Faculty of Media, Society and Culture

Negotiating Sustainability in the Media:

Critical Perspectives on the Popularisation of Environmental Concerns

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Abstract

Despite intensified and concerted efforts to realise sustainable development, Western industrialised countries have in recent years experienced several mass protests against institutions perceived variously to have the potential to govern the global economy in environmentally sustainable or unsustainable ways. This thesis examines how different actors in the news media attempt to legitimate and de-legitimate neo-liberal approaches to economic governance on grounds that these approaches are or are not environmentally sustainable. By using a critical discourse analysis perspective to analyse texts produced by actors with competing political commitments (neo-liberal and left-liberal), it discusses how primarily profit-driven generic conventions can govern what can and cannot be said in debates on sustainability. The thesis suggests that the effectiveness of (cultural) politics aimed at legitimating and de-legitimating neo-liberal approaches can be understood in terms of the relationship between an instrumental rationality geared at maximising the effectiveness of existing institutional systems and a communicative rationality geared at achieving understanding.

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Abbreviations

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BP	British Petroleum
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CO_2	Carbon dioxide
EU	European Union
FTTA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GM	Genetically Modified
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
WB	World Bank
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nation Environment Program
US	United States

Contents

Introduction

The so-called anti-globalisation protests against multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and against multi-national corporations such as McDonalds, British Petroleum (BP) and Rio Tinto Inc., are all manifestations of growing public discontent with neo-liberal regimes of economic governance on grounds that they are environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust. International unity around the concept of sustainable development formally endorsed at the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992, as well as increased knowledge about environmental problems in general, have not, according to large parts of the environmental movement – whose critique unifies major elements of the anti-globalisation movement – significantly changed global developmental trajectories.

Like major political contestations in general, the mass media is assumed to play an influential role in this contestation over global governance.[1] This thesis analyses the negotiation over the meaning of sustainability as it occurs in media discourses. The main objective is to contribute to knowledge that can enhance the self-reflexivity of actors engaged in media debates over sustainability. Such contributions can offer insights into how to create the knowledge base – and perhaps political will – needed to remove obstacles that constrain both the realisation of a sustainable development and the democratic function of the media.

Using a critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) perspective, mainly drawing upon the work of Norman Fairclough and Lilie Chouliaraki, the thesis examines how neo-liberal free-market approaches to economic governance are both legitimated and de-legitimated in the media on grounds that they are or are not environmentally sustainable. *Legitimation* can be defined as those processes (i.e. textual practices) whereby the possession and exercise of power are constructed as self-evidently logical and moral (O'Sullivan, 1994, p. 236).

The texts that are analysed are press articles that comment on US and UK global warming policy initiatives announced in March 2002; the outcomes of the 2002 UN Johannesburg Earth Summit (August/September); and the dispute over the environmental advantages and disadvantages of trade liberalisation that took place before, during and after the 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle (November/December).

The texts analysed are published in the globally circulating British publications *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. These are among the world's most

authoritative media publications. They are known for their in-depth analysis and serious commentary. They are believed to inform what can be called the 'knowledge class' (Frow, 1995), whose members occupy structurally important positions and also inform consumers and electorates, not only in Britain but in all the countries where their publications are distributed. The two publications also position themselves in political opposition to each other. As I will show below, *The Economist* is committed to neo-liberal free-market ideas of economic governance, while *The Guardian* tends to embrace the scepticism expressed by the anti-globalisation movements. Analysis of texts found in these two antagonistic publications can capture the range of competing discourses involved in negotiations over the sustainability of neo-liberal forms of economic governance. That is, it could be argued that the rhetoric employed in the texts I analyse are part of wider political discourses that involve multiple actors, participants, texts, sites, and fora. My cases could then exemplify how these discourses – which are parts of ongoing public debates on the sustainability of existing institutional arrangements – work, and how their ideas are attempted to be legitimated in the media.

The concept of *discourse* in this thesis is understood to be an analytical concept that enables the description of the ways in which the representation of knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment is governed by ideas that are perceived as rational. On one hand, discourses can both define and produce knowledge about sustainability, and thereby also govern what can and cannot be said in sustainability debates. On the other hand, as discourses are social constructs they are also inherently contestable. It is when the boundaries of a discourse are contested and changed that socio-cultural change (of whatever degree) occurs (Fairclough, 1995a, pp. 12-13). Debates over sustainability in their invocation of competing discourses are thus also debates over the preferred socio-cultural order (Fischer & Hajer, 1999; Hajer, 1995, 1996; Harvey, 1999). This means that debates over environmental sustainability contain cultural critiques that problematise existing institutional arrangements and suggest alternatives (Fischer & Hajer, 1999, p. 7).

As pointed out by David Harvey (1999) there can be no social justice without environmental justice, and *vice versa*. Debates over sustainability are therefore also intrinsically linked with debates over distributive ethics. As such debates can be attached to longstanding and unresolved philosophical debates, Harvey (p. 182) suggests that one should accept that it is impossible to define what is and is not

2

sustainable and socially just in the long term and recognise the truth of Marx's argument: 'Between equal rights, force decides'.

This thesis seeks to describe how force, or power, operates in media texts dealing with sustainability issues. The focus is on describing how particular relations of power are reproduced through various textual practices geared at producing truth and certitude about what is sustainable and just. More specifically, it investigates the *discoursal hybridity* of attempts to legitimate and de-legitimate neo-liberal free-market approaches to economic governance. That is, it examines the relationships between different discourses and how they hybridised. Maarten Hajer's (1995; 1996) use of the concept of storylines provides a way of grasping the discoursal hybridity of media texts (or texts in general) dealing with sustainability issues. He defines a storyline as 'a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena' (1995, p. 56). Storylines thereby play a significant role in the way in which meaning in general is produced. Like mental schemata (or templates) they help us to chronologically organise and categorise information in recognisable and predictable ways. By providing such recognisable and predictable frames through which the meanings of phenomena and events are negotiated, storylines allow actors with different political commitments to communicate and understand each other – for instance, how environmental movements, governments, corporations and scientists can share a storyline on global warming. This means that in the contestation over the meanings of consensual storylines (and therefore politically very important), actors with different political positions articulate discourses that can be contradictory. Shared storylines are thus characterised by their necessary discoursal hybridity.

I approach the negotiation over sustainability in Western industrialised countries as a contestation over the meaning of a storyline that has three key sequences. The first sequence involves a realisation that the contemporary pattern of development (i.e. the status quo) is unsustainable. The second sequence involves a realisation that 'something' needs to be done. This seems to be accepted by the majority of all significant political actors. The third and final sequence contains the realisation of a sustainable development (whatever that in fact is). Yet, although there might be consensus on the chronological order of this shared storyline, this does not mean that actors interpret the meaning of it the same way. For example, radical environmental groups will have different prescriptions for environmental

change than most governments. These different interpretations are manifestations of different political commitments (Hajer 1995; 1996).

It is in the negotiation over the meaning of this three-sequence storyline that discourses are hybridised. The result of this negotiation is that some discourses come to form what Hajer (1995, p. 46) calls 'authoritative narratives' that govern what can/cannot be said. Hajer (p. 56) says: 'Political change may therefore well take place through the emergence of new storylines that re-order understandings. Finding the appropriate storyline becomes an important form of agency'. This means that the storyline on environmental problems that come to be perceived as rational in a particular context, will govern what can/cannot be said in environmental policy debates that subsequently result in the formal, as well as informal, implementation of practices aimed at realising a sustainable development.

If we accept the proposition that it is impossible to define what is sustainable and socially just in the long term, these hybrid discourses on sustainability inevitably contain reductions and exclusions that often arise when attempts are made to legitimate one's position by producing closures. In my view such reductions and exclusions should be the objects of public debate and critique occurring in the media-based public sphere. In this way deliberative processes among audiences can be facilitated in ways that contribute to the realisation of a deliberative democracy operating according to a principle of devolving political decisions to the lowest possible demographic level. Chouliaraki (2000, p. 295) explains the sort of criticism this thesis aspires to:

> While 'deliberative democracy' sets an important ethical and practical
> ideal for the contemporary, heavily mediatised, public sphere, as actual
> practice, 'deliberative democracy' can only be recognised, evaluated
> and facilitated once its conditions of possibility, and its obstacles and
> limitations, have been identified and discussed.

An objective of this thesis is therefore to develop a critique that can help improve the democratic function of the media. Specifically this involves providing a critical perspective that can, first, enhance the self-reflexivity of all actors engaged in media debates over sustainability, and second, empower the environmental movements.

Ulrich Beck's (1992; 1996; 1998) 'grand theory' of the forces that appear to be driving our history presents a background against which media discourses on

sustainability can be analysed. Beck suggests that the ecological deficit of industrial society directly backfires, through the protests of 'new' social movements, on the institutions that have been erected over the course of industrial modernisation and that therefore are perceived to harm the environment. The central issue of politics in what Beck terms the 'risk society' is no longer the just distribution of wealth, but the just distribution of risks. A central paradox of Beck's risk society is that risks are generated by the forces and institutions that try to control them, for instance, science, rationality, politics and other producers of 'traditional certainties'. One effect of this paradox is that the public trust in these traditional producers of certainties is eroded. It is because of the contingency of causal relationships, the invisibility/immateriality and uncertainties attached to problems like global warming, mad-cow disease and ozone-layer depletion, that doubt is cast on the legitimacy of central institutions in modern societies. The legitimacy of these institutions is being questioned because of their perceived failure to protect the environment, and hence the population, against the risks associated with invisible and immaterial environmental hazards. The emergence of 'new' environmental problems such as global warming and acid rain cannot be regulated in an incremental way, as are other visible environmental hazards, such as spills from oil tankers. Therefore, according to Beck, these institutions can now be seen to have reached their social limits in the sense that their legitimacy is 'exhausted'. They are thus compelled to change. Beck theorises this change as a process of 'reflexive modernisation', which he defines as the 'self-confrontation with the consequences of risk society which cannot (adequately) be addressed and overcome in the system of industrial society' (1996, p. 28).

According to Simon Cottle (1998, p. 8), Beck, despite describing the media's 'commercial pursuit of ratings, readers and revenue and consequent parading of spectacle, drama and entertainment', ascribes to the media a key role in the process of reflexive modernisation. It is the media that masks/unmasks the risks in Beck's risk society. Yet, Cottle identifies underdeveloped areas of Beck's theorisation. First, according to Cottle (p. 7), although Beck ascribes the media a pivotal role as a site for '(1) the social construction, (2) the social contestation and (3) the social criticism of risks and 'risk society'', he does not adequately explain how power operates in the media. Second, in Cottle's view, Beck's theorisation of the role of the mass media is inconsistent. On the one hand, the media is assumed to be the site where risks are revealed. The media can therefore operate in ways that can influence what Cottle

5

calls 'political perceptions' (p. 11) in the sense that the 'true' nature of risks are revealed in the media. On the other hand, suggests Cottle, the media is also theorised as a site of contestation and potential neutralisation of social movements, including importantly the environmental movement. That is, the politics of media discourses is given the potential to either empower or neutralise the environmental movements. My thesis addresses these two underdeveloped areas of Beck's theorisation.

Methodology

In the following I will provide a brief description of the three-step methodology employed in this thesis (see Part I for an elaborate and detailed description of theoretical framework and analytical method). First, on basis of ideal-type descriptions of discourses that are articulated in debates over sustainability, I identify internal tensions caused by logical inconsistencies and contradictions in hybrid discourses. Secondly, the identification of these tensions enables me to analyse how textual practices work to both legitimate and delegitimate neo-liberal free-market approaches to economic governance on grounds that they are or are not environmentally sustainable. Thirdly, in light of theoretical contributions, I discuss what my analysis of empirical material says about both attempts to realise sustainable development and the democratic function of the media.

My analysis involved archival search of texts found in the online publications of *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. The texts that are analysed, according to the websites, also appeared in the hardcopy publications. The body of texts that were sampled and subsequently analysed is rather limited. This means that the analysis is neither statistically grounded nor comprehensive in scope, nor does it need to be for my purpose. Obviously, there are many events and issues that exert influence over the direction the negotiation over sustainability takes, but it would be impossible to cover all these areas in detail. This study therefore restricted itself to analysis of texts commenting on events and issues that allowed for many key aspects and practices of the negotiation over sustainability to emerge. The selection of texts was thus based on the following two criteria: First, the texts should allow for the exemplification of the rhetoric employed in wider political discourses. Second, the texts should comment on cases that allow for many key aspects and practices of the negotiation of sustainability to emerge.

Overview of thesis

Part I (Chapter One) provides a theoretical framework that can be employed in analysis of media texts dealing with sustainability issues. I discuss claims about the validity of knowledge produced through CDA, and how the structure/agency dialectic as it occurs in media discourses on sustainability can be understood. As discourses do not exist as empirically comprehensible phenomena, Part II (Chapters Two and Three) provides ideal-type descriptions of competing discourses on sustainability. This will enable me to analyse the discoursal hybridity of media texts dealing with sustainability issues in Part III. Chapter Two describes competing discourses on economic globalisation. More specifically this involves a review of key sites in discourses on market regulation where contesting readings of the sustainability of particular modes of economic regulation exist. Chapter Three describes competing discourses on the sustainability of what arguably are influential 'eco-modernist' approaches to environmental problems that assume it is possible to reconcile environmental protection and economic growth trough existing institutional arrangements. In Part III (Chapters Four, Five and Six) I analyse the discoursal hybridity of media texts commenting on sustainability issues. In the analysis I identify internal tensions (caused by logical inconsistencies and contradictions) in hybrid discourses on sustainability and how these are attempted to be omitted and obscured through textual practices. I also show how these textual practices that are geared at producing truth and certitude reduce the complexity of environmental problems and popularise environmental politics. Part IV (Chapter Seven) discusses the implications of the findings of the analysis in Part III and suggests a way to understand the relations of domination and subordination between social forces that might result from the employment of popularising journalistic techniques that simplify the complexity of environmental problems.

Part I: Analysing Negotiation

The following chapter discusses how the negotiation over sustainability in the media can be analysed for its discoursal hybridity. It begins with outlining my view of what the role of theoretical enquiry should be, including this thesis, in a period where the public trust in modern institutions like, for example, the media and the social sciences, is undermined in a process of institutional 'exhaustion' as described by Beck, and by strands of poststructural/postmodern theory that seem to reject, or at least seriously question, the notion that it is possible to produce 'rational' knowledge that can facilitate sustainable development. The intention is to anchor my approach epistemologically within a tradition. I will clarify my view on the role of the media as a key discourse-bearing institution in modern societies and discuss the ways in which media-structures and institutional conventions of the media can condition the production of knowledge about environmental problems. I discuss the influential sociological argument that the democratic function of the media is being undermined in a process of 'refeudalisation' (Habermas, 1996, p. 59) where the public sphere is dominated and manipulated by a small number of large and powerful actors.

Chapter One: Critical Media Discourse Analysis

The role of theoretical enquiry into discourses

During the last two decades or so there have been significant changes in focus within social theory. This change of focus is often theorised as the 'postmodern' turn. Post-structural theory is often held to be one of the key factors initiating this change of focus within social theory, and the two terms postmodern theory and poststructural theory are often used interchangeably.

Modernity is the name usually given to the period that followed the industrial revolution that resulted in the transformation of the traditional largely agricultural, feudal, communal and religion-bound way of life. The changes that occurred were mainly, but not exclusively, initiated by the emergence and expansion of industrial capitalism. These conflicts resulted in what has been theorised as a process of 'detraditionalisation' (Heelas, Lash, & Morris, 1996). One of the most important changes that occurred as a consequence of this detraditionalisation was the rise of science as an 'objective' way of knowing about the world. This idea was consistent with the Enlightenment narrative that had challenged traditional dogmatic beliefs in religion with a belief that science and critical reason could provide humanity with 'objective' knowledge. This belief, also called the Enlightenment legacy (McGuigan, 1999, p. 48), is in some ways still informing a wide range of social practices, including environmental policy-making, journalistic practice dealing with environmental issues and theoretical enquiries into media discourses.

In social theory the idea that science and critical reason could provide objective knowledge in many ways culminated in the development of structuralist thought. Structuralism is above all characterised by its assumption that it is possible to identify structures that determine and influence social practices. Karl Marx's historical materialism developed from the 1850s is the prime example and prime source of inspiration of much critical structuralist thought. In orthodox Marxist thought, ideology (here understood as similar, but broader, to concepts such as worldview, belief system and values) was seen as a powerful form of social control through which the members of the ruling capitalist class imposed their ideology on the subordinate working class. In this system, the working class, which accepted the ideology of the capitalists, was said to have a 'false consciousness' because its

worldview served the interests of people other than its own. What determined the dynamics of this capitalist system of subordination were the economic bases. Marxist analysis from this perspective therefore attempted to identify the ways in which the subordinate working class failed to reflect its interests in political action. In essence then, Marxist analysis was about pointing out how the consciousness of subordinate groups was false and in need of a correction. Marxist analyses thus often claimed to know the 'truth' the subordinated groups failed to see.

Such claims can be criticised on two interrelated grounds. First, it is a structuralist and deterministic claim in the sense that the room for human agency is minimal or absent. Yet, at the same time Marxism is regarded as a main source for critical theory aimed at enhancing reflexivity that can be used to empower agency that can change social practices and structures (Derrida, 1994). The second criticism has to do with the truth claims Marxist analyses tend to make. When claiming that the working class has a false consciousness, the analyst places himself /herself in a position outside the 'reality' experienced by members of the subordinated group. Thus, the analyst claims to have the privileged access to truth, knowledge and insight that others do not have. I return to criticism of such truth claims below.

Marxist theory was developed in the 1920s and 1930s by Antonio Gramsci. His notion of 'hegemony' (1971) is a key theoretical concept in contemporary research into media discourses. Although Gramsci's theory of power as exercised as hegemony was originally developed to explain how the dominant class constantly wins and re-wins consent for its rule, his ideas are applied in theories that seek to explain how conditions of dominance and subordination are kept relatively stable. Such theories are often primarily aimed at producing emancipatory knowledge for groups perceived to be subordinated, for example women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities. The notion of hegemony is also useful for the study of media discourses on sustainability. John Fiske's definition of hegemony illustrates what I mean. Fiske (1990, p. 176) in general terms defines hegemony as 'the constant winning and re-winning of the consensus of the majority to the system that subordinates them'. This wide definition makes Gramsci's original notion of hegemony more applicable in the sense that it can be used to analyse other forms of asymmetrical power relations than those found in class relations, for instance, the asymmetrical power relations between environmental movements and the forces and actors they contest. Fiske's definition also implies that the dominant group exercises power not through forcing people

against their conscious will, but through the constant winning of consent for that particular form of rule as the best and most rational, commonsensical and beneficial state of affairs. Furthermore, this definition also implies that hegemonic control, or power, will never be total. As Fiske (p. 176) puts it: 'the social experience of subordinated groups (whether by class, gender, race, or any other factor) constantly contradicts the picture the dominant ideology paints for them of themselves and their social relations'. In other words, attempts to govern will always be met by resistance. Fiske (p. 176) goes on to argue that 'These resistances may be overcome, but they are never eliminated. So any hegemonic victory, any consent that it wins, is necessarily unstable; it can never be taken for granted, so it has to be constantly rewon and struggled over'. Fiske's definition also opens up the possibility that the employment of the practices through which consent is won is not restricted to any particular sphere, process or institution. Rather such practices can be exerted in any relation of civil society. Kate Nash (2000, p. 7) thus considers Gramsci to be the first theorist of 'cultural politics' since 'he sees politics, not as confined to the level of the state, but as taking place in all social relations, representations, and institutions' – in short, the exercise of political power is exerted in the whole culture. *Cultural politics* is in this thesis understood as the politics of signifying practices through which practices and structures are contested and either reproduced or transformed.[2]

Hence, the focus on what in orthodox Marxist theory have been understood as 'ideological processes' has been superseded by a focus on 'cultural politics' that can be analysed by examining its 'discursive practices', which Stuart Hall (1992, p. 291) broadly defines as 'the practice of producing meaning'. As meaning is produced in texts, hegemony or 'relative stabilisations' (Nash 2000, p. 35) of conditions of subordination, can be understood as the product of 'cultural politics' exercised through various textual practices geared at producing truth and certitude.

