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The communicative structures of journalism and public relations

■   **Lee Salter**
University of the West of England

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to analyze the communication structures of journalism and public relations, using the communication ethics of Jürgen Habermas. The intention is to use this analysis to draw attention to the differences between journalism and public relations in the interests of good journalism and in the interests of democracy. I do not deny that public relations is an inevitable part of the communications order but rather that, contrary to some recent suggestions, it is with good reason that good journalists reject the use of public relations techniques in their own practices. The article ends with the suggestion that journalists need to defend their practice in policy and a clearly articulated self-understanding.

KEY WORDS ▪ communication structures ▪ democracy ▪ discourse ethics
▪ ethics ▪ Habermas ▪ intersubjectivity ▪ public relations

Introduction

It is becoming increasingly common in universities for journalism and public relations to be considered as partner subjects. The border between journalism and public relations is being eroded in the context of a more general decline of normative inquiry and its replacement with inquiries into mere instrumental effectiveness. This process is being pushed not only by government policy on education and research but also by interpretations of the implications of technological change, the growth and unequal distribution of communication capacities generally, and also by the pressure of a free-market economy. It is, however, the contention of this article that the communication structures of journalism and public relations conflict. Further, I argue that there is a quite explicit danger of merging public relations and journalism that can only diminish the effectiveness of journalism in fulfilling its normative role. This argument must, therefore, rest upon a conceptualization of what journalism is (should be). Before moving to address this question, I must lay out a theory of

communication, which will form the basis of the answer to the aforementioned question.

A Habermasian model of communication

The German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas has become rather popular in journalism and media studies, though in the process he is often stripped of his critical theory. Habermas' (1989, 1996) theory of the public sphere, for example, loses its critical function when merely applied to chat shows (Keane, 1998) or becomes weakened when it is considered simply as an abstract ideal rather than as a critical theory with practical intent. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) charts the decline of the public's ability to form a critical public opinion, not as a result of simple changes in 'consumer demand' but as a result of the limited structural capacity of a capitalist system to deal with conflicting demands generated by it. In this work, Habermas views the mass media as complicit in this process, not driven by intentional collusion by individual actors but by the social relations formed under capitalism that it necessarily encompasses. As a result of the incapacity of the political subsystem to cope with genuine public opinion, forms of opinion manipulation develop, with the public relations industry taking the lead. On this analysis, public opinion, which started off as an opponent of domination, becomes the latter's object: 'opinion research has the task . . . of aligning the behaviour of the population with political goals' (Schmidtchen, cited in Habermas, 1989: 243). Habermas (1989: 193–4) sees public relations as an industry in which 'the sender of the message hides his business enterprise in the role of someone interested in the public welfare', invoking a 'false consciousness that as critically reflecting private people they contribute responsibly to public opinion'.

In contrast to the damaging influence of public relations, Habermas has recently described a normative role for journalists and media practitioners in relation to genuine public opinion. Such workers should

> understand themselves as the mandatory of an enlightened public whose willingness to learn and capacity for criticism they at once presuppose, demand, and reinforce; like the judiciary, they ought to preserve their independence from political and social pressure; they ought to be receptive to the public's concerns and proposals, take up these issues and contributions impartially, augment criticisms, and confront the political process with articulate demands for legitimation. The power of the media should thus be neutralized and the tacit conversion of administrative or social power into political influence blocked. (Habermas, 1996: 378–9)

Whilst Habermas' work on the public sphere has gained a good deal of interest from journalism and media studies, it is the contention of this article that a much deeper understanding of the communicative capacities of public relations and journalism can be garnered from his work on communication. To be sure, a less frequently applied component of Habermas' work, and one that cannot but lead us to consider his critical theory, is that expounded in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987) and *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990). Whilst the theory of communicative reason developed in both of these works has not been uncritically received, it does provide a solid basis from which to analyze communication structures.

