), the journalistic field (struggles among newspapers, journalists), the field of publishing (struggles among publishing houses), the literary field (struggles among writers), the theatrical field (struggles among playwrights, producers, theaters), the philosophical field (struggles between philosophers); we always take notice that we are facing actors performing prestigious professional activities just by limiting ourselves to observing these actors exclusively in their professional activities, ignoring other social, public or private, long-term or short-term relations.

It is revealing, considering the exclusions of this “*Time outside the field*” and the “actors outside the field”, that this sociology is not

interested only in the situation of those that were practically “born inside the field” or in those who were “born to the game” (for instance, the son of an actor that becomes an actor himself), but also generalizes, perhaps too much, this situational model: “The *illusio* is a kind of knowledge based on the fact of being born inside the game, of belonging to the game by birth: saying that I know the game this way means that I have it under my skin, that it plays in me, even without me” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 44). Or even: “Why is it so important to think about the game as a place in which we were born and not just as an arbitrarily instituted game?” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 49).

We are invested with this *illusio*, typical of a social universe, without such a universe summoning up the set of characteristics that permits one to define it as a field. The family, for instance, although it is not and can never be a social field, is structured around a set of implicit normative values that guarantee its reproduction and the standing of some individual lost so that the family life may endure.

This relativity of the reach of field theory is important for the analysis of the journalistic field. A simple examination of the structure of a newspaper, in relation to the newsroom where the newspaper is produced – and that configures what Bourdieu calls the journalistic field – is revealing of how many people participate in the production and advertisement of the newspaper and are of no concern to the field, are outside the theory.

Another important caveat regarding field theory is that belonging to a field does not guarantee homogeneous engagement. It is possible to live in a universe without being completely possessed by that universe, by its specific *illusio*. That means that belonging to a universe does not guarantee equivalent engagement in the competition for the trophies, nor the adoption of strategies for conquest of its specific capital. For example, a person may train at a tennis club once a week to unwind, without belonging to any ranking and without being concerned about the goals of the struggles among the professionals. That way, the social agent can also be a “consumer” of tennis matches without practicing the sport. He may be throwing himself at the game without having all of the coercion typical of the competitive struggle of this game weighing upon him, because he occupies himself with the preparation of Wimbledon’s grass or is part of the cleaning crew in Roland Garros’ locker rooms. In these three cases, the forces that act so powerfully upon the tennis player (professional, actor in the spectacles that we may watch) are not acting upon him.

The same happens in the journalistic field. The existence of a relatively autonomous space for struggle, with defined rules, specific trophies and unique strategies is indisputable. But belonging to this universe does not give the same level of engagement to its multiple types of agents. The specificity of the journalistic activity may vary, due to a progressive segmentation, the nature and the intensity developed in the field.

From the editors and writers involved in the daily production of news, to the regular columnists, regular articulists, sporadic articulists, free-lancers, consultants, privileged sources, etc., the level of engagement in the field tends to decrease. Almost always, this decrease is directly related to other means of livelihood, that is, the sporadic participation in other social universes.

A frontier is established between journalists, professionals that live to and for journalism, and participants in the journalistic field who, although they enjoy the visibility of the media in the contemporary public space, “play a different game”, obey other rules and are interested in other trophies. In this way, academics, artists, physicians, psychiatrists do not hesitate to use their occasional participation in the journalistic field as a strategy aimed at social distinction and legitimacy in their own original fields.

Field theory is consequently a way of responding to a series of scientific problems, but also it may constitute an obstacle to knowledge of the social world because it ignores many passages made by agents between fields where they are producers to fields where they are mere spectators-consumers or even to the multiple social positions that evade any field logic.

A field will be more autonomous when its participants engage exclusively in it, fight exclusively for its trophies, incorporate its *illusio*. Aiming to understand the influence of the political field on the journalistic field, Darras (2005) shows that televised political debates in France and in the U.S. serve as political institutions in which the selection of candidates and themes is much more dictated by the logic of the political field than by that of the journalistic one. In the same way, Cook (1998) says that “news-values” connected to the economic pressures used by journalists have driven politicians more and more to creating and adapting public policies so that they win the attention of the media.

Agency and *habitus* in journalism

Bourdieu comments that “the journalistic field is very autonomous, but this relative autonomy, weak as it may be, means that nobody will

understand what happens in the journalistic field just by looking at the world surrounding it. To understand journalism it is not enough to know who finances the media, who are the advertisers, etc. Part of what is produced in the journalistic field can only be understood if the researcher understands how the field acts as a microcosm and seeks to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another” (Bourdieu, 2005: 33). That is what we will do in this section, proposing the existence of a properly journalistic *habitus* in order to understand how the actors’ agency in the journalistic field affects its choices and ethical content.