The focus on cultural politics and textual practices within social theory is a manifestation of intellectual trends that have been exposed to the impacts of post-structuralist thought often associated with French theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard. They developed poststructuralist thought in the wake of the perceived neutralisation of left-wing oppositionals in France, where the flourishing of left-leaning social movements during the 1960s was particularly dramatic. The intellectual confidence of the Left detoriated further when right-leaning conservative and neo-liberal political parties started to win elections in

the early 1980s (for example, Thatcher's Conservative Party in the UK, Reagan's Republican Party in the US and Hawke's 'consensus' Labor Party in Australia). It was in the wake of these developments that an intellectual disaffection with traditional left-wing politics and established ways of Marxist thinking that post-structuralist thought evolved (Nash, 2000; Peet, 1998).

Gregor McLennan (1992, p. 330) summarises the tenets of the Enlightenment legacy that was challenged, or at least seriously questioned, by poststructuralist thought:

- The view that our knowledge of society, like society itself, is *holistic*, *cumulative*, and broadly *progressive* in character.
- That we can attain *rational* knowledge of society.
- That such knowledge is *universal* and thus *objective*.
- That sociological knowledge is both *different* from, and *superior* to, 'distorted' forms of thought, such as ideology, religion, common sense, superstition and prejudice.
- That social scientific knowledge, once validated and acted upon, can lead to mental liberation and social betterment amongst humanity generally.

McLennan furthermore suggests that there are three main responses to this 'post-structuralist challenge'. The first response is to reject, or seriously question the Enlightenment legacy and instead focus on deconstructing all truth claims and developing a 'non-Enlightenment' rationale' for theoretical scientific enquiry. The second response is to defend the Enlightenment legacy in various ways. This position views the first position as potentially dangerously irrationalist, and questions 'the accommodative attitude' (McGuigan, 1999, p. 151) and unnecessary conservatism of much poststructural thought. This sort of criticism has to do with perceived judgemental relativism, and sometimes nihilism, of much poststructural thought. The third response acknowledges that poststructuralism has exposed some deficiencies of the Enlightenment legacy, but has few constructive proposals on how these can be rectified.

I think that it is too simplistic to either reject or defend the Enlightenment legacy *per se*. As Jim McGuigan (1999, p. 33) points out, such polemical positions fail to acknowledge the contradictory nature of modernity and 'its uneven combination of liberating and disciplinary forces'. That is, the production of knowledge according to the Enlightenment legacy does not necessarily lead to

concentration camps like the Soviet Gulag or Nazi Germany, or a total breakdown of the earth's ecosystems. Nor does it necessarily liberate humans from 'distorted' environmentally unsustainable forms of social practices. The point is that it can do both. Yet, the question still remains about what the role of theoretical enquiry, including this thesis, should be. How is it possible to analyse textual practices in the negotiation over sustainability without making truth claims one-self? Fairclough (1995a, pp. 17-19) has responded to criticism of CDA's alleged truth claims. He suggests that in claiming that particular textual practices are geared at producing certain truths, one is not necessarily claiming a privileged access to any absolute truth, but that such practices contribute to the reproduction of certain relations of power. I agree with Fairclough on this distinction between partial and absolute truths. That is not to say that CDA approaches should not be criticised. As CDA approaches (including the approach of this thesis) that seek to identify contradictory tendencies and practices through a focus on discoursal hybridity are reliant upon the description of ideal-type discourses that inevitably are simplistic and reductionist, criticism can (and should) be directed against the description of these ideal-type discourses. Such criticism can be substantiated by both quantitative and qualitative work. Moreover, despite the epistemological relativism attached to all theoretical enquiries, it is my position that debates over sustainability are far too important for academics not to put forward their perspectives. While accepting the epistemological relativism of all theoretical enquiries, I reject forms of judgemental relativism entailing that all discourses are equally good or bad. However, I want to stress that, of course, not all analyses are successful in avoiding making unfounded and unwarranted truth claims. Ultimately the success or failure to provide a convincing analysis depends on the perspective of the reader.

The media as a discourse bearing institution

The media is one of the main discourse-bearing institutions in modern societies. In producing and circulating information and knowledge – and acting as a link between the public and private spheres – the media is a central agency in the governance of society. It is plausibly argued that without the media there could not be a public sphere in the contemporary period, nor large, complex democratic civil societies (Hartley, 1996, pp. 82-85). That means that the majority of public discourses on

matters of social relevance are in liberal democracies likely, or at least expected, to be borne in the media. The media, and then in particular the news media, play the crucial role in circulating, reproducing and developing these public discourses. They act as a discourse bearer and a site for public political debates. Yet, the media can also constrain public debates. That is, the media have a structural effect upon discourses and debates. These structural effects are the results of particular media structures (for example, ownership and organisational structures) and institutional practices (for example, specific journalistic practices and 'news-room cultures'). It must be stressed, however, that discourses can also contribute to the ways in which institutions like the media, the state, the environmental protection sectors, the family and so on, organise. It is the dialectical interaction between discourses and institutional practices that initiate the dynamics that can change or maintain the boundaries of particular discourses in particular institutions, for example media discourses on sustainability.

There are within any society a large number of intermeshing discourses, such as, discourses on punishment, education, environmental protection, maintaining economic stability and so on. Furthermore, discourses legitimate particular regimes of practices and their material and institutional expressions so that we can talk of an 'environmental protection system', a 'health system', a 'social welfare system', an 'economic system' and so on. The existence of these discourses is characterised by its fluid and interrelated state of being (Dean, 1999, p. 21). Hajer (1995, p. 45) has pointed out how this manifests itself in texts dealing with the acid rain problematic: 'a policy document on acid rain may easily involve discursive elements from disciplines as various as physics, tree physiology, terrestrial ecology, mathematical modelling, economic, accounting, engineering, and philosophy'. Thus, media texts dealing with environmental issues, like texts in general, are characterised by their discoursal hybridity. However, it is important to point out that although texts are characterised by their discoursal hybridity, this does not imply that particular discourses cannot be more authoritative than others. On the contrary, discourses, like society in general, are *hierarchically* arranged in a relatively fluid and interrelated state of being. John Hartley (1994, p. 94) explains: 'Discourses are structured and interrelated; some are more prestigious, legitimated and hence 'more obvious' than others, while there are discourses that have an uphill struggle to win any recognition at all'. In other words, the authority and pervasiveness of particular discourses is

14

determined by their prestige and legitimacy. Thus, it seems clear that discourses reproduce or challenge relations of power, and that CDA can describe how power operates. It is my position that most systems and discourses in modern capitalist societies are dominated by the economic system and the discourses working to legitimate it. For example, the education system, the health care system, the commercially organised media, the environmental protection system and their attendant discourses, all operate according to what is perceived to be rational economic discourses. It therefore seems misleading to focus upon asymmetrical power relations, for example between environmental movements and the discourses they contest, without taking into consideration the function of the articulated discourses within the wider capitalist economic system (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 18).

For my purpose of analysing media discourses on sustainability the assumption that the economic system and its discourses dominate other sub-systems and sub-discourses have two serious implications. First, as discussed in the Introduction, the media is ascribed a central role in the mediation of the risks that are supposed to stimulate the sort of reflexivity that challenge and potentially change discourses and the institutional practices and structures they work to legitimise. I therefore need to take into account how the media-structures and institutional practices of the media constrain or enable the production of, and negotiation between, competing discourses on sustainability. This I will do in the next section. Second, I must to take into account how discourses of the economy relate to discourses on sustainability. The reproduction of the economic system is more than often given priority over the reproduction of other sub-systems like, for instance, the environmental protection system, that are perceived to be of less importance because they cannot function effectively if the economic system functions ineffectively. That is, if there is no economic growth, or if the growth rate is slowing down, it is impossible to realise sustainable development. This tendency has been described and confirmed by theorists analysing different contexts (for an overview of analysis of different national contexts see Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000c). The arguments this prioritising rely on are being contested on several grounds. In Chapter Two I provide ideal-type descriptions of competing discourses on sustainability.

15

On the dialectics of media discourses on sustainability

Inspired by Marx's concept that the ruling class's ideas are the ruling ideas of the whole society, Theodor Adorno and Max Horxheimer (1979) in 1944 described the media as 'cultural industries' that desensitised and 'brainwashed' their audiences, all in the pursuit of profit. Along similar lines Jürgen Habermas (1996, p. 59) in 1989 argued that the democratic function of the media is being undermined in a process of 'refeudalisation' where the public sphere is dominated and manipulated by a small number of large and powerful actors. Although recent audience research (see for example Bordwell, 1985; Radway, 1995; 1996; Turner, 1997) and theorisation of power as not just repressive but also productive (see for example Foucault, 1991) has exposed the flaws of these rather pessimistic arguments, this by no means implies that the problem these analysts helped raise is solved. After all, most media outlets are commercially organised, and there is good reason to believe that this affects the content of the output – no less than we would expect of wholly government-controlled media.

Nicholas Garnham (2000) provides a useful strategy by which to analytically approach the media as 'cultural industries', or the political economy of the media. He distinguishes between two forms of political power operating in the process of producing meaning in media discourses. One form of power is structural and is:

> concerned with the ways in which a market system co-ordinated by
> [...] the non-linguistic steering medium of money, allocates resources
> and constrains behaviour in ways that are not under the intentional
> control of individual or group agency. (p. 39)

This is a structuralist claim in the sense that it implies that the structural determining effects of the capitalist economy produces systemic results which no single actor planned or desired, such as stock market collapses, inflation and other phenomena associated with business cycles of different sorts. Also included in these unintended systemic results, some would argue, is environmental degradation (see Chapter Three). However, as Garnham points out, for these systemic results to occur, economic actors have to make choices that sustain the structures of the capitalist economic system. Garnham (p. 42) explains: 'the system only works in the structurally determining ways that it does so long as human agents continue to act in specific ways that they see as rational'. It is this creation of what is perceived as

irrational/rational in a given context that is the result of cultural politics. This means that agents are able to exert power on the structures (and *vice versa*) that, through their enabling or constraining effect on agency, govern social practices. This last point relates to Garnham's description of the second form of power exerted by the media. The second form of power is 'that exercised by economic agents within these overall structural constraints, but where the ownership or control of resources provides some room for intentional manoeuvre' (p. 39). 'In short', says Garnham (p. 39), 'the study of the exercise of economic power is a classic field for the study of social theory's central problem, the relation between structure and agency'.

Pierre Bourdieu (1998) provides a way of grasping this dialectical relationship between structure and agency as it occurs in media discourse. He argues that the structural constraints on media discourse are produced and sustained *in* and *by* the 'journalistic field' that consists of those actors who comprise the media institution (i.e. media professionals) and of actors that engage in debates in the media (commentators, columnists, letters to the editor and so on) (p. 2). Moreover, what conditions the ways in which actors exercise power within the social structures in which they are embedded, is not only capital and resources, but also what Bourdieu has termed 'habitus' that can be defined as 'a practical sense of 'the game', a set of dispositions to act, which is determined by structure of positions in the field and the particular social trajectory (and history) of that agent' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 101).

Still, where the boundaries of media discourses on sustainability (or any other topic for that matter) lie, remains an open question. It seems clear that a media outlet that is an actor in a capitalist economic system based on market competition is dependent on profits in order to sustain and maintain its production and existence. This has several implications for the ways in which the mass media organise their production. Most media outlets that are commercially organised have advertising as their primary source of income. For these media outlets it is imperative to have high, or at least consistent, audience ratings in order to ensure profitability. Broadly speaking, this aim can be accomplished in two ways. One way is to reduce production costs, for example by reducing staff and cutting back on long-term investigative reporting that produces a relatively small number of stories. The other way is to accommodate the content to what is perceived to be the 'preferred language' of the majority of the audience. In this way media outlets minimise the

17

risk of losing their audiences by producing content in unfamiliar and unpredictable frames. Consequently, there is also a range of conventions and rules that media professionals routinely adopt. It is for this reason that media output is usually presented in familiar and expected ways. What these adopted conventions and rules are, primarily depends on the genre through which a particular text is expressed. Discourses can therefore be said to be enacted in practice as genres that can be defined as a way of producing meaning in the semiotic mode (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 193). Just as discursive conventions work to obtain a relative stabilisation of a particular regime of governance, generic conventions work to obtain a relative stabilisation of a particular mode of articulation of semiotic elements. Genres can either sustain or reform the ways in which knowledge about particular topics is represented. In this way genres can constrain or enable the 'meaning-potential' of a given text, and thereby also impose a structure on the debate of which the text is a part. This means that generic conventions placed upon texts dealing with sustainability can either be obeyed or resisted, the result being that the boundaries of discourses on sustainability can either be reproduced or changed. Thus, the development of hybrid discourses expressed through generic hybridisations can potentially redraw or maintain the discursive boundaries of social practices, including environmental practices.

The permeability or rigidness (Fairclough 1995a, p. 12) of the boundaries of a particular discourse is dependent on the effectiveness of the cultural politics working to legitimate or de-legitimate it. Above all is it the capacity to use knowledge about social practices, including environmental journalistic, in order to change them (in other words reflexivity) what determines the effectiveness of cultural politics. It must be stressed, however, that journalistic practices working to either empower or neutralise the environmental movements usually occur within specific 'normalised' generic conventions that for commercially organised media outlets are primarily profit-driven. For this reason media discourses that are working to hegemonise the conventions of particular institutional arrangements, including arrangements to protect the environment, can accommodate and incorporate elements of environmentalist protest discourses into themselves, while at the same time representing themselves as fundamentally changed. This potential of dominant discourses on the economy to appropriate environmental counter-discourses opens up the possibility that environmental movements can be perceived as both

neutralised as well as empowered. It is debatable to what extent the environmental movements have succeeded in their original stated aims. Some politically important elements of environmentalist discourses might have become institutionalised, but there are still social movements that refuse this process exactly because they fear a neutralisation (or co-option) of a critique of society they perceive as necessary to obtain needed fundamental changes. Although there might be international consensus that the contemporary pattern of development is unsustainable, it seems clear that there is still a long way to go before sustainable development is actually realised. Thus, while there might be some discourses on sustainability that have obtained a hegemonic status, they are also contested. The policy and action they imply is also resisted or rejected.

This 'openness' of both the political impacts and programmatic success of the environmental movements and the environmental journalistic practices (and social practices in general) in relation to established discursive conventions (enacted through commercially induced generic conventions) make this thesis significant in at least two ways. It can not only provide a way of reading media discourses on sustainability, but it can also enhance the self-reflexivity about the consequences of either obeying or resisting the commercially induced generic conventions to which actors operating within the journalistic field are often subjected.

For actors engaged in environmental journalism this self-reflexivity appears to be of great importance in a time when ever more unexpected environmental disasters surface and when the protest politics of environmental social movements question the sustainability of existing institutional arrangements. Similar to news in general, Allen, Adam and Carter (2000) in their survey of research on environmental news coverage suggest that these are supposed to be the main generic conventions of commercially organised environmental-news discourse: (1) The focus is on the spectacular and event based. That is, environmental news is event-sensitive rather than issue-sensitive, the result being that potential invisible/immaterial, long-term and accumulating environmental problems are given a lower newsworthiness and thus less media coverage. (2) The news text is structured as a story, with a beginning, middle and end, as well as easily identifiable protagonists that take the character of the 'hero' and the 'villain', as in a fight between 'good' and 'evil'. (3) Uncertainty among the scientific community about complex environmental problems is presented as certainty in order to make the content intelligible to a wider audience.

Thus, it can be inferred that there is 'institutional pressure to claim certitude where none exists' (McGuigan, 1999, p. 147). The result of this simplification of complex information about environmental problems is that the idea that 'sound' or 'reasonable' scientific knowledge of some sort will solve complex environmental problems is to varying extents naturalised. Such a 'tech-fix' discourse is pervasive throughout Western industrialised cultures. Consider, for example, TV advertisements for four-wheel drive vehicles. Typically the cars are presented in almost magical terms. No natural obstacle is too big for leading-edge four-wheel drive technology to overcome: cars are able to 'fly' up steep mountains, 'swim' deep rivers and 'cruise' through sandy deserts. The actors in the ads radiate confidence, optimism and happiness. Thus, through the use of new technology it becomes possible to take control over both nature and life in general. This suggests that there are no limits to growth that cannot be overcome by technology (here in the 'hardware' meaning of the term).

Summary

It is against the background of Beck's sociology of reflexivity that I analyse media discourses for their discoursal hybridity. I have emphasised that discourses of the economy dominate other discourses. I have inferred that this dominance manifests itself in generic conventions of commercially organised environmental news discourse. These generic conventions then condition production of knowledge about environmental problems of the modern industrialised consumer society. Yet, the existence of particular regimes of journalistic practices (and social practices in general) ought to be understood as both intentional actions as well as conditioned by the structures in which these practices are embedded. This means that actors operating in the journalistic field are given the potential to be able to choose whether or not to obey to the generic conventions of commercially organised environmental news media discourse. It is this potential for actors to, through reflection, to reform the structures that constrain their agency, that makes the sort of critical discourse analytical enquiry this thesis aspires to significant. In other words, what underpins my approach is the assumption that discourses are social constructions and therefore open to change.

Part II: Competing Discourses on Sustainability

In the wake of economic recession in the 1970s there were calls to replace the more regulated post-war (Keynesian) modes of regulation. In most cases neo-liberal free market ideas of economic governance came to be used as guidelines for economic governance and the ongoing process of restructuring the global economic system. The contestation over the meaning of this neo-liberal form of globalisation seems to have gained in intensity in relatively recent times, with several mass protests against multilateral institutions (both inter-governmental institutions and corporations). Growing economic inequalities, an accelerating global economic recession (at the time of writing), the failure of corporations to voluntarily self-regulate within the norms of formal laws (think of, for example, the 2002 Enron and WorldCom scandals) and a perceived failure to further halt environmental degradation, are all developments and events that fuel critiques – including environmentalist critiques – against neo-liberal free-market ideas of what globalisation is and should be.

Because discourses do not exist as empirically comprehensible phenomena, I will in the following chapters (Two and Three) provide ideal-type descriptions of what can be considered competing discourses on the sustainability of a neo-liberal form of globalisation. This will enable me to analyse the discoursal hybridity of media texts dealing with sustainability issues.