In the *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas builds on his earlier (1979) reformulation of historical materialism in which he explained how social learning processes make possible social evolution. In the later work, Habermas (1984, 1987) identifies two models of communication in modern differentiated societies: the communicative and the strategic. The communicative mode of communication or language is oriented towards achieving the mutual understanding of actors involved in the process of communication about X. The strategic mode of communication is one in which one actor intends to gain an advantage in the situation without the other becoming aware of those intentions. Within the strategic mode of communication, one actor aims to have an *effect* on the *actions* of the other. In making this distinction, Habermas is developing a moral argument: we can only consider our communications as moral if each involved in the communicative situation is equally able to propose, question and debate propositions without relying on trickery or manipulation to achieve (pseudo) agreement. The implication of this is that strategic action does not meet with moral criteria of honesty and openness. It is Habermas' general contention that whilst one might engage in some strategic communication to press a point or develop understanding, strategic action is only ever parasitic upon the 'original mode' of non-coercive understanding developed in communicative action. Indeed, *ethical* communication can only be realized under conditions in which the original mode of language (understanding) has priority.

Habermas does not complete his theory with such a simplistic division between forms of communication as that just described. Rather, for *rational* understanding to be achieved, three relations to the world must be discerned – the objective, social, and subjective – in the use of language. These relations are understood as factual and make possible a rationalized lifeworld. In presenting these world relations, Habermas (1984: 306) provides an example of a professor asking a student to fetch a glass of water. The student can reject the request in one or more of three ways, according to these world relations: s/he can remind the professor that the nearest water source is so far away that

the seminar will be long over before s/he returns; s/he can reply that the professor does not have the (social) right to ask her or him; or s/he can object that the professor is merely seeking to iterate the student's inferiority because the professor doesn't sincerely want a glass of water. On these grounds, an insistent professor can be rationally and coherently challenged.

In many respects, the primary world relation for successful communicative action is that of sincerity. One has to be understood as sincere to have any proposition accepted or even considered in the first place. For sincerity to operate, the communication situation has to be one in which the intentions of the communicator are to be honest and truthful towards the other actors in the situation. The immediate objection to such a suggestion is that one can sincerely report inaccuracies or may sincerely believe in something that is wrong. Take, for instance, one who sincerely believes and reports that black people are intellectually inferior to white people. That person will be able to cite dozens of studies in which black people have been shown to achieve lower IQ scores than white people (though, of course, such studies serve merely to highlight social inequality and the inadequacies of IQ testing). This is an instance that demonstrates the importance of Habermas' (1990) communicative ethics. In this model, Habermas suggests that, for any communication situation to be taken seriously, it must stimulate in participants a willingness and ability to understand others, a knowledge of one's own interests, equal opportunities for all to express those interests, equal opportunity to argue against suggestions that may harm one's interests and protection against 'closure', due to the fact that 'no consensus can insure itself against the possibility of new arguments' (Rehg, 1997: 38–9, 222). Steven White (1988) adds to these rules conditions 'which are constitutive of an ideal speech situation' such that each subject who is capable of speech and action is allowed to participate in discourses, each is allowed to call into question any proposal, each is allowed to introduce any proposal into the discourse, each is allowed to express his attitudes, wishes, and needs, and that no speaker ought to be hindered by compulsion – whether arising from inside the discourse or outside of it – from making use of the preceding rights. In accord with this, 'pure communicative action' exists when actors are prevented from 'taking up a discourse with hidden intentions or motives, or in a way in which the true attitudes, feelings and needs of some would be unlikely to find expression', in which the 'traditional interpretation of needs', and the bases of validity claims can be called into question on the basis of 'free access to the test of argumentation' (White, 1988: 56–7). Further to these conditions, the process of discourse should be aimed at clarifying language and terminology so that understanding of needs and wants can be fully achieved. Lest arguments 'pass one another

like ships in the night', a formal understanding of the language system is necessary:

> one has . . . [to be] free to change any inappropriate or distortive aspects of the language system. Such freedom would seemingly have to include not only a freedom from external coercion or manipulation but from internal compulsions and self-deceptions as well. (Rehg, 1997: 42–3)

Accordingly, an ethical discourse takes place within 'unconstrained dialogue to which all speakers have equal access' and in which only the 'force of the better argument prevails' (Outhwaite, 1994: 40). Discourse ethics can be presented as a model through which argumentative communication can be judged or, as Rehg (1997: 38) states, 'participants in discourse must at least believe they have approximately satisfied it if they are to consider the outcome of their discourse as properly justified'. Once such conditions are met, the claim about IQ scores may be rationally criticized as in the very least questionable. Extreme examples of where such conditions did not pertain include Apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany, both of which suffered extremely disturbed communication structures.