There are internal structures in the journalistic field, a mechanism of self-preservation found in the constant exercise of a double evaluation of the actions of the press. Journalism is prodigal in self-criticism and in pointing to procedures of self-correction as it protects itself from external criticism (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 109). This self-critical activity guarantees the impression of autonomy and independence, drawing the debate away from the field’s structures that, most of the time, influence the real practices.

Analyzing the dominant discourse and the posture of undergraduate journalism students with regard to what they were told, we have drawn up a vague hypothesis of a progressive incorporation of the critics of the field as a tacit, expressive condition for participating in this universe. The students’ amazement becomes tacit approval, and even an enthusiastic one, of the critics. Many times the admiration for the discourse was transferred rapidly to the jubilation of its formulator. In other words, the determinant structures of practical actions included a critical ontological dimension as a premise for the existence of the field.

The examination of journalism criticism reveals a surprising structural unity of chosen arguments, of how attacks are coordinated and of expected and condemned procedures. This reveals a link between free criticism and the specific conditions for acting in the journalistic field. In other words, the self-criticism of journalists is presented as part of the field’s structure – in this case, a mechanism for legitimizing the practical procedures by criticizing them.

The condition for action in a field is manifested in the apparent nonexistence of previous references. Diffused through the field itself to ensure its existence, winning and maintaining the public’s confidence, the profession’s criticism by its main representatives is a guarantee of independence. The practical procedure is presented as an abstract entity, depending only on the agent’s subjectivity.

Criticizing the profession is a procedure which is adopted the more individuals are acquainted with the specific conditions of journalistic practice. First semester graduate students of journalism with a license to practice journalism show a kind of “fascination” with the profession, due to their enduring connection to social universes in which the prestige of the “illustrated man”, following a long and complicated tradition (Cohn, 1973), is still high.

When the students start to familiarize themselves with journalistic procedures starting from the first years of college, investigating a piece, text editing, interviews etc, the process is reversed. The learning process of journalism is accompanied by the practice of criticism, respecting what is conventionally understood as “good journalism.”

Presenting the current norm as an absolute one removes the historical, therefore material, dimension of its production, privileging the imposition of extemporal rules of practice, and therefore positioning it beyond any criticism. The historical modifications of the correct professional practices show the arbitrary elements present in the conception of what was, at each moment, the best possible professional performance. The current rules, therefore, must be historically and socially located as specific constructions at a specific moment. Each moment's history becomes the rule when defining new rules for the game in opposition to the old ones, and its constant incorporation by the field's participants.

There is an obvious paradox between critical interdependence of the journalist in relation to his own activity and, at the same time, his acquiescence to the same mechanisms he criticizes. This legitimizing effect is always related to the journalistic field's discourse presented by the dominant actors. There is more at stake than the diffusion and adoption of a journalistic model. Each trend seeks to achieve dominance in the field, dismissing the competition's very reason for existence, arguing that the latter's professional capital is inferior, fallible and useless.

Establishing everyday practices is a complex phenomenon, influenced by several different regulated action matrixes that produce a conjunction of factors that evade both the reduction of behavior to the subject's volition as well as his submission to a predetermined space-Time context. The practices are not established according to objective and measurable criteria that can be articulated by the individual. On the contrary, most of the actions present themselves to the individual as an obvious consequence of a previous action, ignoring the existing will related to a particular choice. This phenomenon results from an interaction between the space occupied by the individual in a specific

field and individual *habitus*.

Pierre Bourdieu's basic principle is that knowledge objects are constructed, not given. However, the world is not based solely on subjective representation – or volition – constructed on principles of will. The structures that drive the actions of the individual are first and foremost objective, preexistent and fundamental to the posterior comprehension of the world by the individual.

The principle of this construction is a system of structured and structuring arrangements that constitute practice and are always oriented by its practical sense. Such arrangements are incorporated by the agent during the latter's social trajectory, particularly in the family and in educational institutions. This system of durable arrangements, applicable to any situation, a "structured structure", predisposed to operate as a "structuring structure", as a principle that generates practices and representations, is the *habitus*. The *habitus*, explains Bourdieu (1980, p. 88), may be compared to a maestro that commands different parts of the subjects' actions in the several fields in which he is inserted.