Chapter Two: The Contestable Meaning of Globalisation

Neo-liberal discourses

The theoretical roots of neo-liberal discourses are often traced back to the classical economics of Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). These were later revised by so-called free-market economists such as Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992) and Milton Friedman (born 1912), thus making neo-liberal approaches modified versions of neo-classical economics (Heywood, 1997, p. 47). The central assumption of neo-classical economics is the theory that markets self-regulate and tend towards equilibrium. The self-regulating tendency of markets is often explained by the theory of perfect competition. This theory assumes that if actors are equal in terms of available resources and posses equal information, they will operate in self-interested rational ways that ensure that the exploitation of resources (both natural and human) will correlate with the wants and needs of people, including 'post-materialistic' wants such as environmental protection.[3] According to this perspective market forces determine supply and demand and the government's role is to ensure that the economic development correlates with the environmental concerns of people. Regulations that inhibit the forces of the market to work in positive and creative ways should therefore be dismantled. This idea corresponds with the alleged economic 'liberal' outlook of neo-liberalism.

There are two basic ideas that are central to the 'free-market' discourse described above (Heywood, 1997, p. 47). First, individuals are rational agents. That is, individuals are believed to be self-interested and rational actors that act in ways that ensure that the supply of goods and services correlate with demand, including demands for environmental protection by environmental movements. The prototype of such a rational individual is often referred to as the 'economic man', following the work of Adam Smith. Second, the forces of the market are essentially creative and productive. If left alone, market competition will deliver socially, economically and environmentally 'progressive' results, including the results demanded by the environmental movements. This point is of course related to the first.

In Australia the Waterfront dispute of 1997-98 and the ongoing privatisation of Telstra are cases in which neo-liberal free-market discourses were articulated. These two events took place (the debate around further privatisation of Telstra is an

ongoing issue) during the Howard Liberal/National coalition government, which can be characterised as being strongly committed to a neo-liberal agenda of deregulation, competition policy and privatisation of public services. In light of the theoretical contributions from Alan Scott (1997) and Andrew Leyshon (1997), I will, in the following, review some of the arguments put forward in newspaper comments about these two cases. The reason I have chosen these two cases is that the textual practices employed in the excerpts that are analysed are similar to the textual practices that are analysed in Part III.[4]

The Waterfront Dispute

Scott (1997) suggests that globalisation should be viewed as an outcome of a neo-liberal idea of a free market that is realised in policies characterised by privatisation and public expenditure cuts. He (p. 10) explains the prominence of neo-liberalism the following way:

> contemporary neo-liberalism has been successful because it has persuaded many politicians, and perhaps voters also, that the direction of causality runs from economic development to political response and thus presents itself merely as an objective or at least neutral diagnosis rather than as a contributor to the emergence of the very conditions it purports to analyse.

Scott suggests a reversal of the direction of causality: not from economic development to political response but from social constructions to economic policies and relations. Thus, for Scott (pp.10-11) neo-liberalism is an 'intrinsically globalising project' that 'by convincing political actors, who may not be fully aware of the political and social consequences, that they should deregulate markets, if for no other reasons than that they are persuaded that there is no alternative'.

This kind of 'no alternative' rhetoric was evident in the Australian Waterfront dispute of 1997-1998 (Brodschöll, 2000). For example, Chris Corrigan, chief executive of the Patrick Stevedoring Company, after announcing that the sacked unionised workforce of 1400 waterfront workers would be replaced with 'a new workforce, which like most Australians wants to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' argued that 'this initiative will improve dramatically Australia's international competitiveness and open the nation's gateways to world's best practice' (*The Australian*, 1998a).[5] Earlier Corrigan had suggested the reason why the unionised

workers were sacked: 'What I am against are the dreadfully unproductive activities and the rorts that are going on this country's wharves [...] they have been going on for decades' (*The Australian*, 1998b). Thus, the sackings were attempted to be legitimated by claims that the sacking was the best, and perhaps the only, way to 'open the nation's gateways to world's best practice' and thereby increase international competitiveness.

This example illustrates attempts to naturalise certain policies and strategies by referring to inevitable and uncontrollable processes of economic globalisation. The example also illustrates how those with different perspectives are de-legitimated and ascribed illegitimate values.

The privatisation of Telstra

Leyshon (1997, p. 133) criticises empirically oriented social theorists for having failed to analyse globalisation: '[they] have been happy to attend to the material outcomes of globalisation, they have failed to appreciate that the process of globalisation is both material and discursive at one and the same time'. Leyshon suggests that this overwhelming material focus has reduced the causes of globalisation and narrowed the area of debate. Leyshon (p. 143) moreover contends that these material-focused discourses of globalisation often are produced by 'academic specialists in business, administration and management theory, as well as large numbers of 'hero-managers', usually successful heads or former heads of successful companies, who write books and articles containing their recipes for business success'. Thus, '*a new managerial discourse*' (Thrift, 1996, in Leyshon, 1997) has been created. The discourse has its material roots in the emerging economic recession in the 1970s, which introduced 'new levels of uncertainty and unpredictability into economic life'. The outcome was a discourse that stressed 'the need for adaptability, manoeuvrability and the ability for organisations '*to go with the flow*''(Leyshon 1997 p. 144).

This managerial discourse seems to have manifested itself in the debate over the privatisation of Telstra (Brodschöll, 2000).[6] For example, a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial (12.2.2000) commented on Telstra's announcement of its intention to cut its workforce by 10,000 jobs the following way:

> In order to remain competitive, the telecommunications giant must
> continually adjust its strategic approach. That will inevitably mean job
> losses, as technological improvements and aggressive price
> competition from smaller call-providers force Telstra to find and
> implement efficiencies.   (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2000)

Another example is an editorial (10.3.2000) in the *The Australian*:

> Dr. Switkowski [CEO of Telstra] understands that for Telstra to
> survive as a substantial player in the new economy, it must adopt the
> corporate pathways of the era. [...]. But he remains hostage to the
> political process – a process that is not particularly alive to the
> implications of the new economy, one which relates to the Telstra of
> the old economy, a public service Telstra.   (*The Australian*, 2000)

These examples illustrate the power of a sort of 'managerial discourse' that asserts

that it is a 'must' 'to go with the flow', whose strength and direction in this case

seems to be determined by assumed changes in the global economy. In this way the

complexity of globalisation is reduced and globalising processes are represented as

inevitable and homogenous.

These two cases are examples of how neo-liberal discourses of globalisation

and its attendant polices of deregulation, privatisation and competition orientated

governance, are justified by the contestable neo-liberal 'axiom' that national

economies must be internationally competitive in order to maintain the welfare and

living standards of the population. What Scott (1997) and Leyshon (1997) have in

common is their emphasis on discursive aspects of economic globalisation, and their

call for reversal of causality: that the direction of causality goes from political action

to economic development and that it is not economic development, caused by

technological advances, market forces or time/space compression, that determines

certain political responses. In other words, they suggest that globalisation is rather to

be understood in terms of intentional actions rather than being something determined

by forces beyond social control.

Left-liberal discourses

The theoretical roots of the Left are usually traced back to Marx and theoretical

enquiry inspired by his work (see Chapter One). In contrast to the assumptions of

neo-classical economics, in left-liberal discourses markets are viewed as destructive

entities that need to be regulated in order for them not to operate in socially or

environmentally unsustainable ways. Neo-liberals are, among other criticisms, accused of having misinterpreted, and/or misrepresented the seminal work of classical economists such as Smith and Ricardo (see Korten, 1995, pp. 76-80) in ways that omit what is perceived as utopian ideas of perfect competition. Because actors operating in markets do not possess perfect knowledge and equal resources, they do not operate in self-interested and rational ways that make markets tend towards a self-regulating equilibrium characterised by harmony in its widest sense: between people and between people and the natural environment. If left unregulated by the mechanisms of democratically governed institutions and bodies, actors will instead act in opportunistic ways that make markets tend towards centralisation of power in the hands of those forces that have the most resources at their disposal. The result is inequality in terms of wealth distribution and exposure to risks often attached to environmental hazards such as air and water pollution, drought and floods caused by disrupted ecosystems and chemicals in foodstuff.

In a survey of the global resistance against a neo-liberal form of globalisation, Amory Starr (2000) describes how these social movements construct what she calls 'the enemy' – the corporate led globalisation – and how they envision an alternative future and form of globalisation. She suggests there are three basic modes of protest:

'Contestation and reform'

This is the most explicit form of protest and the most moderate response to globalisation. Movements in this mode use existing formal democratic channels of protest such as mobilising international agencies, seeking national legislation, demonstrating and boycotting. The movements question the legitimacy of neo-liberal policies 'to roll back the state' in the name of international competitiveness, as they perceive this to put 'profit before people' and the environment. The focus of these movements is to attempt to 'restrain globalisation' by recovering the regulatory powers of states over corporations or getting corporations to self-regulate. Movements in this category include: movements fighting structural adjustment, peace and human rights movements, land reform movements, the explicit anti-corporate movements and Cyberpunk movements. What the movements in this category have in common is that they perceive 'corporate rule' as wrong because it is undemocratic.

'Globalisation from below'

This is the most popular current discourse of anti-globalisation. Movements in this mode are trying to realise a different type of globalisation based on new international democratic structures and mechanisms that are participatory, just and populist. Thus, globalisation here is like the 'contestation and reform' mode of protest, and is also basically seen as an undemocratic project. This project can be resisted and changed by forming powerful global alliances that make corporations and governments accountable to ordinary people instead of elites. This approach is 'consonant with Marxist and international humanitarian hopes: Workers of the world – that is, all those dispossessed by the ravages of corporate hegemony – unite and rebuild the world!' (Starr, p. 83). Movements in this category include: environmentalism, labour, socialism, anti-free trade agreements movements and Central American Zapatismo.

'Delinking, Relocalization, Sovereignty'

This is the most radical mode of protest, and movements working within this mode want fundamental changes to the global economic system. They are seeking to 'delink' localities and communities from the global economy and rebuild sustainable small-scale societies in which large corporations have no role at all. It is the emphasis on the vital and urgent need for economies to be sensitive to their ecological bases and limits that contribute to these movements' desire to delink. For such 'relocalizations', as Starr (p. 111) calls them, to work, local political autonomy and sovereignty needs to be reasserted. Movements in this category include: anarchism, sustainable development movements, small business movements, sovereignty movements and religious nationalisms.

Among the fifteen movements Starr surveyed, the anti-free trade agreements movements and anti-corporate movements were found to be those whose critiques were shared by the most of the other movements. It is the multiplicity of perceived 'threats' produced by the free trade agreements and corporations that produce a movement of multiplicity whose concerns converge. This argument is based on Starr's reading of the discourses found in a variety of texts produced by the movements included in her survey.[7] The next two sections look closer at these two movements whose critiques of globalisation unify the anti-globalisation movement. While these movements do not only mobilise around 'green' issues, they constitute

key elements of the storylines that unite them. Therefore, the focus is on describing environmentalist aspects of these storylines.

The Anti-Corporate Movements

What Starr calls the 'explicit anti-corporate movements' aim to limit corporate power by forcing them to self-regulate or by recovering the regulatory powers of states over corporations that are perceived to have been undermined by the neo-liberal de-regulatory trend that gained momentum in the early 1980s. A good example of how corporations might be forced to self-regulate, is provided by Naomi Klein (2000, p. 431) in her description of an attempt by Shell Petroleum in an advertisement found in *Business Week* (5.4.1999) to present itself as 'green' and socially responsible:

> "Exploit or Explore?" asks the glossy Shell Ad [below the text of the ad].
> Every business wants to make its mark. However, in the sensitive regions of the world, like our tropical rainforests and our oceans, the scars of industrialisation are all too apparent. Our shared climate and finite natural resources concern us as never before, and there's no room for an attitude of "It's in the middle of nowhere, so who's to know?" Time and again at Shell, we're discovering the rewards of respecting the environment when doing business. If we're exploring for oil and gas reserves in sensitive areas of the world, we consult widely with the different local and global interests groups. Working together, our aim is to ensure that bio-diversity in each location is preserved. We also try to encourage these groups to monitor our progress so that we can review and improve the ways in which we work.

Klein writes about this advertisement:

> Rather than stemming the flow of criticism, Shell's extravagant spending on public relations [a $32 million marketing campaign]...repeatedly rejected – sparked its own kind of backlash: a backlash against "greenwash".

After the launching of this campaign, says Klein, a postcard campaign was launched by environmental activists urging Shell's executives to "Spend the money cleaning up your mess, not your image!". Activists in London threw green paint on the doors of the company's international headquarters in order to give them a taste of their own "greenwash" (2000, p. 432). Another example of how attempts to 'greenwash' are

being responded to, is the way in which the CorpWatch website operates. CorpWatch gives out 'Greenwash Awards' to corporations 'that put more money, time and energy into slick PR campaigns aimed at promoting their eco-friendly images, than they do to actually protecting the environment' (CorpWatch, 2002). This is how CorpWatch describes 'greenwashed' ads in general:

> You've seen the ads. Lush green forests. Stunning birds of prey in flight. Humpback whales breaching. Pristine streams glimmering in the sunlight. All photographed beautifully and reproduced at great expense. And all brought to you by major oil, chemical, nuclear and biotechnology companies. In fact, it's often the world's most polluting corporations that have developed the most sophisticated techniques to communicate their message of corporate environmentalism. Meanwhile, the climate is changing, communities are being devastated, forests are disappearing, species are going extinct.

There is an important insight to be drawn from these examples. The attempts by corporations to neutralise resistance through 'greenwashing' by presenting themselves as legitimate, socially responsible institutions are being resisted and met with counter-discourses produced by actors who claim to have knowledge that at least matches that of the corporations and governments. They claim to have seen through 'the greenwash spin', and they claim to know the truth about what 'really is going on' and why this is environmentally unsustainable.

The anti-free trade agreement movements

The anti-free trade agreement movements belong to the second set of anti-globalisation movements: 'globalisation from below'. They highlight the insight that globalisation is neither inevitable nor beyond social control. Multilateral institutions perceived to be further attempting to liberalise trade are the 'enemies' of these movements whose protagonists have participated in protests against institutions that all claim to be able to control globalisation, for instance, the World Economic Forum (WEF), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTTA) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) (Starr, 2000, pp. 98-103). The anti-free trade agreement movements perceive free trade, unrestricted markets and limited state intervention as inconsistent with efforts to protect the environment. They claim there is an inherent incompatibility between these two goals (O'Brien, Goetz, Scholte, & Williams, 2000, pp. 146-147). Thus,

trade policy has become intertwined with environmental preferences. Some of the movements in this mode want to dismantle the WTO and other multilateral economic institutions, while others want reform towards more transparent and democratic regimes that integrate environmental and social concerns in a convincing and credible way. The anti-free trade movements had a major victory in their successful halting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 1998 Multilateral Agreement on Investment agreement (MAI) (Starr 2000, p. 100; Klein, 2000, p. 443). The MAI agreement was designed to impose international rules on foreign direct investment. The failure to launch a new round of negotiations at the WTO Seattle meeting (November/December 1999) was also proclaimed a victory by some elements of the anti-globalisation movement. However, it is uncertain to what degree the protests affected the failed outcome of the meeting.

Chapter Three: Sustainable Development Through Ecological Modernisation?

Ecological modernisation

The discourse of 'ecological modernisation' has been identified as a dominant way of conceiving environmental problems in Western industrialised countries (Gouldson & Murphy, 1998; Hajer, 1995, 1996; Jamison 2001, pp. 123-124; Young, 2000). In so far as levels of aggregate production and consumption in Western industrialised countries contribute to environmental degradation on a global scale, it is worthwhile examining this discourse in more detail. Moreover, given their productive, technological and financial capacity, these countries are expected to play a leading role in the way towards sustainable development. This 'differentiated responsibility' principle is also assumed to underpin the international consensus around the sustainable development agenda formally endorsed at the "Earth Summit" in Rio 1992 (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000b).

Hajer's description of ecological modernisation is perhaps the best known. In general terms he defines ecological modernisation as 'the discourse that recognises the structural character of the environmental problematic but nonetheless assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalise the care for the environment' (1995, p. 25). In other words, the discourse recognises the environmental crises as evidence of a fundamental omission in the workings of the institutions of modern industrial societies. Yet, unlike large factions of the anti-globalisation movements whose critiques are described in Chapter Two, this new approach suggests that environmental problems can be solved through existing institutional arrangements. The discourse has three characteristics: first, it makes environmental degradation calculable (through for example 'cost-benefit' analysis). Second, environmental protection is portrayed as a 'positive-sum game' equating pollution with inefficiency. A third and related characteristic is that the discourse assumes that economic growth and the resolution of environmental problems can in principle be reconciled. Stephen Young (2000, p. 27) also contends that the discourse of ecological modernisation would prioritise preserving short-term economic interests over preserving the environment. This has also often been found to be the case (Lafferty & Meadowcroft, 2000c).

The ecological modernisation discourse is also embraced by Anthony Giddens' 'Third Way' discourse that also claims to be able to reconcile traditionally antagonistic themes such as the old political divisions of right and left (Giddens, 2000).[8] The emergence of 'Third Way' discourses has been identified in several Western industrialised states, but they are usually associated with the discourses articulated by the UK's prime minister Tony Blair, German Bundeskansler Gerhard Shröder and former US president Bill Clinton. Like the neo-liberal discourses described in Chapter Two, as well as the ecological modernisation discourse (see below), the Third Way discourse also arguably stems from discourses on globalisation, or more specifically, discourses on changes in the global economy (Fairclough, 2000; Giddens, 1998, 2000). Third Way discourses have been criticised for constructing globalisation as a presupposition that naturalises neo-liberal regimes of practices in ways that inhibit deliberation among audiences (Dahrendorf, 1996; Fairclough, 2000). Third Way advocates on the other hand, such as Giddens (1998, 2000), reject the claim that the Third Way is neo-liberalism in 'disguise' and seek to reform institutional arrangements, including importantly environmental regimes of governance and democratic structures, in the face of 'real' changes caused by processes of globalisation.

Hajer (1995) suggests four reasons why ecological modernisation is appealing to governments. First, it presented itself to be more effective than the 'ex post remedial strategy' (such as placing filters on chimneys and drains, and repairing or compensating for environmental damage) of the 1970s that was considered to be ineffective because of its excessive regulations that were judged to have failed to halt further environmental degradation. Secondly, ecological modernisation presented a 'win-win' solution to what previously was perceived as a 'win-lose' problem. With a suitable regulatory set-up, ecological modernisation is believed to have the potential to stimulate innovation in methods of production and transport, industrial organisation, consumer goods and thus lead the whole of industrial society into a new round of industrial innovation. A third and related point is that the discourse did not challenge the prevailing social order. In doing so it also provided a strategy to neutralise the radical environmental cultural critique of the 1970s. Fourth, the ecological modernisation discourse was consistent with concurrent neo-liberal ideas typified by 'de-regulatory' policies that gained popularity in the 1980s. Hajer (p. 32) says: 'Being the antithesis of the existing administrative judicial system, ecological

32

modernization could mesh with the deregulatory move that typified public administrative thought in the early 1980s'. According to this line of reasoning one should expect that established environmental regulatory mechanisms should have been eroded over the last two decades. However, as William Lafferty and James Meadowcroft (2000a, p. 452) point out, this has not been the case. Governmental intervention in the environmental policy domain has stayed essentially intact and, if anything, the reach of agencies and ministries has been extended. Also corporations have extended the reach and range of governmental interventions aimed at dealing with environmental concerns. Thus, the environmental policy domain represents a major inconsistency in the 'deregulatory' neo-liberal discourses that have prevailed in Western industrialised countries over the two last decades. However, this does not necessarily weaken Hajer's argument. His focus is rather on the qualitative aspect of environmental policies than on the quantity of governmental intervention. The developments Hajer envisages might have taken place at the same time that governments and corporations extended their reach in the environmental policy domain. Instead of focusing on how states 'deregulate', it is perhaps better to focus on how they 're-regulate' and which actors are given more power as a result of such practices. Or in the words of Hajer (1996, p. 247): 'the key question is about which social projects are furthered under the flag of environmental protection'.