Objections to this model may charge that all language and communications is 'naturally' manipulative, that power infiltrates the very core of how we construct thought and articulate it in communication. Michel Foucault may be considered as one of the most serious philosophical objectors to Habermas' model (see, for instance, Ashenden and Owen, 1999), drawing our attention to the truth–power relation in discursive formations. Foucault did communicate though. He also undertook specific activities, especially around the area of prison reform. How could he have undertaken these activities, without tripping on his own relativist tongue? Indeed, for Foucault to convince anyone of anything, even that 'there is no such thing as true', would require that he defend itself as a true statement, regardless of its power relation. [1] The alternative is what Habermas calls a performative contradiction. In fact, the performative contradiction can be shown in other ways informed by the speech act theory outlined earlier: 'there is no such thing as true (but I don't believe it)'; 'there is no such thing as true (so don't arrest me for child molestation)'; or 'there is no such thing as true (so this point-blank Magnum bullet in the head will not kill you)'. Without such evaluative possibilities as Habermas provides, we are unable to uncover propaganda and critique it *really* as such from the perspective of a participant, intersubjectively, comparing utterance with utterance, with actual experience and with structural context. There is, however, a limit to Habermas' theory of communication, which relates to its capacity to operate under *conditions of systemic inequality*. Nevertheless, such conditions do not disable the theory but rather make us more aware of what Habermas refers to as systematically distorted communication. Indeed, Volosinov understood

that language cannot be separated from activity, so therefore a way of life that was unjust and manipulative results in a language animated by injustice and manipulation. For Volosinov, such a state of affairs ought not result in resignation to a crude form of relativism but should (would?) result in the contestation of language in the guise of physical struggle. Thus, language cannot be 'natural' in the direct sense of the word but nor is it unconnected to states of affair and nor is it static. Rather, language is determined by the particular social order:

> Production relations and the socio-political order shaped by those relations determine the full range of verbal contacts between people, all the forms and means of their verbal communication. (Volosinov, 1973: 19)

Thus, whilst the non-neutrality of language itself poses problems for the communicative participant who seeks to be an objective subject, the generative nature of language means that physical struggles and social experiences underlie even the most seemingly individual 'I-experience', giving 'accent' to the utterance and animating language (Volosinov, 1973: 83–98). Ultimately, Habermas' distinction between communicative and strategic action is premised on a distinction between public and private interests. As I illustrate later, this distinction is central to understanding the differences between journalism and public relations.

An application of the model to journalism

The acceptability of applying this model of communication is dependent upon a judgement on the form that democracy must take, developed most fully in Habermas' (1996) *Between Facts and Norms*. We might say that communication within a democracy should correspond to this model. To this end, Habermas' theory of the public sphere, though less his complete theory of communication, has been applied in public journalism projects. In this sense, it is the role of the journalist to facilitate the form of public communication as required by ethical discourse. However, it is clear that the criteria for ethical discourse are not met under current social relations. For example, basic material inequalities compound the social relations of production disabling participation in discourses. Thus, the journalist has a role of facilitating the effective flow of 'accents', whilst uncovering and challenging the hidden motives of certain communicators. In addition to this, journalists (as we might distinguish from reporters [Rosen, 1999], though such a distinction seems to afford 'reporters' a neutral position of *simply* reporting) are faced with a number of constraints to their 'getting at the world'. Herman and Chomsky (1994: 2) write of the filters through which news has to travel but which occur 'so naturally that media

news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values'. The filters that Herman and Chomsky recognize are the ownership of media companies; the reliance upon advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; cheap and easily accessible news sources and experts; pressure groups, or 'flak' as they call it; and what Herman and Chomsky refer to as anti-communism, though perhaps we might expand this last filter to 'system-maintenance'. On this account, journalists have to work *within* pre-existing social relations of production. That is, journalists cannot be neutral as such, as passive neutrality can too easily reflect power relations. Rather, journalists should attempt to 'get outside' the appearance of the reality they see, which has long been the objective of many critical artists and journalists. This is not to say that such appearances are not real, or that they are merely relative, rather, they stand as they are but the point is to uncover the hidden structures that underlie the appearances. It is to this end that Herbert Marcuse called for such critical journalism when he noted that

