Journalism in Quebec

As a group, journalists in Quebec have historically occupied a central place in the ideological arena. Much more so than their counterparts in the rest of North America, they have tended to be an intellectual lot, situating themselves generally alongside academics, artists and various other social producers of culture. Today, for the first time in a generation, journalists in Quebec are wondering out loud whether they are still able to play such a role. The theme of the 20th anniversary convention of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ), held in December 1988, indicated one important aspect of this concern: "Can there be news without PR?". Needless to say, the mood in which this question was discussed was not a festive one. But at least such questions are discussed.

Quebec in the late 1980s often appears to be a vast marketplace, where every type of social undertaking - including the circulation of ideas and the framing of public debate - tends to follow the logic of a commercial exchange. This context has two sets of implications for newsworkers: (1) the value of their work is measured first and foremost by the fundamental market criterion of short-term profitability; and more subtly, (2) the at one time professionally distinctive nature of journalism as a social practice is reduced to an industrial ritual, as the news is increasingly "really" made by an array of non-journalist communication practitioners working on behalf of social actors with something to sell, be it a commercial product, an idea, a political image, or a set of values.

Journalists in Quebec are having a difficult time adapting to this new environment - particularly those members of the journalistic elite who built their careers during the social ferment of the 1960s and 1970s, and no longer find it possible to practice the type of journalism on which they were weaned. In the 1980s, the journalist's role as trustee of the public interest appears to have shrunk. But if serving the public interest is no longer the journalist's raison d'être, then what is it to be? And as far as serving the public interest is concerned, if not the journalist, then who?

The four main articles collected here should help us to situate and understand the current unrest in the journalistic "milieu" in Quebec. Each one was specifically commissioned for this issue of the Journal. Two of the articles take the form of essays by senior journalism educators, and the other two, by younger scholars, report on recently completed, and previously unpublished research. The first two articles directly address the current debate; the latter two directly inform it.

Enn Raudsepp, of Concordia University's journalism program, reviews the state of journalism education in Quebec, placing it in a broader context which will be immediately familiar to English Canadian and North American readers. If journalism education is, as Raudsepp suggests, the antidote to letting market considerations dominate the news, then journalism schools should be addressing the ideal
conditions of journalistic practice, rather than the actual ones, as they are increas-

The question of education takes on a special importance in light of the rise of 

a new approach that Laval University Dean of Arts François Demers has christen-

ted "the good employee's model". Demers, himself a former journalist with a 

long personal involvement in both union and professional associations of Quebec 

journalists, sees the emergence of a new ethic among Quebec journalists, linking 

their interests to those of the institutions that employ them, as a threat to the pain-

fully established "professionalism" based on autonomy.

The historical emergence of the recent Quebec tradition is recalled in the ar-

ticle by André Gosselin, a québécois doctoral candidate at the Institut français de 

la presse in Paris. Gosselin not only refreshes our memory as to the recent history 

of Quebec journalism, but uses the Quebec experience to construct a highly 

original general typology through which one can distinguish the different types of 

collective action undertaken by journalists.

Finally, Jean Charron, a doctoral candidate in political science at Laval, 

reports on some of the findings of a recently- completed team research project, 

clarifying our knowledge of one of the "hottest" issues of concern to journalists in 

Quebec: the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. 

Among other things, this report indicates the importance of broadening the 

parameters of ethical issues that journalists have traditionally championed, to in-

clude the practices of other social communicators as well.

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NOTES

1. This was noted early on by Porter (1965), in his classic study of Canadian 
society, *The Vertical Mosaic*, and has been discussed in various subsequent 
texts, including Raboy (1985).

2. See, for a representative cross-section of views on this, the témoignages of 
fifteen or so members of this cohort collected in the special issue of the Quebec 

REFERENCES


Mosaic* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto).
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