Hajer (1995) traces the roots of ecological modernisation to rising public discontent in the 1970s with the perceived failure of governments' strategies (typically characterised by 'end of pipe' approaches) to solve environmental problems. Hajer sketches out two different perspectives that emerged in response to this failure. On one hand there was a critique of such approaches that called for a bigger input of science and technology. According to Hajer is it this technocratic response that eventually gained dominance in the negotiation with other actors in the policy making process. On the other hand, key factions of the environmental movement 'embedded their concern in a much broader discontent with the developments in capitalist consumer societies' (p. 87). This response to the failure of governments to deal with environmental problems in the 1970s therefore often resulted in calls for fundamental changes in institutional arrangements. Like contemporary anti-globalisation movements, they called for more participation in decision-making, re-ordering of priorities that would correct the 'anthropocentric' bias in environmental discourse, and re-definitions of key problems that would

appreciate 'the beauty and organic principles that could be derived from natural processes' (p. 89). Moreover, the technocratic response was seen as part of the problem and not the solution.

Hajer emphasises two divergent parallel developments in his explanation of how these 'tech-fix' and environmentalist perspectives came to be reconciled in the ecological modernisation discourse. It was during the 1970s that environmental movements managed to put environmental issues on the political agenda. It was also the time when radical factions of the movement broke with 'lobbying and interest-groups politics'. These factions resisted being institutionalised in the sense that they 'neither wanted nor were able to negotiate their demands with the state'. The questions at stake were too important, and like contemporary factions of the anti-globalisation movements they feared a neutralisation of their critique. At the same time there was also a parallel development within the 'newly institutionalised environmental expert organizations' (p. 90), such as the OECD, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). In these 'policy-making institutes' a new language of the environmental problem was being devised. While these two spheres were initially separated, Hajer argues that they started to converge around the discourse of ecological modernisation from 1979. This convergence Hajer exemplifies through an exploration of the development of the negotiation over the nuclear energy issue.

Nuclear energy was *the* emblematic issue of the environmental discourse of the 1970s.[9] For the radical elements of the environmental movement it symbolised all their fears. It was technologically complex and hazardous, and the reliance on science and experts was crucial. This reliance upon 'expert systems' was seen as a totalitarian trend that could threaten the freedom of the individual. Nuclear issues thus became a metaphor for all that was wrong in modern industrial consumer society. What followed was a wave of anti-nuclear mass demonstrations in Western industrialised countries. The clashes that occurred between demonstrators and the police at some of these demonstrations further reinforced the view that nuclear power and its attendant totalitarian traits were a threat to democracy and individual freedom. On the other hand, for the technocrats, nuclear energy presented a solution to the looming energy crisis that was accelerated when the OPEC countries raised oil prices in the early 1970s. Thus, in the late 1980s radical protest against nuclear

energy ebbed (as did the anti-nuclear weapons movements with the end of the cold war), and with it went the radical environmentalist critique. Hajer points out that the environmental social movement itself did not evaporate. What happened was a change in the strategy and structure of the movement. The focus was now on presenting practical alternatives. Technology was no longer the focus of critique, but increasingly came to be seen as 'the discourse of solutions' (p. 93). Thus, environmental activists came to play a new role; they became experts in diverse fields, as for example, engineering, economics, media theory and marketing. As Hajer says: 'The problem-makers of the 1970s had become the problem-solvers of the 1980s' (p. 94).

Hajer suggests that the fact that the environmental movement was caught up in the economic recession in the Western industrialised countries in the 1970s is the most important single factor explaining why convergence around the discourse of ecological modernisation occurred. Because of the recession, environmental concerns were replaced by concerns over inflation and mass unemployment. No longer could a discussion of 'selective growth' prevail, and in order to maintain the credibility of its discourses the environmental movement 'had to find ways to reconcile economic restructuring with environmental care, or so it seemed'. Hajer says:

> Of course within the radical political discourse the argument could have been to blame the same practices for both the environmental and economic problems. This in fact obviously happened, but somehow that claim became marginalized in environmental discourse. (p. 94)

Furthermore, referring to his analysis of OECD papers and what he found to be 'the underlying arguments that were important in the OECD attempt to push ecological modernization to the fore', he contends that:

> The positive-sum game format that became characteristic of ecological modernization was simply born out of necessity: for environmental policies to survive they needed to work with the grain of the time. What is more, environmental politics was not only positioned as non-contradictory to economic policy, it was also suggested as a potential instrument for economic recovery. (p. 98)

35

This is one of the ways in which the claim that the same practices that caused both the economic recession and the environmental problems became marginalised in environmental discourse. It would indeed seem senseless to work against 'the grain of the time'. Moreover, it would also be irresponsible to work against a practice that was 'suggested as a potential instrument for economic recovery'. Recalling the attempts to legitimise the Australian government's neo-liberal agenda of re-regulating the waterfront and privatising Telstra, it can be inferred that neo-liberal discourses on globalisation have also played a crucial role in the legitimation of eco-modernist approaches to environmental problems since the early 1980s.

As discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, while different actors might agree that a shift towards a neo-liberal eco-modernist approach to environmental policy has indeed taken place, they are likely to hold quite distinct views on the meaning of this shift. Hajer (1996) sketches out two antagonistic ideal-type discourses on ecological modernisation: ecological modernisation as 'institutional learning' and ecological modernisation as a 'technocratic project'.[10] In order to advance the understanding of the negotiation over sustainability in media discourses, the following further examines what characterises these two competing discourses.

Ecological-modernisation-as-institutional-learning

This is the most widespread discourse on ecological modernisation. The political conflict over how to tackle environmental problems is seen as a learning process, and the politics of the environment is perceived as 'renewed' because of the governing institutions constructive and dialectical relationship with the environmental movements (Hajer, 1996). That is, I want to suggest, ecological modernisation is seen as the historical product of the democratic negotiation of opposing social forces. The convergence around the discourse of ecological modernisation is thus seen as a sign of maturation and 'progressive' institutionalisation of the environmental movement. The central assumption of this discourse is that the dominant institutions can learn and produce meaningful change. Thus, environmental problems are seen as conceptual problems that will be resolved by integration of an ecological rationality into the policy-making of all actors involved in potentially unsustainable practices (Hajer, 1996). Consider, for instance, how this editorial of the *Lufthansa Magazine* (2001) welcomes its passengers:

Welcome on board
Sustainability is an important criterion increasingly coloring consumer
decisions. People want to know whether the companies whose products
they purchase are actively striving for resource-preserving production.
Sustainability has recently even become a touchstone for creating
investment strategies. The topic is addressed in an article in *Balance*,
the new Lufthansa publication for sustainability and the environment
due to appear at the end of May. One very important factor is the Dow
Jones Sustainability Group Index (DJSGI), which lists the stock prices
of companies creating economic, ecological and social "added value".
This new index even clearly surpasses the Dow Jones Global Index in
appreciation terms. No wonder, say its inventors: Sustainable
enterprises are evidently also the more successful ones.

Thus, the discourse assumes that economic growth and environmental protection can
be reconciled if a regulatory set-up that stimulates innovative activity and diffusion
of innovations through the economic system is present. Porter and van der Linde
(1995) suggest there are two basic features of such a 'correct' regulatory set-up: a
strict rather than lax regulation and use of market incentives such as tradeable
pollution permits. Properly designed these two regulatory mechanisms will create the
necessary pressure on private companies to innovate towards 'green and clean'
technologies. This means that regulatory mechanisms that are perceived as
constraining innovative activity and diffusion of innovations would have to be re-
regulated through formal legislative procedures.

Science in this discourse is called upon to provide a basis on which rational
social choices can be made. The natural sciences should determine 'critical loads' of
how much pollution nature can tolerate, and engineering sciences should devise the
technological equipment necessary to achieve agreed environmental standards. The
role of the social sciences should be to come up with ideas of how environmentally
unsustainable behavioural patterns and 'anti-ecological' cultural patterns might be
changed and modified (Hajer, 1996).

In all, this discourse can be characterised as positivistic as it assumes that the
reconciliation of two traditionally antagonistic themes will lead society to further
'growth' and 'progress'. It envisages a 'win-win' solution.

Ecological-modernisation-as-a-technocratic-project
The historical narrative of this discourse starts with the emergence of the
'countercultures' in the 1960s (Hajer, 1996). The discourse holds that more is

required than institutional learning and questions the meaning of growth and progress as defined in the ecological modernisation as institutional learning discourse. It rejects, or is at least sceptical of, the idea that it is possible to reconcile economic growth and environmental protection through technological innovation and deregulation, which are perceived to unleash the 'destructive forces' of the markets (Hajer, 1996). In this discourse there is an inherent incompatibility between neo-liberal 'free market' policies and environmental protection (O'Brien et al., 2000), and it contends that ecological modernisation fails to address those 'immanent features of capitalism that make waste, instability and insecurity inherent aspects of capitalist development' (Hajer, 1996, p. 255). In this discourse ecological modernisation is seen as 'empty rhetoric' that stands in the way of producing 'real' instead of 'false' technocratic solutions for 'real' problems.

Like other social movements, environmental movements have also become institutionalised and thereby lost much of their revolutionary status (Hajer, 1996). Being 'green' no longer connotes a radical position. Green parties share power in governments, for example *Die Grünen* in Germany, reform-oriented environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace act as expert consultants for governments and corporations on environmental issues and 'environmental departments' were established in almost all industrialised countries during the 1980s. Also corporations have absorbed the environmental critique, and sustainable development agendas figure as important elements of their public profile. In other words, 'green' credentials have become important for all significant political actors, and environmental discourse has become one of the (if not *the*) most productive sites for generating both legitimacy as well as illegitimacy (Eder, 1996). Political parties are competing for the increasingly important 'green vote' (for instance, the increased support for Ralph Nader's Green Party is said to have prevented Al Gore from winning the presidency in the US 2000 election, and some say the Australian Greens took enough votes off the Liberal and Labour parties to make Labour lose the federal election).

For corporations the increase in the numbers of people that fit into the category 'environmentally aware' present opportunities to create and exploit new market niches. Eco-tourism, organic-food, re-cycling, 'Socially Responsible Investments' and other 'environmentally friendly' commodities and investments are represented as good business these days. One reason for this is that the emerging

anti-globalisation movement consists of people who are well educated, 'environmentally aware' and have big spending power. This is not to say that there are no genuine attempts to actually pursue a sustainable development agenda, or that it is unethical to make money producing 'green' commodities. Neither is it to say that one should not be critical of how environmental concerns are appropriated.

It is this 'greening' of industrial capitalism that has made factions of the environmental movements working within the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse claim that these developments are attempts to 'greenwash' rather than produce 'genuine' environmental changes. According to this view, ecological modernisation is seen as a rhetorical ploy and 'the repressive answer to radical environmental discourse rather than its product' (Hajer, 1996, p. 254). It is such readings that have often resulted in calls for radical changes of global economic structures and the institutions that regulate them. Ian Drummond and Terry Marsden (1995) suggest that a 'successful' neo-liberal regulation of what they see as an inherent contradiction of capitalism – the tendency to generate internal crises caused by over-accumulation that causes unequal distribution of resources (as well as risks, as Beck would argue) – would postpone rather resolve the environmental problems of modern industrialised societies. This dialectic between the inherent contradictions of capitalism and postponement of them through regulation then 'embodies the genesis of the unsustainable' (p. 57) in the sense that successful regulation will transfer the problem to a different location or change the form of its expression. In other words, neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches to the environmental problems are perceived as a 'win-lose' scenario where the environment loses to short-term political and economic interests. The ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse therefore rejects the idea that 'growth can solve the problems caused by growth', and asks if 'sustainable development' (as promoted in the 'Our Common Future' *aka* Brundtland report (WCED, 1987)) is not another "top-down' model destined to bring evil while in name it intends to good'. Furthermore, it is not seen as a coincidence that politically explosive nuclear power issues are absent from the main text of the Bruntdland report. Thus, the discourse criticises the sciences for being incorporated in the technocratic project, and calls for 'counter-experts' to illuminate the 'technocratic biases in official scientific reports' (Hajer, 1996, pp. 253-255).

Summary

As social movements are important political phenomena that contribute to inducing social changes as envisaged in Beck's reflexive modernisation, I have emphasised the role anti-globalisation movements play in the negotiation over sustainability. These movements are contesting a neo-liberal form of globalisation and call for radical and/or moderate institutional changes of the global social order on grounds that it is environmentally unsustainable. This environmentalist critique of the perceived environmentally unsustainable practices of modern industrial consumer society plays an important political role in the hybrid storylines that unify the diverse anti-globalisation movements. This chapter has shown that both 'defenders' and 'protesters' of a neo-liberal form of globalisation make truth claims about what is the most beneficial state of affairs for both people and the environment. What these antagonistic actors agree on is that the contemporary pattern of development is unsustainable. They disagree on what exactly is unsustainable, what caused/causes it and how sustainable development should be pursued. This contestation over the meaning of sustainability is evident in media discourses as a negotiation between different readings of the history of environmental problems in Western industrialised countries. These different readings are firmly grounded in different views on how markets should be regulated: an issue as old as capitalism itself.

Part III: Analysis of Media Discourses on Sustainability

The following case studies analyse the discoursal hybridity of media texts commenting on sustainability issues. The analysis will identify key sites in discourses on sustainability where internal tensions exist, as well as how these, for strategic reasons, are attempted to be omitted and obscured through textual practices aimed at producing truth and certitude. The focus is not so much on the motivation of actors behind such truth-claiming practices, as it is on the effects these practices can have upon what can and cannot be legitimately or credibly said in debates over environmental problems.

The study is structured around the three key sequences of the history of environmental problems in Western industrialised countries (see Introduction). Chapter Four examines how unsustainable institutional arrangements are discursively constructed by analysing texts commenting on US and UK policy initiatives to tackle global warming. The policies were revealed in speeches by President George Bush on 14.3 2002 (Bush, 2002) and Prime Minister Tony Blair on 7.3.2002 (Blair, 2002). Chapters Five and Six examine how sustainable institutional arrangements are discursively constructed. The focus is on how the legitimacy of neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches are attempted to be produced and challenged on grounds that they are or are not environmentally sustainable. For the sake of clarity it might be useful to distinguish between two intrinsically interrelated sorts of legitimacy: democratic legitimacy and moral legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy is obtained when people are convinced that the possession and exercise of power is based on democratic principles (i.e. socially equitable, just and fair). Chapter Five examines how the democratic legitimacy of neo-liberal approaches to market regulation are attempted to be produced and challenged by analysing texts commenting on the outcomes of the 2002 Johannesburg UN Earth Summit (26.8 to 4.9). Moral legitimacy is obtained when people are convinced that the possession and exercise of power is democratic as well as environmentally sustainable. This means that, in most cases, moral legitimacy depends upon democratic legitimacy. Chapter Six examines how neo-liberal institutional arrangements are attempted to be morally legitimated/de-legitimated by analysing texts commenting on the environmental

advantages and disadvantages of further trade liberalisation negotiated at the 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle (30.11 to 3.12).

Before analysing these mediated constructions of sustainability, I will, however, say more about the diverging political positions of the publications and describe the sampled texts in some detail.

The Economist: committed to 'free' trade

The Economist is known for its commitment to free trade. *The Economist's* website proclaims its commitment to free-market economics and neo-liberal ideas of governance:

> Established in 1843 to campaign on one of the great political issues of the day, *The Economist* remains, in the second half of its second century, true to the principles of its founder. James Wilson, a hat maker from the small Scottish town of Hawick, believed in free trade, internationalism and minimum interference by government, especially in the affairs of the market. Though the protectionist Corn Laws which inspired Wilson to start *The Economist* were repealed in 1846, the newspaper has lived on, never abandoning its commitment to the classical 19th-century Liberal ideas of its founder.

The Economist's founder, James Wilson, is referred to the following way:

> Free trade, in Wilson's view, was good for everyone. In his prospectus for *The Economist*, he wrote: "If we look abroad, we see within the range of our commercial intercourse whole islands and continents, on which the light of civilisation has scarce yet dawned; and we seriously believe that free trade, free intercourse, will do more than any other visible agent to extend civilisation and morality throughout the world - yes, to extinguish slavery itself."
>
> Wilson's outlook was, therefore, moral, even civilising, but not moralistic. He believed "that reason is given to us to sit in judgment over the dictates of our feelings." Reason convinced him in particular that Adam Smith was right, that through its invisible hand the market benefited profit-seeking individuals (of whom he was one) and society alike. (*The Economist*, 2002a)

The Economist can be described as 'contrarian' in environmental matters. That means that, contrary to the majority of media outlets (including *The Guardian*), it is sceptical of the claims of the seriousness of contemporary environmental problems.

This 'contrarian' stand was evident in *The Economist's* non-by-lined review
(6.9.2001) of Bjørn Lomborg's (2001) controversial book titled "*The Sceptical
Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World*". The review describes the
book as 'one of the most valuable books on public policy – not merely on
environmental policy – to have been written for the intelligent general reader in the
past ten years' (*The Economist*, 2001a). In a preceding 'by invitation' essay
(2.8.2001) based on his book, Lomborg attempts to 'set the record straight' about the
'real state of the world' by debunking 'four big environmental fears': (1) natural
resources are running out, (2) the population is ever growing, (3) species are
becoming extinct in vast numbers: forests are disappearing and fish stocks collapsing
and (4) the planet's air and water are becoming ever more polluted. According to
Lomborg these fears are unfounded. It is the environmentalists' incorrect use of
sources, statistics and relevant literature that have misled the public (*The Economist*,
2001b). In other words, environmentalists have got it wrong and Lomborg's book is
the evidence, or in the words of the book review in *The Economist*: '"The Sceptical
Environmentalist" is a triumph'. This debunking of environmental fears often
associated with an unfettered and unregulated industrial capitalism is very timely for
The Economist. It counters the left-liberal critique that industrial market capitalism is
self-destructive and proclaims that therefore markets ought to be free from
governmental intervention. *The Economist's* self-proclaimed commitment to neo-
liberal free-market ideas is thereby more fully morally justified.

The Guardian: voicing dissent

The British 'quality' broadsheet *The Guardian* is known for its left-liberal
sympathies, as well as for its commitment to environmental coverage (Hansen, 1993,
p. 177). On *The Guardian* website the newspaper's history is described in the
following way:

> In the increasingly polarised political climate of the late 70s and early
> 80s the Guardian's position as the voice of the left was unchallenged.
> The opinion pages were the birthplace of the SDP, and the letters page
> was where the battle for the future direction of the Labour Party was
> played out, while the coverage of industrial disputes including the
> 1984-1985 Miners' Strike defined the paper's position.
> (*The Guardian*, 2002h)

It seems that such left-leaning sympathies are still to be found in *The Guardian*. One indication is to be found in the way its online archives are structured. While globalisation in neo-liberal discourse is perceived as a means to obtain more economic equality on a global scale, articles on globalisation are in *The Guardian's* archive categorised in a 'special report' section termed 'world inequality' together with articles on subjects such as 'debt relief', 'famine' and 'global recession' (*The Guardian*, 2002k). Graham Meikle (2002, p. 60) suggests that *The Guardian* website also has a lot in common with websites of radical left-leaning groups that call for fundamental changes of democratic mechanisms. In his study of *The Guardian's* website on genetically modified (GM) food (the analysis was done in 1999 when GM food was a major issue in the UK), Meikle notes that similar to the websites of radical (or 'alternative') groups (for example, http://indymedia.org/ and http://www.adbusters.org/) that reject, or at least seriously question, the corporate control over mass media, the *Guardian* website also voiced dissonant political perspectives, encouraged horisontal linkages between readers and called for direct action by, for example, offering external links under subheadings such as 'What can I do About GM food?', 'Join a Protest Group' (for example, Friends of the Earth or Cultural Terrorist Agency) and 'Buy organic'. These sorts of attempts to resemble 'alternative' media outlets are still evident on *The Guardian* website.