> the facts are never given immediately and never accessible immediately; they are established, 'mediated' by those who made them; the truth, 'the whole truth' surpasses these facts and requires rupture with their appearance. (Marcuse, 1969: 99)

Indeed, because of this fact,

> a mentality is created for which right and wrong, true and false are predefined wherever they affect the vital interests of the society. (Marcuse, 1969: 95)

So that, for Marcuse,

> if a newscaster reports the torture and murder of civil rights workers in the same unemotional tone he uses to describe the stock-market or the weather . . . then such objectivity is spurious – more, it offends against humanity and truth by . . . refraining from accusation where accusation is in the facts themselves. (Marcuse, 1969: 98)

To be sure, Marcuse's approach has its limitations and he recognizes that 'no power, no authority, no government exists' which would act upon his call for liberating tolerance. However, Marcuse does show how simple 'neutrality' preserves repressive social relations. Against this, understanding reality is a social process through which flows of communication should expose contradictions, misunderstandings, half-truths, and lies. In a similar way to Habermas, Marcuse's call is not for the neutralization of power relations as such but for them to be challenged and resisted by those interested in liberation. However, whilst Habermas' model can be criticized for being almost naively consensus-oriented, Marcuse's approach must fail for its mono-

logical overtones, not least in his call for the 'withdrawal of tolerance from regressive movements' (Marcuse, 1969: 110). Instead, journalists must *orient* themselves to *understanding* the whole *reality* of the situation, by taking up a public and intersubjective (perhaps dialectical) position rather than a 'neutral' one. In turn, this entails critically engaging the validity claims outlined earlier as well as recognizing the tension between (systemic) strategy and communicativeness.

So far I have established that the product of media workers can be analyzed according to a particular model, which is rooted in *actual* forms of life and communication but, at the same time, is critically oriented and grounded in theory. On this view, journalists have a responsibility to go beyond a simplistic relation with appearances and attempt to get at the *whole reality* of a situation by accepting a communicative ethics which is so oriented. To evoke another critical theorist, Theodore Adorno, the problems of 'Truth' are such that the journalist should undertake to expose the non-identity of concept and referent and, thus, challenge the epistemological and social difficulties of truth. This practice is not to engage in a postmodern politics of difference but to undertake criticisms of false identifications intersubjectively.

Perhaps it might be objected that the previous account is, amongst other things, naive. Roy Greenslade (2003), for example, tells us that

> popular newspapers tell lies, ignore rules and refuse to apologise for their sins. They duck and weave to avoid self-regulatory censures. They abuse the concept of press freedom day after day.

To be sure, Greenslade's description of a large amount of so-called journalistic practice is correct, though should not be limited to 'popular newspapers'. Indeed, the outrageous damage that some 'quality' and 'popular' journalists have done to society and language has been well documented by generations of media analysts. For a variety of structural and biographical reasons, journalists both intentionally and unintentionally serve malign interests, propagate false ideology, distort reality, and lie. However, this account is not intended merely to describe actual practice, though to be fair, there are many journalists who attempt, with some success, to adopt what we might refer to as *good* practice. Rather, this is an exercise in excavating the *possibilities* of a practice without settling merely for what such-and-such a person might do. In this sense, it is an attempt to outline *good* journalism. The present inquiry is interested in *internal structural constraints* to these forms of communication. To be sure, just as there are journalists who are not interested in adopting *good* practice, there are no doubt plenty of well-meaning public relations agents, whose serious and heart-felt *intention* is to behave ethically. The point is,

however, that public relations is structurally unable to generate a coherent ethical practice. This means that, as I demonstrate later, even those with good intentions are unable to act ethically without prejudicing their capacity to be (instrumentally) *good* public relations agents. In contrast, it is the contention that a *good* journalist is necessarily ethically oriented. Journalism can generate its own good practice that is wholly consistent with being a practitioner of journalism: for the journalist, there is no trade-off between these demands (beyond those of political economy). It is the task now to analyze the communication structures of the public relations industry, comparing them with the demands made on journalists. I will then be able to explain how the differing logic of these two methods of communication are opposed and how they should be related.