The *habitus*, therefore, is the "generating and regulating" principle of everyday practices, defining, in its dual performance within a context, apparently spontaneous actions of the subject. A social practice is produced by the relation between the objective structure that defines the social conditions of the production of the *habitus* and the conditions in which it may operate - the context in which it is inserted.

The existence of a particular *habitus* considers the tacit acceptance of rules of conduct in the field, incorporated in the concurring and collaborative agent's practices. However, there is a depersonalization of this situation, referring the journalism acolyte to the hypothetical existence of a rule independent of the subject – a phenomenon, as pointed out by Lukács, of reification. "It is journalism that converts the journalist into a master of journalism itself. The origin of journalism is the journalist. The origin of the journalist is journalism". (Costa, 1991, p. 241).

The professional *habitus* is a common matrix of the practices of all the agents that live and have lived in the same social conditions of professional existence. Thanks to these common arrangements, due to common world perceptions, socially forged and interiorized throughout trajectories in the same universe, each professional, obeying his own personal preferences, agrees, without knowing or realizing, that many others are driven to act in analogous conditions.

Two interviews demonstrate the pertinence of the expected ethical

conduct of the journalist: on one hand, Heródoto Barbeiro (interviewed on 04/05/2001): “The fundamental question is the good faith that every journalist must have. Working in order to seek the actual truth is the key to a good communication professional”. In the same sense, the principle postulated by Bernardo Ajzenberg (interviewed on 08/06/2001): “Either the person is ethical or not. That goes for any profession or trade”.

Bourdieu uses the metaphor of an “invisible maestro” to clarify the aforementioned combination. That is because when it is perceived as such, it is taken for granted, naturalized. In this way, it is possible to simplify the phenomenon. It is not necessary to identify all the socializing processes that produce it¹.

This joint action brought about or not by previous pré-reflexive actions, is the raw material of the professional *eidōs*. The aforementioned homogenizing effects cannot hide the singularity of each field trajectory. Behavioral units observed are noted as similar in the singularity that is the spectacle perceived by each observer. In this way a total of non-occurring events – the professional conducts of any universe – overlap another sequence, constituted by scenes in part randomly imposed and in part sought for and found by the soon-to-be-socialized observer.

It is this ultimate sequencing that exists for the observer and that therefore, produces socializing effects on him. It is in this unique spectacle that the journalistic *eidōs* converts into subjective dispositions to act, in the journalistic *habitus*.

As we have observed, all *habitus* is a kind of practical knowledge, that is, knowledge aimed at acting, *praxis* knowledge. In this sense, given a certain situation, this *praxis* may be preceded by calculation made by a reflexive consciousness based on the presumed effects and goals to be achieved. Not always, however, is this calculation necessary. The repeated observation of situations perceived as analogous ones may produce in the social agent a kind of spontaneous unconscious reaction. So practical knowledge is not always consciously apprehended and applied².

Even the most vicious critics of journalism concentrate their analysis on the conscious options reflected in news production. To ignore the practical unconscious means to represent the journalistic *praxis* only as a rational utility-maximizing activity, thus ignoring the origin of important ethical questions. The next section is about these questions in relation to new journalistic field structures, such as blogs and twitter.

Ethics and new structures in the journalistic field

If online journalism, whose material conditions of production are extremely accessible and pulverized, has allowed news to be spread in real time, on a non-stop basis of reception, how do producers of this type of journalism place themselves in relation to the journalistic field?

During the electoral campaign of 2006 in Brazil, we researched the production of five of the most prestigious journalistic blogs in the country. More than an analysis of the journalistic product they offered, we interviewed their producers. We promised not to identify their interests, trophies, strategies, positions, ethical rules etc. Furthermore, we promised not to reveal how they believed they were situated within the social universe responsible for journalistic constitution.

When it comes to the journalistic field, one of the main objects of struggle is, as we have previously explained, the very definition of what is legitimate journalism, of what must be understood as a good journalistic report, a good article, etc. The agents investigated by us are part of this struggle. They manifest themselves by the redefinition of legitimate journalistic production for which they take more credit: "Nowadays, the best journalism is in the blogs, for it is the place to do really independent journalism". "It is we who perform the journalism idealized by the pioneers". "If there is still any idealism in our job, it can only be here".

Secondly, there has to be people wanting to play this game. As we have seen, the journalistic field hides its competitive nature for the sake of priesthood or of its mission to inform. For a blogger, being anonymous not only shows compromise with this social role, but also reveals the personal interest of his or her behavior. "More than for any other media vehicle, information is our big 'thing'. It is information for its own sake". In this game, interests for the disputed trophies are disguised as an "uninterested" representation of the interests of their audiences. "I always say that my blog is there to inform, above all else".