Material found in *The Guardian* is also presented in the globally circulating newspaper *The Guardian Weekly* that contains additional material produced by other the daily 'quality' broadsheets, *The Observer* (UK), *Washington Post* (US) and *Le Monde* (France). *The Guardian's* left-leaning sympathies are evident in *The Guardian Weekly's* choice and description of partner *Le Monde diplomatique* that is available in English to subscribers (*Le Monde* is a daily, while *Le Monde diplomatique* is a monthly):

> At last readers in the English-speaking world have access to a strand of
> European thought that challenges the tenets of globalisation and is
> highly critical of the way footloose capital dictates national agendas
> and distorts the market in favour of the rich. (*The Guardian*, 2002a)

Thus, *The Guardian* clearly presents itself in opposition to the free-market ideas to which *The Economist* aspires. Its commitment to environmental coverage and its acknowledgment of the seriousness of environmental problems is, in this respect,

unsurprising. Coverage and commentary on environmental issues provide opportunities to criticise what arguably are socially unjust and therefore environmentally unsustainable forms of governance. The green critique of *The Guardian* therefore has the potential to bolster claims that markets are inherently self-destructive in both social and environmental terms. Such criticism is consistent with the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse, and can be seen as part of an *oppositional cultural politics* that is geared at contesting and transforming dominant practices and structures that are perceived as unsustainable.

Description of sampled texts

The genre I analyse is the news genre. More specifically I analyse 'straight-news' and opinion pieces. 'Straight-news' is usually understood to be articles that comment on events without in principle making any judgemental or argumentative statements. Opinion pieces (comments, analysis, editorials and opinion columns), on the other hand, are generally expected to express a particular perspective, often in an emotive, argumentative and judgemental style (Fowler, 1991, pp. 208-232). Yet, not all editorials and leaders share these characteristics. In some newspapers the 'non-by-lined' editorials and leaders (although understood to be the editor's opinion) might attempt to avoid making extreme or partisan judgements about an issue – that is to say, that they seek to present a 'balanced' and considered opinion.

Despite separate functions as 'sense-makers', these two news sub-genres are characterised (as are all semiotic practices in general) by their generic hybridity. 'Straight-news' articles, of course, cannot be purely objective in the sense that they are written from specific cultural, historic and ethnic positions. They are context-dependent social perspectives. Opinion pieces, on the other hand, while explicitly making argumentative and judgemental statements, often (but not necessarily always) also implicitly make statements that they wish to be read as 'common sense' or 'matters of fact'.

Two caveats concerning the editorial differences between these two publications need to be entered here. All articles in *The Economist* written by staff are non-by-lined because the position of *The Economist* is that 'what is written is more important than who writes it' (*The Economist*, 2002a). In cases where no indication is given as to what genre a particular text belongs (for example, in headlines or sub-title), this anonymity makes it impossible to distinguish between

'hard-news' and opinion pieces. It could therefore be argued that all such articles take the character of editorial statements. Opinion pieces written by 'by invitation' columnists are, on the other hand, by-lined. My sampling indicates that such opinion pieces written by 'by invitation' columnists are always sympathetic to the ideas of governance favoured by *The Economist*. This means that *The Economist* does not routinely, if ever, provide the opportunity for actors to articulate divergent discourses. This kind of censorship does not help the publication to provide the information and range of views this thesis will argue is needed for its readership to make informed decisions, and it is arguably 'illiberal'. In *The Guardian* all articles, except leaders (or editorials), are by-lined. This, however, does not mean that articles in *The Guardian* are 'pure' in terms of generic distinctions between what is 'objective news' and what are opinion pieces. Like texts in general, texts in *The Guardian* are hybrid. *The Guardian* also differs from *The Economist* in terms of allowing access for 'external' actors to articulate opposing discourses. Discourses that diverge from the political positions favoured by the publication are articulated. That is not to say that editorial processes do not exclude particular views. Texts are selected on the basis of what at a particular moment is considered to be 'newsworthy'. This is thus a subtle but familiar form of editorial censorship.

The second caveat that needs to be entered concerns the frequency of the publications. *The Economist* is a weekly and *The Guardian* is a daily. This means that *The Guardian* is under less pressure to produce a 'balanced' daily publication, in terms of types and genres of texts, than *The Economist*. That is, *The Guardian* can redress the imbalance that might occur in one single daily issue in later publications that same week, while *The Economist* would have to wait for the next weekly publication.

Chapter Four: Global Warming and the Attribution of Error

In order to reach to an understanding of how the environmental problems of our time can be solved, it is necessary to first understand what has caused these problems. I advance my understanding of what can be called discourses on unsustainability by focusing on how errors are attributed to be behind the causes of global warming in *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

Global warming is perhaps one of the most global of all environmental concerns as its effects transcend national borders. Unlike earlier forms of environmental problems, such as localised air pollution in heavily industrialised areas, the cumulative effects of global warming are uncertain and the full extent of the problem might not become visible for hundreds of years. This means that global warming, like other similar environmental problems such as ozone layer depletion and biodiversity loss, are as much discursive constructions as they are real, material and visible problems. The diagnosis of and prescription for such problems are therefore dependent on discursive constructions (Hajer, 1995, p. 35). Analysis of the attribution of errors (in policy, judgement, personality of political leaders and so on) behind global warming can therefore exemplify practices involved in the process of diagnosing newer global environmental problems in general.

Global warming is arguably mainly caused by CO_2 gases released during the combustion of fossil fuels, like oil, gas and coal, the most important energy sources in modern industrialised countries. For many environmentalists this alleged connection between the reliance upon fossil fuels and global warming typifies the unsustainability of modern industrialised societies. For large factions of the anti-globalisation movement the causes behind global warming are therefore to be found in political and economic strategies aimed at conserving rather than changing existing fossil fuel-reliant institutional arrangements. Their discourses therefore challenge the existing institutional arrangements and often call for radical changes. The global warming issue is thus potentially 'explosive' in the sense that discourses on global warming can pose a radical challenge to existing institutional arrangements that all significant political actors, including importantly *The Economist* and *The Guardian*, agree is unsustainable. Their articulation of discourses on global warming thus need to both acknowledge the unsustainability of the heavily fossil fuel

dependence in development, while at the same time convince their readerships that the problem can be resolved through existing, yet reformed, institutional arrangements that operate in accordance with favoured ideas of governance. In doing so, articulations of such hybrid discourses (on a shared storyline) will appropriate elements from environmental discourses. According to the institutional-learning discourse these appropriations are evidence of constructive and democratic negotiations between opposing social forces. According to the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse they are undemocratic 'rhetorical ploys' that constrain rather than facilitate sustainable development. I start by examining texts from *The Economist*.

The Economist: the polluting villains

My first example of how error behind global warming is attributed is an opinion piece titled *'Blowing Smoke'* (16.2.2002), commenting on the new US policy to tackle global warming after the US withdrawal from the UN Kyoto protocol in March 2001. The opinion piece comments thus:

> any credible policy on tackling climate change must include either a carbon tax or a mandatory target for limiting carbon emissions. The former could be implemented all through the economy with little red tape. The latter would be more unwieldy, but would probably include a mechanism for trading carbon permits among companies (a "cap-and-trade" scheme) that would greatly reduce the cost of cutting emissions.

> Mr Bush's proposal contains neither of these. Of course, a tax would be unpopular. However, a flexible cap-and-trade proposal might not be. The environmental chapter of the new report prepared by Mr Bush's own Council of Economic Advisers is full of praise for market-based policies. Various proposals of this sort are already floating around Congress, and a number of big corporations, including coal-fired utilities, have publicly asked the government for such an approach.

> So what exactly does Mr Bush's policy contain of substance? The 18% target for reductions over the next decade sounds impressive. But Mr Bush is not talking about reducing emissions of GHGs, only emissions intensity—that is, the level of emissions per unit of economic output. That is utterly inadequate as a target, as the 1990s showed (see chart), since it is a virtual guarantee of much higher absolute levels of GHG emissions in a decade.

The notion of improving America's registry for GHG emissions is certainly a good one. Done properly, it would help firms take stock of their actual emissions, and could set the foundation for a sensible scheme for trading emissions credits. What is more, existing registry schemes like America's Toxics Release Inventory, which forces companies to disclose details of their use of chemicals, achieve environmental goals not through red tape but through the "power of sunshine": the fear of appearing at the top of the list of polluters encourages firms to clean up their act. But for any reporting system to be meaningful, it must be mandatory—and Mr Bush is too timid to suggest that.   (*The Economist*, 2002b)

What is interesting for present purposes, are the first section and the last paragraph of the text. The first section of the text strategically acknowledges that the status quo is unsustainable by declaring what, according to *The Economist*, is needed for tackling global warming: either a carbon tax or mandatory emission targets. It is not explained why these are needed. The last paragraph explains why the US approach does not contain mandatory regulations by suggesting the reason that 'Mr Bush is too timid to suggest that [regulations must be mandatory]'. That is, Bush does not want to implement mandatory regulations (reference is made to mandatory reporting systems that force companies to disclose detailed accounts of how much they pollute) because he is afraid of something. Yet, what he is afraid of is not made explicit in the text. Despite that the text describes the policy as 'voluntarily' ('It talks of a robust registry of emissions that would give businesses incentives to invest in new, cleaner technology and voluntarily reduce greenhouse gas emissions'), no reference is made to the neo-liberal ideas of governance that underpin the US policy (a voluntary emission target is a regulatory mechanism consistent with neo-liberal ideas of governance (see Bush, 2002)). By excluding this political aspect of the policy, attention is directed away from the political and economic interests that might gain from this voluntarily approach, to the 'bad' properties of the individual who in this case is the 'timid' US president Bush. In this way the text attributes the error behind the causes of global warming to individuals rather than to systems. The issue, in this case the US policy's lack of credibility, is thereby framed as a sort of personal problem, and not a systemic problem.

Commentary on the UK policy initiative shows similar practices were also present. Below is the first half of an opinion piece (23.3.2002):

Climate change

The green man

Britain leads the world in tackling climate change

TONY BLAIR may be closer to George Bush than any other leader over the war against terrorism, but on another huge global issue—climate change—the two could hardly be further apart. Last year, Mr Bush ditched the Kyoto treaty, an international agreement on global warming that commits industrialised countries to sharp cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). He has since refused to produce any serious domestic climate policies. Mr Blair seems a tree-hugger in comparison. He is committed to the Kyoto treaty and says he will push it through Parliament this year.

Even more striking are his many climate policies. To help Britain meet its Kyoto target of reducing GHG emissions by 12.5% from their 1990 levels by the end of this decade, he has come up with a dizzying array of policies ranging from a new "climate change levy" (a form of energy tax) to renewable energy targets to more money for climate science.

And, on April 2nd, Mr Blair hopes to go where no one has gone before: GHG trading. Britain is about to become the first country with a full-scale scheme to trade emissions. Trading allows companies that can cut emissions at the lowest cost to do so; those that find it expensive to cut can buy "the right to pollute" as emissions credits. To kick-start the market, the government even held an auction on March 11th in which 34 companies made competing bids of GHG reductions to win a share of some £200m of government money.

(*The Economist*, 2002c)

In this opinion piece UK Prime Minister Tony Blair is compared to US president George Bush. While Bush 'ditched the Kyoto treaty' and 'has since refused to produce any serious domestic climate policies', Blair 'is committed to the Kyoto treaty and says he will push it through Parliament this year'. This Blair will do 'with a dizzying array of policies ranging from a new "climate change levy" (a form of energy tax) to renewable energy targets to more money for climate science'. And above all, Blair has introduced GHG (greenhouse gas) trading. It is these actions that have made *The Economist* refer to Blair as 'the green man' in the title, and a 'tree-hugger' in comparison with Bush. Blair thus takes the role of the hero to Bush's villain. Nevertheless, the UK policy to tackle global warming, according to the text is flawed. Below more of the same text:

Environmentalists point out that the green man's policies are not quite
what they seem. According to the purists, there are two equally
efficient ways to reduce emissions of a pollutant like carbon dioxide
(the chief GHG): an economy-wide tax on carbon emissions or a
mandatory trading scheme with fixed emissions targets.

Mr Blair's plan appears to embrace both approaches, but fails to put
teeth into either. His climate change levy, for example, is hardly an
economy-wide tax: he has given so many businesses exemptions of up
to 80% that it resembles Swiss cheese. Also, the GHG trading system
is based on voluntary rather than mandatory targets, which is why the
auction was needed to get companies interested.

The Economist adopts the environmentalist position in the introduction of their

elaboration of the flaws of the UK policy: 'Environmentalists point out that the green

man's policies are not quite what they seem'. This reference to environmentalists'

protest discourses indicates a shift in position. In the first half of the text Blair is

saluted for his path-breaking approach to climate change. In this later section of the

text, he is criticised for having given too many exemptions to the climate change

levy and because the trading scheme is voluntarily rather than mandatory. Yet, no

explanation is given why mandatory regulations are needed. This is another example

of how issues of public concern are personalised and made matters of individual

determinations rather than conscious political strategies.

This personalisation of what arguably are ineffective climate change policies

seems to be fairly representative of *The Economist's* coverage of both the US and

UK policy initiatives. In a survey of articles from 7.2.02 to 27.3.02 (a survey of a

total of eight (weekly) issues) I found that there were two articles commenting on

each of these two initiatives (thus a total of four articles). The second article on the

US initiative (titled *'Tax or Trade'* (16.2.2002) (*The Economist*, 2002f)) occurred in

the same issue as the article analysed above. This article did not provide any

explanation why the US initiative, according to the *'Blowing Smoke'* opinion piece

analysed above, failed to deliver by not including mandatory regulations. The second

article commenting on the UK initiative (titled *'New nukes or wind farms?'*

(16.2.2002) (*The Economist*, 2002d)) commented on a government report (supposed

to outline the UK energy policies for the next 50 years) by discussing the

comparative economic cost (i.e. the taxpayer costs) of nuclear power and wind

power. In this text no explanation of Blair's alleged inconsistent environmental

practices was given. Nor were the neo-liberal eco-modernist assumptions that seem to underpin the policy criticised.

The above analysis makes two suggestions. One, the absence of criticism of the neo-liberal eco-modernist assumptions that seem to be underpinning both the US and UK policy might indicate that *The Economist's* coverage of these issues hegmonises an *ecological modernisation-as-institutional-learning* discourse that assumes that it is possible to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection without fundamentally changing existing institutional arrangements. Secondly, the analysis suggests that *The Economist* is sceptical of the lack of mandatory regulations, but that this scepticism is insufficiently explained. This is not to say that neo-liberal free-market approaches are never explicitly criticised in *The Economist*. Paradoxically, such critiques (that are elements of left-liberal *ecological-modernisation-as-a-technocratic-project* discourses) are more explicitly articulated elsewhere, in other issues of the publication. For instance, an article (18.12.1999) on 'irrationality' presents a range of arguments that contradict the classical liberal ideas to which *The Economist* proclaims its commitment. Below the first and last sections of the article are reprinted:

IRRATIONALITY

Rethinking thinking

Economists are starting to abandon their assumption that humans behave rationally, and instead are finally coming to grips with the crazy, mixed up creatures we really are

"ARE economists human?" is not a question that occurs to many practitioners of the dismal science, but it is one that springs to the minds of many non-economists exposed to conventional economic explanations. Economists have typically described the thought processes of *homo sapiens* as more like that of Star Trek's Mr Spock—strictly logical, centred on a clearly defined goal and free from the unsteady influences of emotion or irrationality—than the uncertain, error-prone groping with which most of us are familiar. Of course, some human behaviour does fit the rational pattern so beloved of economists. But remember, Mr Spock is a Vulcan, not a human.
[...]
Richard Thaler was an almost lone pioneer in the use of psychology in financial economics during the 1980s and early 1990s. Today he is a professor at the University of Chicago, the high temple of rational economics. He believes that in future, "economists will routinely

52

> incorporate as much 'behaviour' into their models as they observe in
> the real world. After all, to do otherwise would be irrational." Mr
> Spock could not have said it better.　　　(*The Economist*, 1999a)

In another text (16.12.2000) commenting on a UK government White Paper on
global poverty, Adam Smith's argument that the 'invisible hand' of the market
benefits profit-seeking individuals and the society alike, is referred to in the
following way:

> EVERY so often—quite frequently, in fact—the invisible hand of
> Adam Smith grabs a worker by the shoulder and chucks him out of his
> job. Globalisation has put the hand at the end of an ever-longer arm. So
> it was this week, when General Motors announced from Detroit that a
> global restructuring would lead to the loss of some 10,000 car-making
> jobs, 2,000 of them at Vauxhall's Luton plant [...].
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(*The Economist*, 2000)

In both these examples, widely accepted, and therefore politically very important,
elements of left-liberal technocratic-project discourses are articulated. These
discursive elements contest the neo-liberal discourses of economic governance *The
Economist* favours. In the first example the assumption that humans are rational and
that therefore economic actors should be freed from centralised governmental
intervention is undermined. In the second example the assumption that markets are
'creative' and 'progressive' (because actors operate rationally in the interest of not
only themselves but also the society as a whole) is undermined by pointing at one
example of the socially devastating consequences of the (neo-liberal) restructuring of
the car manufacturing industry.

However, such inconsistencies between what *The Economist* says in one
place (for example in their self-description) and what it says another place (in the
two examples above) are for strategic reasons likely to be avoided in *singular* texts
found in their publications. For instance, in the two examples above it was not
discussed how the discursive elements that were articulated (elements of discourses
on human nature as irrational and discourses on markets as socially destructive)
corresponded with the neo-liberal free market discourses to which *The Economist*
proclaims its commitment. I discuss this further below.

The Guardian: also the polluting villains

Personalised accounts are also found in the left-leaning *Guardian* For example, a

Guardian news story (15.2.2002) employs a personalised script in its coverage of the

US global warming policy announcement: Bush is the villain who challenges the rest

of the world:

Clear skies for US, gloom for Kyoto

Bush's new environment policy fails to cut gas emissions

President Bush unveiled an environmental policy yesterday which
sharply differed from the international Kyoto agreement on global
warming, advocating voluntary instead of mandatory targets for
greenhouse gas emissions and setting less ambitious goals.

Under the president's "clear skies and global climate change initiative",
the US aims to cut "greenhouse gas intensity" by 18% over the next
decade, a reduction in the rate of growth of emissions relative to the
growth of the national economy. It does not mean a cut in greenhouse
gas emissions, as required by the Kyoto protocol.

Corporations will not be obliged to meet the targets set in the Bush
plan, nor will they have to disclose what progress they make to a
central emissions registry, in which participation will also be
voluntary.