The structural limitations of public relations

To help illustrate the similarities and differences between journalism and public relations, it is fruitful to begin with a comparison of the ethical codes of journalists and public relations agents. There are two sources of journalistic ethics, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). It is the contention of the writer that the PCC should not be considered a *voluntary* regulatory body, as its existence is very much a defensive move to prevent formal government regulation of the press. To this end, the PCC is de facto compulsory. Therefore, in analyzing journalistic codes of practice, I will focus on those of the NUJ, as this is roughly equivalent to the voluntary position of the professional body for public relations, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR). Again, the following analysis relates to the formal capacities of the forms of communication to meet with the specified ethical guidelines, rather than to the intentions of any specific actor.

   The NUJ requires that all members of the union sign and abide by their code of conduct. The code specifies that journalists 'shall at all times defend the principle of the freedom of the press and other media in relation to the collection of information and the expression of comment and *criticism*. He/she shall strive to *eliminate distortion*, *news suppression* and *censorship*' (NUJ, 2004: Clause 2). Such a clause clearly illustrates a conception of journalism as having a normative self-conception and a practical intent based upon it. Beside the expected recommendation that journalists undertake accuracy and fairness, the code goes on to demand that journalists distinguish between conjecture and fact and warns against '*falsification* by distortion, *selection* or *misrepresentation*' (Clause 3). The code recommends that journalists recognize their structural position and the threats to their practice that might come from

such a position. Clause 9 notes that a 'journalist shall not lend himself/herself to the distortion or suppression of the *truth* because of advertising or other considerations'; and Clause 13 demands that a journalist 'shall not by way of *statement, voice or appearance* endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of his/her own work or of the medium by which he/she is employed'. If any of these clauses are breached, then the code demands that the journalist 'shall rectify promptly any harmful inaccuracies, ensure that correction and apologies receive due prominence and afford the right of reply to persons criticised when the issue is of sufficient importance' (Clause 4; emphasis added in all cases). Of course, the accuracy and truth requirements as they stand enable the journalist to claim to be writing the 'truth' without getting at the underlying reality. Nevertheless, there is a healthy recognition of the value of whole truth and of some of the barriers to the pursuit of truth.

In a similar way to which journalists can join the NUJ, public relations agents may join the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), which requires that members adhere to its code of conduct. The code itself requests that agents 'deal honestly and fairly in business with employers, employees, clients, fellow professionals, other professions and the public' (IPR, n.d.: Section A1, ii), and 'respect the customs, practices and codes of clients, employers, colleagues, fellow professionals and other professions in all countries where they practise' (Section A1, iii). That is, apart from dealing 'honestly and fairly' with the 'public', the public relations agent must work for the interests of clients; the code of conduct of agents is tempered by that of the client. Under the code, the Principles of Good Practice notes that there are fundamental criteria to 'public relations practice', which include integrity, competence, and confidentiality. 'Integrity' calls for agents to have an 'honest and responsible regard for the public interest', to check 'the reliability and accuracy of information before dissemination', and to 'never knowingly misleading *clients, employers, employees, colleagues and fellow professionals* about the nature of representation or what can be competently delivered and achieved' (Section 2; emphasis added in all cases). Competence refers to doing one's job properly and to declare conflicts of interest to clients, whilst confidentiality is to safeguard information.