There is only a journalistic field when the rules of the game – although they are always undergoing redefinition – are known and recognized by its agents. In this context, one finds that dominated agents propose strategies of subversion and dominant agents support strategies of conservation. A blogger presents him or herself as a journalist. He or she claims to play the journalistic game, occupying a position in the field that has not always existed. He or she considers him or herself an agent that has just arrived and is not always welcome, imposing his or her presence "bit by bit", for the sake of "a revisited journalism".

In this space of social relations that is devoted to the production of

news, there is a set of agents that say they live from and for journalism and that implicitly recognize the rules and the value of the specific trophies in dispute. The bloggers interviewed by us denounce in each sentence the obviousness of the value of trophies that are typically journalistic: “we are pursuing the journalistic beat. Twenty four hours a day. If it were not so, I do not know what we would be doing here. We are aware that for one to hit the top, one needs to risk everything. But it is worth it. It has to be worth it. If you hesitate, you are finished”.

Thirdly, we stress the organic trend to avoid and make difficult the action of any agent who is outside the field and who wishes to subvert its rules to join it, its definitions, and its access to trophies. This allows the field to be not only a space of conflict or social struggle, to continue with the jargon dear to Bourdieu. It can be converted into a space of complicity, in which the *esprit de corps* will avoid any revolution that endangers the survival of the space itself.

Institution of the journalistic space demands the imposition of a boundary between those who are prepared to join the game of competitive production of news and those who find themselves excluded from it. More than the limits imposed by official barriers such as a diploma, this exclusion is due to the inability to convert to a whole set of conceptual and practical references, such as the linguistic posture, which presupposes entrance into this social space.

The constitution of journalistic competence, which is a technical domain of knowledge far from simple recommendations originating in common sense, disqualifies other criteria of evaluation of the world, specific to other social universes. The daily attribution of a certain value that is typically journalistic does not fit in with other social representations. “The subjects that I discuss in my blog are those that have an obvious value for society”.

The distance between the non-initiated vision of a source and that of a professional journalist is nowhere near accidental. It forms a relation of power that involves two different ways of seeing the world. This distance becomes visible, for instance, in the discrepant familiarity with television technology among the political debate mediator, the information professional and the disputing candidates.

As we have emphasized, belonging to the journalistic field does not presuppose the same level of engagement among its several types of agents. The online journalistic agent repeatedly reiterates this aspect: “We are the ones committed all the time. It is not the people above³ the ones who work 24 hours a day”. “Making a newspaper allows a life full of

other activities that a blog does not". "If anyone knows what it is to be a journalist, it is the person who works with me. In many other places one has already lost the notion of what journalism means".

The online political journalism agents interviewed by us presented themselves as the ones who legitimately represented a profession that had deteriorated. They mix arguments related to technological performance, but when they note a relative subverting inability, they allude to the origins of the profession, to what "journalism never should have stopped being", "to the ideals that we must not let die", "to the determination of those who gave their lives for the profession". Thus, the more the participants of a field engage themselves exclusively in it, struggling exclusively for the trophies specific to it, incorporating the *illusio* typical of it, the more autonomous the field will be.

We conclude by stating that a blogger who is a political journalist is aware that he or she is dominated, knows he or she is subverted, and demands autonomy, but paradoxically alludes to the founding fathers, to the principles of the profession, to what is pure, to a discourse which is commonly enunciated by those who are conservative, i.e., by those who dominate the social space of struggle and enunciation.

Twitter and ethics in journalism

New potential spaces of subversion in the journalistic field are frequently created. The most successful recent one is Twitter.com, a tool that accepts updates of up to 140 characters –little more than a headline of a traditional newspaper. Established journalists from the print media adhered to this new structure, using it both for personal⁴ conversations as well as for advertising their work.

There is a perverse side of twitter for journalistic practice. It is the use of this structure by the sources that feed rumor, gossip and real news of traditional print journalism. Journalists who cover sports events are especially concerned. In mid-2009, Wanderley Luxemburgo, Palmeiras soccer team's coach, announced his firing from the team through his blog and twitter profile. Luiz Gonzaga Belluzzo, president of the club, announced afterwards that the negotiations with Muricy Ramalho, former São Paulo soccer team coach, to replace Luxemburgo had failed. Eleven days later, Belluzzo wrote: "Supporters of Palmeiras: The new coach of Palmeiras Soccer Club is Muricy Ramalho. Read more in our official web site. Best regards."