"This constitutes business as usual," said Eileen Claussens, president of
the Pew Centre on Global Climate Change. "It just continues the
existing path, so that by 2012 the US will be 25% above 1990
emissions levels. Right now it's 14.5% above 1990. There's not even
mandatory reporting and disclosure."

And this is how Bush's rationale of the policy is represented in the final section of

the text:

The approach, Mr Bush argued, was based "on the common-sense idea
that sustainable economic growth is the key to environmental progress
- because it is growth that provides the resources for investment in
clean technologies."   (*The Guardian*, 2002c)

It is the assumption that 'economic growth is the key to environmental progress –

because it is growth that provides the resources for investment in clean technologies'

that underpins the policy. Yet, as expected in a 'hard-news' account, no reference is

made to the neo-liberal eco-modernist ideas that underpin the policy and which explain *how* and *why* the policy is supposed to work (that is, how and why free-markets will operate in environmentally sustainable ways). In this way, the idea that for Bush is 'common-sense' (that 'economic growth is the key to environmental progress'), is represented as fallacious, as indicated in the citation of Eileen Claussens. The result might be that Bush is 'demonised' for acting in ways that for somewhat obscure reasons are wrong.

Another *Guardian* news story titled *'US will not set target for cut in emissions'* (7.2.2002) is also structured as a story of 'good' and 'evil'. Already in the opening paragraph it seems implied that the US is the 'villain' and that it represents the 'evil' element in the story that follows:

> In a challenge to the rest of the world's fear about climate change, the United States has decided not to set any targets for reducing its own massive emissions and to adopt "a gradual approach" instead.
>
> President George Bush, who repudiated the Kyoto protocol last year and promised to come up with an alternative strategy, has decided that the US will rely on industry to come up with solutions. The plan is to "adopt a flexible agenda to avoid imposing any regulations", slowing the growth of emissions rather than cutting them.
>
> *(The Guardian, 2002o)*

The text does not elaborate what this 'flexible agenda' or 'gradual approach' entails, other than avoiding imposing regulations (on industry emitting CO_2). Thus, neither in this text is any reference made to the neo-liberal eco-modernist ideas that underpin the policy and which explain *how* and *why* the policy is supposed to work. This absence of explanation makes the US position appear irresponsible and irrational. The 'error', in this case the Bush administration's error to ratify the Kyoto protocol, is thereby framed as an individual error and not a systemic error caused by a conscious political strategy.

This way of personalising the political conflict surrounding the US policy seems to be representative of *The Guardian's* coverage. In my survey of articles occurring between 7.2.2002 and 27.3.2002 (a total of 42 (daily) issues) I found there was just one article, apart from the two analysed above, that commented on the US policy (thus, a total of three articles). This article (a leader (15.2.2002) titled *'Going for Kyoto'* (*The Guardian*, 2002g)) did not provide any explanation of why President

Bush acted irrationally by not implementing mandatory regulations. My survey showed that the UK policy initiative was not criticised for failing to implement mandatory regulations. This, ironically, is in contrast to *The Economist* text above ('*The Green Man*') that did criticise the policy for containing lax regulations. The UK policy was commented on in the following way in a news account (15.2.2002):

Energy plan puts onus on 'low carbon' economy

Report calls for 20% increase in efficiency by 2010 and greater use of renewable power sources

A fundamental change to energy policy, increasing use of renewables and energy efficiency to prevent climate change, was recommended by a government review yesterday. Brian Wilson, the energy minister, who chaired the review, said a white paper would appear in the autumn.

The much-leaked review looked at policy over the next 50 years and recommended changing to a low carbon economy whereby economic growth did not mean higher emissions of greenhouse gases.

(The Guardian, 2002e)

The policy appears to be consistent with the ecological modernisation as institutional learning discourse described in Chapter Three. Similar to the institutional learning discourse, this policy seems to assume that it is possible to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection. In the survey referred to above I found that there were four articles commenting on the UK policy (excluding the article referred to above): an analysis (14.2.2002) titled '*Switch on to renewables*' (*The Guardian*, 2002m), a leader (15.2.2002) titled '*Going for Kyoto*' (*The Guardian*, 2002g) (this leader commented on both the US and UK policy initiatives), a news story (7.3.02) titled '*Chief scientist urges more nuclear stations*' (*The Guardian*, 2002b) and an editorial (7.3.2002) titled '*Nuclear is not the answer*' (*The Guardian*, 2002j). None of these articles criticised this neo-liberal eco-modernist assumption.

Similar to the above analysis of *The Economist* coverage, this analysis of *The Guardian* coverage makes two suggestions. First, it suggests that the absence of criticism of the neo-liberal eco-modernist assumptions underpinning the UK policy in *The Guardian's* coverage of this issue might serve to hegemonise an *ecological modernisation-as-institutional-learning* discourse, and not a left-liberal *ecological modernisation-as-a-technocratic-project* discourse that rejects the idea that it is

possible to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection. Secondly, the analysis suggests that *The Guardian* is sceptical of the US policy's lack of mandatory regulations, but that this scepticism is insufficiently explained. This is of course not to say that neo-liberal free-market approaches are never criticised in *The Guardian*. They are. For instance, an analysis (22.7.2002) titled '*It's time to apply the special K factor*' – referring to the 'healthy' cereal by Kellogg's called '*Special K*' – draws upon the influential work of John Maynard Keynes in its critique of neo-liberal free-market ideas (Keynes ideas are thus '*the special K factor*').

> [...] Keynes rejected the notion that in the long run market forces would operate to leave the sea flat calm again. Now that the global economy is again gripped by systemic failure, it is inevitable that thought turn to the man who revolutionised economic thinking 70 years ago. [...] Keynes believed that markets were imperfect, and that market failure was a chronic condition of capitalism. His view was that neoclassical economics was the special case, because it was dependent on a series of assumptions that did not apply in the real world. With patrician disdain he said individuals acting separately to promote their own interests were usually "too ignorant or too weak even to achieve these. Experience does not show that individuals when they make up a social unit are always less clear-sighted than when they act separately".
>
> (*The Guardian*, 2002i)

Somewhere else the work of another well known free-market sceptic, Karl Polanyi, is used in similar ways. Below the text (10.4.2000):

> **No such thing as the market, only ordinary men and women**
>
> As the second world war was drawing to a close in 1944, two great works of political economy were published. One was Hayek's The Road to Serfdom, the driving force behind the free-market revolution in the final quarter of the 20th century. The other was Karl Polanyi's The Great Transformation.
>
> Hayek's book is much the better known. It is the blockbuster to Polanyi's cult classic, up in the great canon with the Wealth of Nations, Capital, and the General Theory. Its pro-market, anti-state message has embedded itself deep into western societies, so that parties of the left now believe in low taxation, privatisation and rolling back welfare.
>
> Polanyi's book, though, is well worth reading. A Christian socialist refugee from fascism, Polanyi's explanation for the political and economic crisis in the West during the 30s was completely different from Hayek's. His argument in The Great Transformation was that the

> profit-maximising dictates of the self-regulating market were
> incompatible with social protection, which aimed at "conservation of
> man and nature as well as productive capacity."
>
> Just as Hayek believed the growth of the state was the road to serfdom,
> Polanyi believed that the triumph of the self-regulating market was the
> road to social disintegration. He liked all the things Hayek loathed:
> social protection, trade unions, welfare states, curbs on finance. What
> makes this more than simply a disagreement between dead Austrians is
> that as the management of economic life is becoming more Hayekian,
> we are all becoming more Polanyian.   (*The Guardian*, 2000)

Nevertheless, this sort of left-liberal systemic critique was not explicit in coverage of

the US policy. As I will discuss below, I view this absence to be problematic.

Systemic flaw or individual error?

I want to propose that a significant tension can be found in *The Economist's*

articulation of discourses on the environment. The tension arises in the articulation of

opposing discourses on human rationality. This tension manifests itself in at least

two interrelated ways. First, *The Economist's* publications seem to constantly express

certitude that neo-liberal 'free-market' approaches constitute the best state of affairs,

both for people and the environment. This constant repetition of attempts to

legitimate neo-liberal approaches appears to me as contradictory. If actors were

rational, as presumed in the neo-classical discourses that seem to underpin neo-

liberal approaches to environmental problems, there would be no need to constantly

point out that neo-liberal solutions are self-evidently the best. Something that is self-

evident does not need to be constantly argued. The tension then arises between

arguing that actors at least tend to be rational and that therefore neo-liberal

approaches are best, and at the same time constantly repeat what allegedly is self-

evidently true and that therefore rational actors should be able to understand – that

neo-liberal approaches are the best because human nature is essentially rational.

Secondly, in the texts commenting on policies to tackle global warming, individuals

are for different reasons criticised for not being able to act in ways that facilitate

sustainable development. The unsustainability of industrial societies is thereby

constructed as being caused by irrational actors rather than by systems. There is then

a tension between arguing that all actors are essentially rational and therefore that

neo-liberal approaches to environmental problems are self-evidently the best, while

at the same time arguing that some actors in some cases act irrationally. In the above

examples the political leaders of the US and UK are criticised for their inability to deal with environmental issues in rational and sustainable ways. They are thereby represented as irrational. In this way the unsustainability of modern industrialised societies is diagnosed as being caused by some sort of communication problem between individuals, not a systemic problem. This is as if actors were inherently rational, but need to be constantly reminded of the neo-liberal gospel before they can become enlightened. In a sense then, the human consciousness is constructed as both rational and irrational.

These opposing discourses on human rationality are not drawn upon randomly. Rather, they are drawn upon strategically in attempts to legitimate, or 'safeguard', the political position of *The Economist* in specific circumstances. It is strategic for *The Economist* to acknowledge the unsustainability of the status quo by attributing error to individuals rather than systems. As I have shown above, one result of personalising the issue of how to tackle global warming, might be that the focus is directed away from the characteristics of the neo-liberal eco-modernist policy in question and towards the characteristics of individuals. One possible consequence of this is that the determination needed to contest these approaches to tackle global warming is undermined. By attributing error to individuals rather than to systems, focus is directed away from the ideas of governance underpinning the system, to the 'bad' properties (or inadequacies) of antagonistic actors with different ideas. The risk of exposing potential tensions in hybrid articulations of discourses on the environment is thereby minimised and the actual characteristics of particular regimes of environmental governance are obscured. Furthermore, by obscuring the reliance upon the actual existence of specific systemic features of neo-liberal regimes, such as actors being rational, the risk of undermining the credibility of neo-liberal arguments is minimised. It is therefore unsurprising that *The Economist* prefers to avoid highlighting the specific characteristics of the regimes of governance they favour by personalising, instead of politicising, issues concerning the environmental sustainability and social justice of these regimes.

Thus, personalisation can allow for potential tensions in hybrid political discourses on the environment to be obscured. In a sense then, personalisation can help depoliticise an issue. In doing so, personalisation can have a constraining effect upon environmental movements geared at contesting what are perceived as unsustainable and unjust discourses. The practice of personalising political issues can

thereby help to reproduce certain relations of power. Because of this potentially constraining effect on environmental movements, it appears to me to be problematic for an actor such as *The Guardian*, that apparently embraces the scepticism expressed by the anti-globalisation movements, not to raise questions about the ideas of governance that underpin the neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches in question – in this case US and UK approaches to tackle global warming. As I will show in Chapters Five and Six, this practice of personalisation is recurrent in coverage of environmental issues in both *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

Chapter Five: The Johannesburg Earth Summit and Sustainable Development Agendas

This chapter examines attempts at producing the democratic legitimacy/illegitimacy of neo-liberal approaches to market regulation. It specifically analyses representations of what can be called the environmentalist *agency*. Agency, in general terms, refers to the ability to exercise control over social processes and events (Schirato & Yell, 2000, p. 187). Discourses geared at producing the democratic legitimacy/illegitimacy of a neo-liberal regime of governance thus need to convince people that this regime's control over social processes and events is either democratic or un-democratic. As agency, and thus social control, entails reflection and cognition, analysis of the kind of environmental self-reflexivity that is ascribed to dominant institutions can illuminate how the environmental movement's ability to exercise control over the political agenda is represented.

According to the institutional-learning discourse, the convergence around the concept of sustainable development indicates a constructive and dialectical relationship between opposing social forces (Hajer, 1996). This dialectical interplay between the 'establishment' and the environmental movements I suggested is arguably characterised by a democratic process of learning whereby dominant institutions produce 'genuine' environmental change. It assumes that institutions have an inbuilt ability to reflect on the sustainability of their practices. This is in contrast to the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse that suggests that such changes are attempts to 'greenwash' what are arguably environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust practices. Moreover, what is perceived as 'genuine' environmental change is in this discourse viewed as a result of the agency exerted by environmental movements that articulated not only a green critique but also a wider cultural critique (Hajer, 1996). According to such a discourse, external factors, rather than inherent or inbuilt ones induce institutional self-reflexivity.

This emphasis on responsibility for socio-cultural change seems to be a key characteristic of other modern oppositional political counter-discourses, such as discourses on labour rights, gender equality and decolonisation.

The texts that are analysed were chosen from a survey of the two news publications in the ten days following the 2002 Johannesburg UN Earth Summit (26.8 to 4.9).

The Economist: choosing to 'green'

As stated in Chapter Two, there are two ideas central to the neo-classical discourses *The Economist* seems to favour. One is that actors are rational. In Chapter Four I identified tensions that arise when opposing discourses on human rationality are woven together in hybridity. The identification of these tensions has consequences for *The Economist's* discourses on sustainability. If actors are not held to act in rational ways for the benefit of both people and environment, the argument that 'de-regulated' markets work in a sustainable manner (because actors act in self-interested and rational ways) loses credibility. What further undermines the credibility of this argument, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the fact that the extent and range of governmental interventions into the environmental policy domains, in both the public and private sector, have increased rather than decreased over the last two decades or so. This tendency represents a major inconsistency in the 'deregulatory' neo-liberal discourses that have prevailed in Western industrialised countries since the early 1980s. Neo-liberal approaches to environmental problems are, as Porter and van der Linde (1995) suggest they should be (see Chapter Three), reliant upon governmental interventions in markets. In order not to lose the authority and thus the credibility of its articulation of the economic 'liberal' and 'deregulatory' discourses, it therefore seems strategically important for *The Economist* to obscure this reliance upon strong regulation of markets. The effect of obscuring this need for regulation is that *The Economist's* emphasis on the 'liberal' outlook that allegedly follows a neo-liberal regime appears appealing and commonsensical.

I have suggested that *The Economist* works within an *ecological modernisation-as-institutional-learning* discourse that assumes that existing institutions can change their unsustainable practices through a democratic process of learning. The environmental policies and strategies that are implemented through this learning process are assumed to be results of a constructive and dialectical relationship between opposing social forces. This means that *The Economist* accepts and articulates some elements that characterise what can be called the environmentalist protest discourses. Yet, at the same time there are elements of these discourses that are not accepted. It is therefore strategically important how, and

which of, these accepted discursive elements are articulated. In order to avoid drawing attention to potential tensions between these foregrounded and backgrounded 'protest elements' and the discourses in which attempts are made to incorporate them, it is equally important to minimise the risk of making too explicit what these backgrounded elements are. One way of avoiding drawing public attention to these discursive elements is to downplay the role and political impact of the environmental social movements that produce and articulate the protest discourses from which *The Economist* selectively articulates politically important elements.

Following the Johannesburg Earth Summit, *The Economist* published a leader (5.10.2002) titled *'Small is all right'* that commented on the outcomes of the summit (in the ten days after the summit *The Economist's* two weekly issues contained a total of two articles that commented on the outcomes). Below the first part of a leader is reprinted:

Was the sustainable-development summit a wash-out?

"FOURTEEN hours to help save the world." So screamed a headline in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper earlier this week. Such agitation reflected the sentiments of many of the lobby groups at the UN summit on sustainable development, which concluded on September 4th. But now the summit is over, and those crucial final hours were spent, apparently, to no great effect. The planet is presumably doomed.

Either that, or the *Guardian's* headline and many others like it were idiotic. That in fact would be our guess.

If the world had needed saving, it would have been wrong to expect an event such as the UN summit to rise to that challenge in the first place. Happily, though, the world does not need saving. On most measures, both human welfare and the environment are getting better, not worse. Particular problems, such as AIDS and climate change, do need more attention and international co-operation. When it comes to curbing poverty, on the other hand, international co-operation is not the main thing that is needed. In any case, it is ludicrous to suggest that the earth is in grave peril.   (*The Economist*, 2002e)

In this excerpt *The Economist's* 'contrarian' stand is evident. According to the leader the planet is not 'doomed', nor in 'grave peril'. Rather, 'on most measures, both human welfare and the environment are getting better, not worse', and it is 'idiotic' and 'ludicrous' to argue the opposite. Nevertheless, the text strategically

acknowledges that particular problems (AIDS, climate change and poverty) need to be dealt with. This acknowledgment indicates that those who are referred to as 'idiotic' and 'ludicrous' are at least partly right. This acknowledgment is strategic in the sense that to argue otherwise (that AIDS, climate change and poverty are not problems that need to be solved) would indeed undermine the credibility and authority of *The Economist* as a serious publication. This could again reduce readerships and profits. Thus, the text articulates some elements of the politically important environmental discourses (something needs to be done) while denouncing others (the state of the planet is not as bad as many, for example *The Guardian*, says it is). Below is the last section of the text:

In praise of non-government opportunities

The summit also marked a shift in the role that agencies other than governments—be they green groups, charities aiming to relieve poverty, or big business—can play. Dozens of new partnerships were launched to tackle specific local problems, and hundreds of existing ones were examined and discussed. This marketplace of ideas and experiment is the nitty-gritty of sustainable development. UN officials even announced that they were ready to bypass governments and directly finance firms that offer employees treatment for AIDS.

The prominence of business led many to complain that the summit was hijacked by "free-market ideology". If only. As the litany of ongoing subsidies for pollution and squandered resources makes clear, there was never any danger of that.

In this section it is again strategically acknowledged that the status quo is unsustainable and that something needs to be done. If it were *The Economist's* position that the status quo is sustainable and that the environment does not need to be protected in some ways, there would be no reason to engage in debates over the effectiveness of environmental policies and initiatives aimed at protecting the environment. Thus, while actors (such as *The Guardian*) that emphasise the seriousness and urgency of environmental problems are denounced, *The Economist* nevertheless acknowledges that they are at least partly right: 'something' does need to be done. The UN summit was an attempt to do 'something' that could facilitate sustainable development, and, according to the text, 'the summiteers actually achieved a modest success'. One of the positive outcomes of the summit was, according to the text, the 'partnerships' between 'agencies other than governments'.

The way in which these 'partnerships' are described I find interesting for two reasons. One has to do with the allegedly 'liberal' outlook of neo-liberal discourses. The opportunities of partnerships between agencies other than governments and direct partnerships between the UN and private firms are praised in the sub-title: 'In praise of non-government opportunities'. The reason why, it is implied, is that the private sector is 'good' and the public sector is 'bad'; a view consistent with neo-liberal discourses. This view is often expressed through binary oppositions such as efficient: inefficient, vibrant: rigid, dynamic: static and constraining: enabling. Another way of describing these 'partnerships' between private and non-governmental agencies (for example, between reform-oriented corporatised NGOs like Greenpeace and corporations such as BP) and public and private agencies (for example, between the UN and Nike and The Body Shop) could be to call these actions steps in a process of privatising areas of governance previously under the control of the public sector (see Fairclough, 2000, pp. 127-129 for similar analysis of 'partnerships' in the UK New Labour discourse).