The two codes have some similarities, such as dealing 'fairly' with the public, though neither code really goes into much detail on what constitutes 'fairness' or what 'the public' is. This may lead some to proffer the reason for these similarities as being that journalism and public relations share orientations towards the public. However, such a claim would be misguided. The 'fairness' condition of the IPR code cannot possibly be met for reasons which I explain later. Indeed, significant differences manifest themselves when

considering the relation of such codes to the possibility of implementing them in practice, not as seen from the viewpoint of an outsider but immanently, from within their own logic. We can establish criteria for the judgement of a journalist, i.e. what it takes to be a *good* journalist, based on the code of ethics. In the first instance, a good journalist is not disinterested as such but we might suggest that s/he should be interested in reaching and communicating a public understanding of the whole *reality* of a given situation with *all involved* (regardless of whether that reality is profitable or not), perhaps making a judgement of that situation in accord with a specified normative standard, such as justice, or by comparing the utterances of those involved in that situation with the reality of the situation as a whole. We can then make an immanent evaluation of that journalist's work based on immanent criteria. The 'we' of this evaluation is 'humanity', the journalist's constituency.

However, when we evaluate the practice of public relations, it fails at every point in which this evaluative model is applied. In the first instance, the *good* public relations agent is oriented to representing a *particular interest*, which is partial. Surely a *good* public relations agent cannot really claim to have an 'honest and responsible regard for the public interest' whilst, at the same time, respecting the 'practices of clients'? Nor can a *good* public relations agent be 'fair' when s/he is representing only one interest. A *good* public relations agent will be biased towards representing the interests of *only* her or his paying client on the basis that such a representation will be profitable to the client (or, by proxy, to the public relations firm). Surely, for a public relations agent to represent British Nuclear Fuels and have a responsible regard for the public living in the vicinity of a nuclear reactor is something of a contradiction to say the least, for it is the company, not the public who pays for the communiqué. Of course, the 'opposition' can utilize public relations to push their agenda too. Aeron Davis (2000) has analyzed how the trade union movement, which is often treated as a 'folk devil' (see, for example, Glasgow University Media Group, 1976), benefited from the use of public relations. However, there are shortcomings to this argument as, under Davis' period of analysis, trade unions had become significantly less threatening than they had been in the 1970s and neither are they resource poor in comparison to other oppositional groups. At the same time, public relations is driven by inequality so that they are a medium through which influence is literally bought. The extent to which the unions successfully employed public relations in the case study presented by Davis is the extent to which they manipulated the public by the use of union-commissioned polls which 'found their way into the national press' and by the insistence of the public relations agent that the union-inspired lobby 'does not look like a union-inspired lobby' (Davis, 2000: 182). In contrast, even a liberal interpretation of good journalism asserts that the loyalty of

journalists is to citizens (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003) and that those who want to practise propaganda should 'go and work in public relations' (Randall, 2000: 134). Further to this element of loyalty, journalists should attempt to overcome barriers to understanding, retain 'independence from those they cover', and attempt to see things from all perspectives (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003). In contrast, whilst lying in public relations is formally frowned upon, half-truths are necessary. Imagine, for example, a public relations agent acting on behalf of Boeing suggesting to the board of directors that they should relate to the public the importance of war for the financial well-being of the company! Holistic reality is not good for public relations. A client does not employ a public relations agent to tell the truth, regardless of the personal orientation of the agent. Neither does the client pay a public relations firm to represent the interests of their opponents, let alone to assist the public in weighing up all of the evidence so they can make their own judgement on the situation. A public relations agent who did this would be considered *bad*. Of course, underlying this is the fact that those most able to pay (and those able to pay the most!) will gain the most representation by the public relations agent. Such is a satisfactory arrangement neither in the interests of reality, justice, nor democracy.

We might concede that the public relations agent is oriented towards reaching a *private* understanding of the *reality* of a situation (though this is by no means necessary), from which a particular interpretation will be commun- icated. However, this understanding cannot be reached or communicated publicly, rather the agent will attempt to *impose* this pre-defined private understanding on the public. The 'good' agent may well interact with the public but this is merely to judge the *effect* of the pre-defined understanding. This form of communication is clearly in the class that Habermas refers to as 'perlocutionary', i.e. it is intended to have a particular effect with or without the public consciously understanding, let alone accepting, the whole reality of the situation. There is no orientation to reaching a real understanding, unless an 'understanding' that suits the client can be reached, for real understanding has to take place publicly, openly, and dialogically. A famous example of the perlocutionary activity of public relations is Edward Bernays' exploitation of the women's liberation movement to promote smoking among women (in addition to his abominable representation of American fruit companies against the interests of Central American peasants and workers; see, for example, Tye [1998]). Here we can see a concrete case of where strategic communication is parasitic on communication oriented to mutual under- standing, whereby genuine discourses on the place of females in a society were abused by interested parties who sought to use that language for private gain. The appearance of an orientation to gender equality hid the real interest in