Several journalists, for obvious reasons, condemn the use of twitter to divulge information. For Fernão Ketelhuth (our interviewee

of 12/10/2009), a journalist who covers the Palmeiras club for the newspaper “*Diário de S. Paulo*”, newspapers have been damaged by the case of the Palmeiras coach. “Luxemburgo announced his decision at 1:00 p.m. on a Saturday. All the newspapers were already in the press. There was a major rush to try to change the news, which we were not able to do. Twitter evidently was faster than our printed newspaper. When Belluzzo promised to announce the new coach through twitter, we joked that we would need a “twitter intern” to alert the announcement. My concern is that twitter would encourage my sources to simply announce their decisions through twitter and blog and not speak to the press. For now, at least, that has not happened much. Today, twitter facilitates the exchange of information and ideas between journalists themselves”.

It is not so simple to imagine conflict in the disclosure of news through twitter. However, at least two newspapers from the “old journalistic structure” – Brazil’s “*Folha de S. Paulo*” and the United States’ “Washington Post” – established rules to be followed by their journalists with twitter profiles.

At the “*Folha de S. Paulo*”, a memo signed by the executive editor of the newspaper, Eleonora de Lucena, states: “The professionals that have blogs or are participants in social networks and/or twitter must remember that: a) they represent *Folha* in these information spaces; therefore, they must act always following the principles of the editorial project, avoid taking sides or partisan positions on issues; b) they must not publish on Twitter the contents of columns and exclusive news. These are reserved only for the readers of *Folha* and subscribers of UOL.com.br. Eventually blogs may have a quick reference to the published text, with a link to the online version of *Folha*”.

As we can see, the editorial orientation of *Folha* expresses both an ethics concern (maintaining a nonpartisan appearance) and a market concern (not divulging news free of charge).

The “Washington Post” restriction is limited to the first concern, prohibiting tweets that “may be perceived having a political, racial, sexual, or religious bias or any other kind of favoring that may be used against the Post’s journalistic credibility”⁵. Reporter Raju Narisetti wrote in his twitter profile that the 91-year-old senator Robert C. Byrd, hospitalized after a fall, should have the “good sense” to retire. The newspaper requested Narisetti to close his profile and he acquiesced.

Even if the example is more about the journalist’s “lack of touch”, the ethical dilemma is evident: how “old structures” in the journalistic field may limit the journalist’s agency in the “new structures” such as

blogs and twitter? At the same *Time* that there are obvious attempts in this direction, there is also an institutional gap – the lack of rules for journalists’ behavior regarding blogs and twitter – that may be taken advantage of.

The discourse in the journalists’ ethics manuals is outdated and is not able to deal with the complex interactions of the “old” and “new” journalistic structures. “Elements of Journalism”, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, lists nine principles that must guide the practices of good journalism. The last one indicates that all journalists must “be allowed to exercise their personal conscience”. It is worthwhile quoting it: “Every journalist must have a personal ethical sense of responsibility. A moral compass. (...) Journalistic organizations must nurture the independence of their journalists by encouraging them to speak and write what they think. That stimulates the necessary intellectual diversity to understand and faithfully investigate the ever more complex society” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001, p. 173).

It is not necessary to underline that the vigilance which some newspapers have exerted over their employees’ personal twitter goes against what is advocated by Kovach and Rosenstiel. It is a paradox that principles such as these are publicly advocated by the companies. But maybe the paradox is not so great. After all, the fact that the “good journalism” discourse contradicts journalistic practices is not news to anyone. The main point is this: the new journalistic structures such as blogs and twitter provide the feeling of augmented “agency” and journalistic independence. However, they are still bound by the norms and practices of the companies. The tension between the new and old structures in the journalistic field will have important consequences as to how the public as well as journalists see concepts such as “ethics” and “objectivity”. We dare say that the proliferation of blogs and twitter profiles leads to an inevitable personalization of journalistic practices. With time, these new practices will make the readers even more knowledgeable of the directions in which the journalists’ moral compass leads them.

| NOTES

- 1 It is evident that not all concurrence, observed in the distinct professional universes, is due to the *habitus*. The collective practice is also, in part, determined by strategies, explicit calculations and orientations, and projects defined words of order and orchestrated decision making. But for these actions, indoctrination is essential.

- 2 This aspect is much more theorized in Barros Filho and Praça (2006).
- 4 See, for instance, the interaction between journalists Flávio Gomes (@flaviogomes69) and Fábio Seixas (@fabio_seixas).
- 5 <http://toledol.com.br/2009/09/09/Folha-cria-regras-para-seus-jornalistas-no-twitter/>.
- 6 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/02/AR2009100202888.html>

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