The second aspect of the description of partnerships that I find interesting was the way in which these non-governmental agencies are listed together: 'be they green groups, charities aiming to relieve poverty, or big business'. This way of listing might give the impression of equal structural positions. Yet, it is contestable that these agencies – green groups, and charities aiming to relieve poverty and big business – 'play', or negotiate, on a level playing field. According to the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse sustainable development is the repressive answer to the radical environmental protest discourses that put the environment on the political agenda in the first place (Hajer, 1996, p. 254). According to such a discourse, then, the partnerships are not negotiated on equal terms. Rather they are the outcomes of negotiations between actors that are in dominant and subordinate positions. That is, the partnership negotiations, or as they are described in the text, '[the] marketplace of ideas and experiment' that is the 'nitty-gritty of sustainable development', is (arguably like markets and societies in general) characterised by asymmetrical relations of power that favour actors in dominant structural positions. In this case, big business arguably is in a dominant structural position *vis-a-vis* green groups and charities aiming to relieve poverty (see Fairclough, 2000, p. 53 for similar analysis of 'lists' of social agencies in the UK New Labour discourse). The effect of downplaying what arguably is a subordinate

revolutionary status of environmental movements, is that the end result of these negotiations (the 'partnerships') are rendered to be a simple matter of 'free' choice by these agencies. Thus, the partnerships are not held to be the result of negotiations between opposing social forces based on discursive and generic conventions set by the dominant forces. It is as if actors in dominant structural positions (in this case big business) have an inbuilt ability to reflect upon the sustainability of their practices rather than operating in relation to external factors such as the environmental movements. If we accept this assumption of an inbuilt, rather than induced, self-reflexivity, the argument that the 'prominence of business' at the summit constituted a trend that facilitates sustainable development seems commonsensical. Yet, it does appear strange to me that big business should have self-reflexive properties that rich countries, most notably EU countries, in the last sentence of the text, are criticised for not having: 'As the litany of ongoing subsidies for pollution and squandered resources [in rich EU countries] makes clear, there was never any danger of that [the summit was hijacked by "free-market ideology"].

The Guardian: the conspiracy of the corporate bogeymen

As an actor that takes the role of the voice that represents the scepticism expressed by parts of the anti-globalisation movement, it appears to me as strategically important for *The Guardian* to at least question what effect partnerships between corporations and green groups have on environmentalist agency.

In my survey of *Guardian* articles, I found that competing discourses on the effects partnerships have on environmentalist agency were articulated. Yet, in my view the majority of the articles articulated ideas consistent with the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse. A few examples will illustrate what I mean. An article (5.9.2002) by *The Guardian's* environmental editor John Vidal describes the articulation of dissident discourses on sustainability at the Johannesburg Summit the following way:

Fearless five stand against the bland blue tide

Renegade leaders speak their mind and earn grateful applause

The East Timorese foreign minister, Jose Luis Guterres, became the last of 109 heads of state and 80 senior politicians to stand before the

world yesterday and mourn for five minutes that humanity was in terrible shape and that Something Had to Be Done.

Few people had heard of him, fewer heard him, and fewer still could distinguish between him and most of the other world leaders who in the past three days have wrung their hands for five minutes and flown home.

As a collective group they proved to be remarkably similar, down to the colour of their suits (uniformly dark blue), their eyesight (most wear rimless glasses), their silk ties and their rhetoric. Politically, too, they have more or less spoken as one, embracing capital markets, trade and more cooperation between countries.

Only five outspoken renegades, a dwindling salon de refusés, have bucked the trend and offered a different analysis. They may be out of step with the rest of the world, but the summit's unofficial clapometer suggests that they have deep support and could all earn a living on the boards.

We must fight

President Hugo Chavez, of Venezuela, was the first and, in the absence of Fidel Castro, was widely regarded as the ring-leader.

"We must confront the elites," he began. The bureaucrats in the audience laughed and shifted uneasily.

"Neo-liberalism is inhuman," he continued. "It disintegrates life. It is guilty of all the disasters in the world. We have to fight it. We do not pretend to fight fires by respecting those who light them. Unless we realise this there will be children here in 40 years' time who will debate the same things and there will be even more poverty and disasters. We are going in the opposite direction."

He was loudly cheered, and followed just 10 countries later by Comrade Dr Sam Nujoma of Namibia. After a quiet start, he had the many African delegates in the conference and press halls in stitches as he waved first one then both fists and attacked colonialism in general and Tony Blair in particular. Well over his five minutes and departing radically from his official speech, he laid into Europe.

"The 21st century demands equality of people. If whites think they are superior, we condemn them and reject them. We are equal to Europe and if you don't think that, then to hell with you. You can keep your money. We will develop our Africa without your money."

(*The Guardian*, 2002f)

The way in which the speeches by the other political leaders are satirically described clearly has a technocratic-project inclination: 'and mourn for five minutes that humanity was in terrible shape and that Something Had to Be Done' and 'have wrung their hands for five minutes and flown home'. Both the anti-neo-liberalism articulated by Chavez and the pro-third worldism articulated by Nujoma are celebrated for being articulated by two of the 'fearless five' who stood 'against the bland blue tide'. These are rhetorics that are consistent with the ecological

modernisation as a technocratic project discourse. The other renegade leaders that were referred to were Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, Felip Roque, Foreign Minister of Cuba and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.

Another 'explanatory' article (4.9.2002) displays similar sympathies in its explanation of what was achieved at the previous meeting in Rio. Below parts of the article are reprinted:

Explained

Earth summit

Mark Oliver and Simon Jeffery look at the issues faced by the UN's world conference on sustainable development in Johannesburg

[...]
What were the summit's aims?
To reconcile development and economic growth with environmental sustainability. The organisers said the summit must "conserve our natural resources in a world that is growing in population, with ever-increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic security".
It took place against a backdrop of famine in southern Africa, caused partly by climate change, which is reducing rainfall, and a lack of clean water and sanitation.
[...]
What is the verdict?
Governments and business have declared the meeting a success, while charities lined up to declare it the worst political sell-out in decades.
The environment secretary, Margaret Beckett, called it a "victory for everyone", but Oxfam said the outcome fell far short of what was needed to address global problems. Friends of the Earth described it as an indictment of world leaders who publicly preached the message of sustainable development but instructed their negotiators to do trade deals above all else.
Why did the summit take place when it did?
It is 10 years since the earth summit in Rio, where the international community adopted Agenda 21, a global plan of action for sustainable development. The 2002 conference was intending to build on Rio's achievements and address its failures.
What was achieved at Rio?
One of the planks of the 1992 convention was trying to reduce emerging economies' reliance on fossil fuels. Some have argued that Rio helped pave the way for the Kyoto protocol on cutting carbon dioxide emissions. However, carbon dioxide emissions have risen by nearly 10% since Rio.

Kevin Watkins, Oxfam's senior policy adviser, wrote in the Guardian
that the 10 years since Rio have seen an "unmitigated triumph for
globalisation". While world output has increased by 50%, there are still
1 billion people living in poverty.   (*The Guardian*, 2002d)

While the article seems to attempt to present a 'balanced' view of the Johannesburg
Summit by presenting officially stated aims and different verdicts on the outcomes of
the summit, a left-liberal critique nevertheless seems to be present. For example, the
picture painted in the descriptions of the previous 1992 Rio Summit is rather grim:
carbon dioxide emissions have risen by nearly 10% and despite 50% increase in
world output 1 billion people still live in poverty. This in contrast to the more
positive picture painted in *The Economist* text analysed above. Thus, the selection
and choice of which 'facts' to present makes this section on Rio appear consistent
with the technocratic project discourse.

More explicit articulation of elements of the ecological modernisation as a
technocratic project discourse was evident in an opinion piece (4.9.2002) by Naomi
Klein, who has become a sort of anti-globalisation 'guru':

The summit that couldn't save itself

Corporations have ensured that real regulation is off the agenda.
When Rio hosted the first earth summit in 1992, there was so much
goodwill surrounding the event that it was nicknamed, without irony,
the Summit to Save the World. This week in Johannesburg, nobody has
claimed that the follow-up World Summit on Sustainable Development
could save the world. The question has been whether the summit could
even save itself.

The sticking point has been what UN bureaucrats call
"implementation" and the rest of us call "doing something". Much of
the blame for the "implementation gap" has been placed at the doorstep
of the US. It was George W Bush who abandoned the only significant
environmental regulations that came out of the Rio conference: the
Kyoto protocol on climate change. It was Bush who decided not to
come to Johannesburg, signalling that the issues being discussed here -
from basic sanitation to clean energy - are low priorities for his
administration. And the US delegation has blocked all proposals that
involve either directly regulating multinational corporations or
dedicating significant new funds to sustainable development.

But the Bush-bashing is too easy: the summit hasn't failed because of
anything that happened in Johannesburg. It has failed because the
entire process was booby-trapped from the start.

When Canadian entrepreneur and diplomat Maurice Strong was appointed to chair the Rio summit, his vision was of a gathering that brought all the "stakeholders" to the table - not just governments, but also environmentalists, indigenous groups and lobby groups, as well as multinational corporations.

Strong's vision allowed for more participation from civil society than any previous UN conference, at the same time as it raised unprecedented amounts of corporate funds for the summit. But the sponsorship had a price. Corporations came to Rio with clear conditions: they would embrace ecologically sustainable practices, but only voluntarily, through non-binding codes and "best practice" partnerships with NGOs and governments. In other words, when the business sector came to the table in Rio, direct regulation of business was pushed off. *(The Guardian, 2002l)*

The text seems to reject personalised accounts of what went wrong at the summit: 'the Bush-bashing is too easy'. According to the article the policy making process at the summit was 'booby-trapped from the start'. It was the presence of corporations that prevented agreements on implementations of what in the text is called 'real' and 'direct' regulation. In other words, it is the absence of regulation of corporations operating in markets that prevents the partnerships from working to 'Save the World'. In this way actors rejecting mandatory regulation (in this article corporations) are ascribed clearly illegitimate values: they constrain sustainable development by opposing 'real' and 'direct' regulation. This sort of argument is consistent with the ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse that assumes that the reconciliation of antagonistic themes – the 'deregulation' of markets and efforts to protect the environment – is a rhetorical ploy made by corporate 'bogeymen' and their politician cronies that works to constrain environmentalist agency.

In this article it is not explained why regulation is needed in the first place. Nor is it explained why corporations reject mandatory regulations. That is, no reference is made to the ideas of governance that underpin different views of market regulation. This lack of explanation makes the representation of the partnerships simplistic, and the reason why corporations resist regulation somewhat vague. Are actors that favour and believe in neo-liberal ideas of governance simply undemocratic, irrational and evil entities that put profit before people and the environment? According to the text it was the corporations that 'booby-trapped' the

UN attempt 'to save the world', and it indeed seems irrational and evil to resist regulations that could save the world. As I will discuss below, I view this kind of demonisation to be problematic.

Greenwashing or greening?

I want to suggest that in *The Economist* text above it is possible to identify a tension between opposing discourses on the environment. The articulation of what might be called a 'contrarian' discourse on environmental problems is evident as a rejection of the alleged claims of those who might be called 'eco-doomsters' (according to *The Economist* article analysed above, *The Guardian* is such an 'eco-doomster'). Yet, at the same time it is acknowledged that there are reasons for concern about the state of the environment. This concern can be said to be one of the defining characteristics of environmental protest discourses. The tension is caused by an inconsistency that arises when politically important elements of this environmentalist protest discourse are woven together with a 'contrarian' discourse on environmental problems. The discursive elements that are not articulated are those that contain critiques of existing institutional arrangements. As such critiques in most cases are inconsistent with the neo-liberal discourses *The Economist* works within, it is therefore strategically important to avoid drawing attention to these excluded discursive elements. I have suggested that one way of doing this is to downplay the arguably subordinate revolutionary status of environmental movements by representing the Johannesburg negotiations (or policy-making process) as being based on consensual conventions. The effect might be that authority of the discourses of the radical environmental movements is undermined. In this way their discourses might lose their agenda-setting power.

The above opinion piece by Klein analysed above, seems to provide a different explanation for why and how the concerns of environmental movements have lost the impetus needed to direct contemporary patterns of development in sustainable directions. According to this text, the reason *why* and *how* this has happened is to be found in corporations' 'booby-trapping' of the policy-process that ensured that mandatory regulation was off the agenda. It was not explained why mandatory regulation is needed or why corporations dislike it. In my view this lack of explanation is problematic. It must be remembered that, in most cases, it is democratically elected governments that legislate the regulatory mechanisms aimed

71

at controlling corporations in various ways. Have these governments conspired with corporations to advance a 'hidden' agenda that will benefit themselves (politically and economically) at the cost of other people and the environment? Despite claims that a neo-liberal globalisation has undermined the regulatory powers of national governments, there are still ways that governments can regulate corporations (see Dicken, 1994; Jessop, 1994, for a discussion on such regulatory mechanisms). As emphasised by the anti-globalisation movements, a neo-liberal globalisation is not inevitable, nor beyond social control. By downplaying the regulatory role governments can play, anger and blame are directed towards corporations that often take the character of a 'bogeyman' in left-liberal discourse. This kind of simplification obfuscates government's ability and responsibility to facilitate sustainable development. It might suggest that governments are powerless, that the whole UN process is undemocratic, and that it is therefore senseless to engage in debates over policies aimed at realising sustainable development.

In my view such suggestions inhibit rather than facilitate widespread political engagement and public deliberation on, and dialog between the competing discourses invoked in negotiations over the meaning of sustainability. The effect of this disengagement and facilitation of non-dialogical deliberation might be that discourses that call for – perhaps necessary – radical changes become marginalised. In this way the practice of demonising antagonistic actors can work to constrain environmentalist agency and hegemonise certain relations of power that thwart moves towards sustainable development.

Chapter Six: The 'Battle of Seattle' and the Regulation of Markets

This chapter analyses how attempts are made to produce the moral legitimacy/illegitimacy of neo-liberal regimes of governance by analysing representations of the environmental advantages and disadvantages of further trade liberalisation. The texts that are analysed were sampled before, during and after the 1999 WTO Summit in Seattle (30.11 to 3.12) whose agenda was to remove barriers and tariffs that hinder the flow of commodities across national borders; an idea consistent with neo-liberal discourses on the 'virtues' of the market.

As suggested in Chapter Two, the ecological modernisation as institutional learning discourse recognises the need for market regulation that stimulates innovative activity and the diffusion of innovations. Such 'innovation friendly' regulatory arrangements would fulfil the 'green' aspirations of concerned citizens and consumers. The underlying assumption is that it is possible to reconcile economic growth with environmental protection without fundamentally changing existing institutional arrangements. It is this promise that grants neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches their moral legitimacy. The ecological modernisation as a technocratic project discourse, on the other hand, rejects this positivistic assumption and often suggests radical institutional changes on grounds that industrial capitalism is inherently unsustainable and that markets are essentially destructive. It is this assumption of the inherent unsustainability of capitalism that morally legitimise calls for radical changes.

I analyse below how texts that articulate competing discourses on market regulation attempt to de-legitimate others ('Them') who have divergent views and legitimate those who share their views ('Us'). Such a 'strategy of polarisation' (Dijk, 1998, pp. 32-33) can be regarded as a key rhetorical device working to morally legitimate or de-legitimate particular regimes of governance in general. I also analyse how the meaning of the term 'free trade' is attempted to be constructed and de-constructed in order to background or foreground tensions that arise when opposing discourses on market regulation are hybridised.

The texts that are analysed were sampled in a survey of articles in the publications' online archives using the keywords 'Seattle and WTO'. I surveyed articles published in October, November and December 1999. *The Economist* had 10

articles, and *The Guardian* 115 articles, that commented at length on the Seattle WTO meeting (there were a few other articles from each publication that made peripheral references).

The Economist: promising paradise

An example of how protesters are morally de-legitimated can be found in a pre-Seattle leader (9.10.1999) that makes a case for neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches. The title of the leader was displayed on the front-page that pictured the earth with recycling arrows around it. Below is the first section of the text:

Why greens should love trade

The environment does need to be protected. But not from trade

THE long battle for free trade must be waged against many enemies, whether protectionists, trade unionists, would-be monopolists or even some economists. A newish troop of combatants has become one of the noisiest: environmentalists. When government leaders gather in Seattle in late November to launch a new push for trade liberalisation under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation, much attention is sure to be paid to the massed ranks there of green demonstrators, shouting loudly that free trade in general, and the WTO in particular, are ruining the global environment.

As a general statement, this claim is plain wrong. Far from damaging the environment, trade is often the best way to improve it. Yet green views cannot be ignored. Across the world, support for free trade remains shallow, and voters everywhere put an increasingly high priority on the environment. Greens are in government in France and Germany; they weigh heavily in other countries, not least in America's Congress, which must approve trade liberalisation.

Besides, some green concerns have a genuine enough basis. Protecting the environment is as legitimate a goal as free trade. And in some specific cases, trade can indeed damage the environment, as the WTO concedes for the first time in a forthcoming report obtained by *The Economist* (see article). Yet in such cases the right response is to tackle the root cause of the environmental damage - and not to stop trade.   (*The Economist*, 1999b)

The second paragraph of the sub-title ('But not from trade') attempts to construct an enemy that is not as powerful as suggested. While it probably is the case that some environmentalists are against trade *per se*, it is misleading to argue, as the sub-title

implicitly does and as suggested in line 5-7 ('the massed ranks there of green demonstrators, shouting loudly that free trade in general, and the WTO in particular, are ruining the global environment'), that all environmentalists are against trade *per se*. It is plausible that indeed most environmentalists do not wish to prevent people trading with each other, that what most want are more regulated forms of trade that put a higher priority on environmental concerns than what they perceive neo-liberal regimes to do (see Chapter Two). Radical factions of the environmental movements that might be against trade *per se,* would not represent the much broader and perhaps even popular scepticism towards the claims of public good from free trade as articulated in neo-liberal discourse. In a sense then, the leader is misleadingly asserting that environmentalists as a group are making the misleading generalisation that all trade is bad for the environment.

The leader also tries to create equivalences between its 'many enemies' in order to de-legitimate them. It is doubtful if it is correct to equate 'protectionists, trade unionists, would-be monopolists or even some economists' with the 'newish troop of combatants' that has 'become one of the noisiest: environmentalists'. Besides the sweeping generalisation of environmentalists, it is unclear what, for example, the similarity is between a 'would-be monopolist' and an environmentalist. Apparently, if we accept the opinion's claim, they are both against free trade. But would not the motivation behind this opposition be different for 'would-be monopolists' and environmentalists? And would not that difference be important? The term 'would-be monopolists' is rather pejorative as it is associated with selfishness and greed. To equate 'would-be monopolists' and environmentalists is therefore an attempt to ascribe illegitimate values to the 'enemy'.

While protesters through the various textual practices described above are represented as misguided by some 'evil' force, *The Economist* emphasises their good intentions and properties. The reason why could be that this is an attempt to persuade sceptical or wavering sections of their readership who want to have a moral justification for backing a neo-liberal form of globalisation, among others characterised by eco-modernist approaches to environmental problems.
Such an attempt to glorify neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches was evident in the second subsection of the text:

For richer, for cleaner

All this makes it doubly important to explain why trade generally benefits the environment. The reason is that it boosts economic growth. As people get richer, they want a cleaner environment - and they acquire the means to pay for it. Granted, trade can increase the cost of the wrong environmental policies. If farmers freely pollute rivers, for instance, higher agricultural exports will increase pollution. But the solution to this is not to shut off exports: it is to impose tougher environmental laws that make polluters pay.