maximizing the market – and thereby increasing direct and relative profit – for a dangerous product. The evaluation of Bernays' practice was in terms of whether or not more women took up smoking as a result (they did), rather than whether agreement was reached on whether or not smoking is a good thing for women to do. The degree to which the latter debate did take place was always and only a secondary consideration to the primary, and hidden, motivation of increasing a market; of course, a wholly different, and more truthful, evaluative criterion would be cancer rates among American females. As Habermas (1984: 305) puts it, public relations is an industry in which the speaker 'inconspicuously employs illocutionary results for perlocutionary purposes'.

Finally, and perhaps most problematically, public relations, in contrast to journalism, is primarily concerned with the world of appearances, rather than reality. In this sense, for the public relations agent, it matters less whether, why, or how X *really* occurs than whether, why, or how X *seems* to occur in the eyes of the public. Perhaps the most obvious example of this relates to military public relations. It is of no concern to the agent in this case whether a war is *really* just, why it is *really* happening, or how it is *really* conducted. Consider, for example, the military public relations agent explaining that a government has decided to support the slaughter and mutilation of thousands of people to secure access, transport, and consumption of certain materials that are more profitably sourced from that region. Of course, in this instance, given the special circumstances of war, it is less the case that the public relations agent will believe her- or himself to be doing wrong, given the internalization of values that takes place when public relations are 'in-house'. This example does, however, illustrate a profoundly problematic form of public relations: the in-house department. In such cases, ethical practices are far more difficult due to the absolute (internal) dependence of the 'agent' on the 'client' (in this case, the 'firm' in which the public relations department is based). To be sure, Baudrillard's claim that the Gulf War didn't *really* happen indicates the normalization of public relations' concern with appearances; i.e. the reality of war changes less than the appearance of it. Of another order are attempts to reconcile opposites, such as junk-food companies *appearing* to 'support' schools or sports, or petrochemical companies *appearing* to 'support' environ-mentalist award ceremonies. Of course, in neither case can agents genuinely believe that they are presenting the public with a real insight into the operations of their clients. On the contrary, the clients in these instances hinder the activities which they 'support'. On such occasions, it is the *good* journalist and, of course, the *good* sense of the public that exposes such contradictions, though less frequently do either recognize the profound and fundamental systemic wrongness of the public relations sector that deals in

such unreality. In this sense, it is the job of the public relations agent to construct the non-identity that is the job of the journalist to expose.

Conclusion

I hope to have clearly outlined the major structural differences between journalistic communication and the communication of public relations agents. I repeat, I have *not* argued that journalists are any more honest than public relations agents nor that they are any more immune to social relations than anyone else. Rather the intention here has been to illustrate the different logics underlying the communication structures of each form, to demarcate the structural limits to the possibilities of each practice, beyond those common to both, and to highlight these by developing possible criteria for evaluation. It, therefore, remains for me to suggest the proper relations between these forms of communication.

It has become something of an orthodoxy for media commentators to bemoan the 'spin' of politicians and champion the media victims of the manipulation of communication systems by politicians. However, Thomas Meyer (2002) has presented an alternative to this somewhat naive description of appearances. Meyer argues that rather than politicians manipulating an innocent media, the media set frames into which politics has to fit itself. Whereas in conventional media studies, 'framing' refers more to a linguistic process in which words, sentences, headlines, and images are organized so as to propagate a certain appearance, Meyer argues that organizational and technological structures (of which we might say both are ultimately dependent upon resource allocation) create time and space restrictions on the access that politics has to mass media. It is in this sense that Meyer argues that the logic of the media 'colonizes' the logic of politics. Meyer's point is well taken: the process of communication is rarely simple and singular. Indeed, we might be well advised to consider the role of the intermediary between politics and the media, the 'spin doctor' or, far more accurately, press officer. We can see that the press officer is, in fact, structurally less threatening to ethical communication than the public relations agent as such. The good press officer transmits official information, usually limited and partial, to the media via journalists who are (or should be) aware of such limitation and partiality. [2] The public relations agent proper, in contrast, is, by definition, more apt to deal either directly with the public without necessarily passing through the interpretive filter of the good journalist or by manufacturing a media event, which may well be intended to have perlocutionary effects. Perhaps, then, it is best to view the 'spin doctor' as a Frankenstein's monster, created by the media

environment and existing as half public relations agent and half press officer.

Rather than submit to the rationale of minimalist and efficient strategic communication, we should reassert the professional ethics of the journalist, especially in light of some of the more absurd thinking around the impact of new technologies, so-called 24-hour news, and fragmented consciousness (deriving from fragmented life experiences and distorted communications), which force us to abandon traditional goods, such as reality! Indicative of these claims is Julia Hobsbawm's (2003) suggestion that the contemporary environment demands that journalists should rely on public relations agents in order for them to operate. She claims that 'journalists need PR not just to give information, but to provide access to *sexy spokespeople* to fill columns, host programmes and give soundbites' (emphasis added). However, understanding reality cannot be undertaken cheaply or by halves. Nor can it be achieved by rapid reporting or the use of soundbites. To be sure, reality is costly, time-consuming, and risky, with the expense being incurred by journalist and (active) audience alike. The response of the public relations agent in this case is that if reality takes up too much time in the lives of members of the public and if people haven't got the time to eat or sleep properly, then why force them to read or, God forbid, think? Why bother with reality when it is so costly? However, the investigation into reality is not of the same order as flared trousers or deely-boppers. Rather, it derives from human virtues whose value goes beyond fad and fashion. It is also a resource upon which we can draw to enlighten ourselves and change our world. Rather than abandon such virtues, in the modern world we should firmly reassert and retrench them. To be sure, the journalist should be involved in a struggle, which members of the public are a part of too. It is, therefore, not only the practice of journalism that must be attended to but also the very same social relations that cause 15-minute attention spans, that force journalists to work under such pressure that they have to 'cover a story in half an hour' (Hobsbawm, 2003), and that only contribute to the confusion, disorientation, and moronization that reduce our understanding of the world.

Around Europe, there are already measures in place that aim to protect certain areas of the media from the downward pressure of the market (or relations of production), such as public service broadcasting and media production and distribution subsidies. Although at the moment some exceptions to the General Agreement on Trades and Services rules for audiovisual services have been made in relation to the European media, they are under continual threat as capitalist social relations seek to monopolize ever more domains of human sociation. In view of this, journalists have a choice in where their allegiances lie: with the representatives of these relations or with the no doubt

insufficient provisions to preserve the relation of journalism and media practice to the democratic public they should serve. To be sure, public relations may benefit from journalism but journalism does not benefit from public relations. As far as the academy is concerned, if we are to nurture democratic communications, we must ensure that we prioritize the journalist's understanding of the manipulative communications of public relations agents over the public relations agent's understanding of how to take advantage of journalists for private gain.

Notes

1   I am reminded by my colleague Ruxandra Trandafiou that language is argumentative and built to distort. However, the point of Habermas' thesis is that the social context in which language is used results in such distortions. Under such social conditions, public relations agents may play a role in the field of contestation. This is doubtless a fair claim but does little to damage the premise of this article that journalism and public relations have fundamentally different orientations.
2   The role of the press officer is not, however, simple. Press officers also practise manipulation but they are ultimately subject to democratic pressures and political procedures. Nevertheless, politics has always been a strategic exercise but excesses in this practice must also be checked.

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Biographical note

Lee Salter is currently a lecturer in journalism and media studies in the School of
Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England. Besides his work on the
communicative structures of the Internet, his research focuses on more general
communicative structures in various media, and their capacities to resist and
oppose rather than reflect and perpetuate oppressive social relations (and their
material base).
Address: Department of Journalism and Media Studies, University of the West of
England, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY, UK. [email: Lee.Salter@uwe.ac.uk]