Environmentalists retort that free trade itself prevents countries from doing this. Producers complain about 'unfair' competition from countries with laxer standards. This causes a race to the bottom, as governments are forced to set lower environmental standards for fear of seeing jobs move abroad. Yet it is not at all unfair for countries to choose different levels of environmental protection - it is, rather, an important part of their competitive advantage.

In any case, the costs to business of environmental laws are smaller than is often thought - and they fall over time as greener technologies spread. America's Census Bureau finds that even the most polluting industries spend no more than 2% of their revenues on abating pollution. Moreover, such costs are offset not just by other advantages such as good infrastructure or a skilled workforce, but by gains from a green reputation. For all the talk of a race to the bottom, no governments are rushing to lower environmental standards.

But, greens fret, the WTO may still get in the way of desirable policies. When America banned imports of tuna caught in ways that drown dolphins, Mexico protested to the GATT, the WTO's predecessor. More recently, America's ban on shrimp from countries that use nets which trap turtles was contested by four Asian countries. Both times, America was found to be violating world trade law.

Proof that the WTO stops environmental protection? No. WTO rules decree simply that countries should protect the environment in ways that do not discriminate because of the way something is produced. This is a valuable principle. The big gains from trade stem from taking advantage of countries' differing production methods; to ban such differences would create open season for all protectionists. The right way to deal with people's desire to eat turtle-friendly shrimp, hormone-free beef or whatever is not to impose one country's values on another: it is to label the products appropriately. Consumers, not governments, can then choose what they eat—and trade can remain free.

According to the text what is needed 'to save the world' is more trade. In this excerpt (line 2-4) it is stated that: 'it [trade] boosts economic growth. As people get richer, they want a cleaner environment - and they acquire the means to pay for it'. This

means that trade equals economic growth that again equals better environmental protection. This is why nobody should listen to the 'irrational' greens and instead further liberalise trade through deregulation of markets. This kind of argumentation appears to be typical in neo-liberal discourses on sustainability. First of all, economic growth has the highest priority. It is for this reason that national economies need to be competitive in global markets. Only then can economies grow and populations prosper, or in some cases even survive (as discussed in Chapter Two). Moreover, it is when economic growth has increased the spending power of people that they demand and can afford to pay for environmental protection. It is when and because they are rich that they demand a cleaner environment. Yet, any analysis or explanation is absent. The causal relationship between trade liberalisation, economic growth and better environmental protection is simply assumed. It is not specified how and when the forces of the market can operate in ways that will realise sustainable development. It is simply inferred that it will happen 'someday'.

This practice of excluding any reference to the temporal aspect of the envisaged environmental change has the effect of backgrounding important ethical questions regarding intra – as well as inter– generational justice in relation to the use of natural resources. On one hand it seems clear that if this 'green' transformation occurred over a short period of time, the choice of countries to pursue lower environmental standards could be ethically justified – as if 'the end justified the means' to faster improve the state of the environment. On the other hand, if the envisaged transformation would take hundreds of years to occur, or alternatively, the transformation would never occur, it would be highly contestable that it is ethically correct for countries to pursue lower domestic environmental standards as they are waiting for green and clean technology to be diffused throughout their economic systems. In a sense then, the leader is attempting to colonise the future. This sort of exclusion can be read as an attempt to obscure what arguably is a utopian element of neo-liberal regimes of governance.

For all that, the equivalence set up between trade, economic growth and better environmental protection is problematic in several respects. First, the history of environmental problems might not be as simple as suggested by this equivalence. While it is the case that trade liberalisation stimulates economic growth for some actors, it is highly contestable that trade liberalisation stimulates economic growth for all actors. Furthermore, the certitude expressed in the categorical statement that

trade equals economic growth that in turn equals better environmental protection, seems unwarranted. As discussed in Chapter Three are there huge segments of contemporary social movements that reject the idea that growth can solve problems perceived to be caused by growth. While economic growth can partly explain a 'value-change' towards more 'green' ideals, and the subsequent incorporation of environmental concerns into the policies and strategies of Western industrialised countries, it is misleading to argue that economic growth is the only factor that explains the empowered environmentalist agency that initiated the 'green wave'. Also the emergence of environmental problems such as for example, ozone layer depletion, air and water pollution and the increased numbers of cancers related to these man-made environmental crises are important contributing factors. What is left out of the deterministic argument that trade equals better environmental protection is the often environmentally damaging effects economic growth has had in post-war Western industrialised countries.

If one forgets, for a moment, these reductions and exclusions found in neo-liberal discourse on sustainability, the text's articulation of discourses on market regulation nevertheless appears ambiguous. First it is inferred in lines 6-8 that 'the solution to this [export of products produced in unsustainable ways] is not to shut off exports: it is to impose tougher environmental laws that make polluters pay'. This is a call for regulation that is inconsistent with the 'de-regulatory' neo-liberal discourses espoused elsewhere by *The Economist* (*The Economist*, 2002a). Then, in the following section, in lines 5-7 (of that section), it is inferred that 'it is not at all unfair for countries to choose different levels of environmental protection - it is, rather, an important part of their competitive advantage'. This statement is consistent with a neo-liberal free-market discourse. An actor's competitive advantages (in this case, some countries lower environmental standards) should not be stifled by governmental intervention. This means that, according to the text, the prescription for environmental 'healing' can be an implementation of 'tougher environmental laws' *as well as* letting countries 'choose different levels of environmental protection'. The ambiguity of this argument is obvious: is it a call for strict or lax regulation? I return to how this tension is managed below. I will first, however, discuss how these two divergent arguments are attempted to be morally legitimated.

The apparent logic of the apparently left-liberal argument that the prescription for environmental 'healing' can be an implementation of 'tougher [domestic]

environmental laws', is bolstered by the claim that: 'In any case, the costs to business of environmental laws are smaller than is often thought—and they fall over time as greener technologies spread'. This last paragraph encapsulates one of the basic assumptions in neo-liberal discourse: that technological innovations (i.e. 'competitive advantages'), in this case 'green and clean' technologies', will be diffused throughout the whole economic system over time, the result being more prosperity for all and sustainable development. The alleged existence of this 'virtue' – and not, for example, the fear of consumer boycotts or other forms of political pressure exerted by the anti-globalisation movements – is apparently the reason why, according to the text, a race to the bottom has failed to materialise: 'For all the talk of a race to the bottom, no governments are rushing to lower environmental standards'. As if there is no need for governments to use their assumed sovereignty to choose to lower environmental standards in order to gain a 'competitive advantage' – the rapid diffusion of green and clean technologies makes this an obsolete alternative. It is therefore imperative to dismantle barriers and obstacles to such diffusions of innovative and 'progressive' technology. These are the criteria that need to be fulfilled in order for the promised paradise (i.e. sustainable development) to be realised. Yet as I have suggested above, it is the absence of any discussion of the time needed for this green transformation to occur that is problematic in terms of the ethical questions that are thereby obscured.

The second apparently neo-liberal argument suggests that – as it is 'an important part of their competitive advantage' – it is morally legitimate for countries to 'choose different levels of domestic environmental protection'. By letting countries exploit their competitive advantages by producing what they are good at in the ways they prefer, the 'big gains from trade' can be realised. In other words, the 'good' and sustainable society will be realised by letting each country take advantage of its competitive advantages. This argument relies on an underlying reductionist assumption that is contestable. The problem with the picture the text attempts to paint (or the truth and certainty it attempts to produce), is that it leaves out one category of agent that many analysts see as dominating the global economy – the transnational corporations.[11] This is also the view of large factions of the anti-globalisation movement (see Chapter Two). For example, for a country to have the 'green and clean' technology needed to produce agricultural products in ways perceived as sustainable, it is of great importance whether it is transnational

corporations, domestic companies or the state that owns the product and production means. The ownership of means of production by transnational companies can lead to a loss of the kind of economic sovereignty the text implies that nation-states should have. Thus, by leaving out one of its central agents, the text presents a simplistic model of an ideal competition where the global market functions as a self-regulating mechanism for the benefit of all. It is as if the global economy is idealised like a communal market of pre-industrial times where local farmers brought what they were good at producing to the village square. The effect of such reductionism is that the text's critique of the protesters, and arguments for why governments should deregulate and pursue a free-market oriented 'governance' seem morally legitimate, or 'commonsensical'. If we accept this line of reasoning, it also seems 'commonsensical' and morally legitimate for the WTO to overrule domestic environmental laws and, for example, allow Mexico to catch tuna in any way they want. Environmental preferences of other countries should not inhibit the forces of the market to work in sustainable ways. And the reason why, it seems, is that consumer demand, and not (democratically elected) governments, should choose whether or not to purchase labelled products categorised as either environmentally 'friendly' or 'unfriendly' (in this case dolphin 'friendly' or 'unfriendly' tuna). This argument is consistent with neo-liberal discourses on economic governance that assume that markets are essentially rational because the actors (consumers and producers) operating within them also are rational, and that they therefore should be freed from governmental intervention. I will now discuss how the tension between opposing discourses on market regulation is managed.

As discussed in Chapter Two large factions of the anti-globalisation movement perceive unrestricted markets and limited state intervention to be inconsistent with efforts to protect the environment. Similar to the related (polyvalent) term 'liberal' (that can mean both individual and/or corporate or commercial freedom), the terms 'trade' and 'free trade' often take on different meanings in negotiations over the meaning of trade liberalisation. To make the neo-liberal idea of 'free trade' seem appealing in terms of its environmental effects, it is important for *The Economist* to impose its interpretation of the meaning of the terms. In the leader, attempts to colonise the terms 'trade' and 'free trade' are evident as a series of strategic, yet contradictory, shifts in position. The first section of the text is excerpted again below:

Why greens should love trade

The environment does need to be protected. But not from trade

THE long battle for free trade must be waged against many enemies, whether protectionists, trade unionists, would-be monopolists or even some economists. A newish troop of combatants has become one of the noisiest: environmentalists. When government leaders gather in Seattle in late November to launch a new push for trade liberalisation under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation, much attention is sure to be paid to the massed ranks there of green demonstrators, shouting loudly that free trade in general, and the WTO in particular, are ruining the global environment.

As a general statement, this claim is plain wrong. Far from damaging the environment, trade is often the best way to improve it. Yet green views cannot be ignored. Across the world, support for free trade remains shallow, and voters everywhere put an increasingly high priority on the environment. Greens are in government in France and Germany; they weigh heavily in other countries, not least in America's Congress, which must approve trade liberalisation.

Besides, some green concerns have a genuine enough basis. Protecting the environment is as legitimate a goal as free trade. And in some specific cases, trade can indeed damage the environment, as the WTO concedes for the first time in a forthcoming report obtained by *The Economist* (see article). Yet in such cases the right response is to tackle the root cause of the environmental damage - and not to stop trade.

In this excerpt is it possible to identify a move from claiming that 'As a general statement, this claim [that trade is bad for the environment] is plain wrong' (line 8) to claiming that that 'in some specific cases, trade can indeed damage the environment [...]' (line 14). Thus, it appears as if the leader first claims that environmentalists are plainly wrong and then that they are partly right. There is obviously a tension between these two statements. Before I discuss the reasons why this shift in position occurs, I will describe some of the moves that lead up to this shift. Already in the sentence following the claim in line 8, the modality of *The Economist's* argument seems to have changed. Trade is now 'often the best way to improve' the environment, and not simply *the* best way to improve the environment. Furthermore, the next sentence reads: 'green views cannot be ignored'. The text gives two reasons why not. First, they cannot be ignored because they undermine the cause of free trade ('across the world, support for free trade remains shallow') and secondly, because they are popular ('voters everywhere put an increasingly high priority on the

environment'). That is, green views cannot be ignored, not necessarily because they are correct, but because they constitute a significant political threat to the free trade cause. Moreover, because 'some green concerns have a genuine basis' it is as legitimate to protect the environment, as it is to support free trade. The reason why it is legitimate is that 'in some specific cases, trade can indeed damage the environment'. Thus, the claim that trade can harm the environment is now at least partially legitimate. Why this shift in position? The key to understanding this inconsistency is to analyse the context of the production and consumption of the text.

The leader comments on the upcoming WTO meeting in Seattle that in retrospect can be regarded as a climax in the surfacing of widespread public concerns over a neo-liberal form of globalisation (or a climax in the history of environmental problems in Western industrialised countries). As the leader admits 'green views' do constitute a significant social force that could potentially threaten the cause of free trade expected to be advanced at the WTO meeting. It is therefore strategically important to obtain political support amongst people with 'green views'. As described in Chapter Two and Three, green concerns are pervasive through Western industrialised cultures, including neo-liberal inspired corporate cultures whose members constitute the target readership of *The Economist*. It is therefore not surprising that *The Economist* attempts to appropriate environmental discourses. That is, *The Economist* attempts to make the concerns expressed in popular environmental discourses their own. This means that the shift from a polemical position (greens are plainly wrong) to an inclusive reconciliatory one (greens are partly right), is an attempt to, first, neutralise resistance to the cause of 'free' trade, to which *The Economist* is committed, and, second, to morally legitimate their own position by appropriating popular and appealing – and therefore politically very important – elements from green protest discourses.

One way of grasping this process of strategic discoursal hybridisation is to examine how the meanings of key concepts are contested and attempted to be appropriated. In negotiations over the sustainability of further trade liberalisation the terms 'free trade/trade' are such key concepts. In the leader these terms are seemingly used interchangeably in a random manner. Yet, where these terms are used, and where they are not used, appears to me to be strategically important. Consider, for example, how the meanings of the title and subtitle change if 'trade' is replaced with 'free trade' and 'free trade' is replaced with 'trade': Why greens

should love [free] trade' and 'The environment does need to be protected. But not from [free] trade'. Furthermore, consider how these titles correspond with the latter section of the text where again 'trade' has been replaced by 'free trade':

> And in some specific cases, [free] trade can indeed damage the environment, as the WTO concedes for the first time in a forthcoming report obtained by *The Economist* (see article). Yet in such cases the right response is to tackle the root cause of the environmental damage - and not to stop [free] trade.

The intention behind this 'textual exercise' is to show how the meaning of this text is conditioned by a selective use of the terms trade/free trade. If one accepts that it is likely many, if not most environmentalists contest a neo-liberal trading regime and not trade *per se* (as suggested in my analysis above), the argument of my altered example, where the term 'trade' is replaced with the term 'free trade', appears ambiguous. If free trade in some cases can damage the environment, could not free trade therefore at least be part of 'the root causes of environmental damage'? The leader seems to argue that it is not. The ambiguity that arises as a consequence of this swapping of terms suggests that it is rhetorically important where the adjective 'free' is used. If the leader did acknowledge that protesters were against neo-liberal 'free trade' regimes (and not against trade per se) by using the terms as in the above excerpt, it would become problematic in the same text to argue that their concerns are legitimate. This might have implied that *The Economist* shares the protesters' conviction that markets ought to be more regulated. This conviction is in stark opposition to the 'de-regulatory' neo-liberal discourses to which *The Economist* simultaneously proclaims its commitment. Thus, in order to minimise drawing attention to the ambiguity around the actual characteristics of a neo-liberal mode of market regulation, the leader avoids making any reference to the large factions of the anti-globalisation movement that call for more regulated approaches. One way of doing this is to colonise the idea of freedom by setting up an equivalence between 'free trade' and 'trade' that helps demonise opposition to neo-liberal regimes ('if you are against free trade you are against trade *per se*, and that is 'illiberal'). In this way reform-oriented elements of the environmentalist anti-globalisation protest discourses calling for more regulation of markets are marginalised. These are the protest-discourses that call for 'moderate' changes, either through 'contestation and reform' or a 'globalisation from below' (see Chapter Two). This marginalisation of

moderate environmental discourses might also help hegemonise an *ecological-modernisation-as-institutional-learning discourse* based on neo-liberal ideas of governance, and not based on other ideas that, for instance, entail more regulated forms of governance.

The Guardian: contesting the 'free' trade myth

In *The Guardian* the demonisation of so-called 'free traders' often focused on the tension between calling for trade liberalisation while at the same time maintaining barriers and tariffs that protect national interests. I will give a few examples of what I mean. An opinion titled *'Let's have a bonfire of WTO hypocrisies'* (8.11.1999) by Kevin Watkins, policy adviser of Oxfam, says that 'While rich countries may preach the free trade gospel, they remain staunch protectionists' (*The Guardian*, 1999b). Along similar lines an opinion (25.11.1999) by Madeleine Bunting (regular columnist in *The Guardian*) and Larry Elliot (*The Guardian's* economic editor) states that 'While the West may preach trade liberalisation, it has not practised it' (*The Guardian*, 1999f). An editorial titled *'Feeding Mammon'* (30.11.1999) explains in more detail that:

> The world's international trading rules were established with the best intentions. For centuries, the most powerful nations had been able to crush the weakest, by refusing to allow them to compete on fair terms. While Britain, for example, was prepared to buy raw cotton from India, it levied import taxes, or tariffs, against cotton clothes made in the sub-continent, ensuring that the profits from processing and manufacturing accrued to our own companies. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), drafted in 1947, would pull these tariff barriers down, enabling the poor to trade on equal terms with the rich.
>
> It wasn't long, however, before the negotiations began to be infiltrated by corporate lawyers. Shielded by the secrecy and opacity with which the trade rules were discussed, they began to undermine the guidelines promoting fairness and replace them with clauses enabling unconditional corporate rule. Expert panels were stuffed with corporate nominees, key decisions were taken by trade bureaucrats with startling conflicts of interest. By the time the GATT was replaced, in 1995, with the World Trade Organisation, it had become the means by which corporations force governments to open their borders to the crudest forms of exploitation.   (*The Guardian*, 1999a)

Thus, while 'international trading rules were established with the best intentions' and have the potential to do 'good', they have unfortunately become corrupted and designed in ways that favour the already rich and powerful. And the reason why this is happening has to do with the way in which corporations have hijacked decision-making (see Chapter Five). Thus, the whole trade-liberalisation process is undemocratic and its supporters are ascribed obviously morally illegitimate values: they do not mind that 'corporations force governments to open their borders to the crudest forms of exploitation'. In other words, the main culprits are the corporations and their 'dupes'.

Another *Guardian* text, an editorial (27.11.1999, also published in *The Guardian Weekly*) titled 'Sleepless in Seattle' (referring to the Hollywood blockbuster with the same title), emphasises the role national governments are playing in the production of international trade rules. They are ascribed morally illegitimate values thus:

> Big negotiators like the US and EU have shown remarkable hypocrisy, arguing for free trade when it suited their interests in gaining entry to new markets, but fiercely defending their own most vulnerable sectors. Their restrictions on developing countries' exports make a mockery of the genuine advances achieved on debt relief in the last year. How can poor countries develop, let alone pay their debts, if we refuse to buy their products?

This is the only attempt the text makes at explaining why 'Big negotiators like the US and EU have shown remarkable hypocrisy':

> While globalisation is delivering unprecedented wealth, it is not at present spreading it equally. Inequality between countries and within countries has sharply increased in recent decades. Millions of people all over the world will log on, turn on or pick up to read what is being negotiated on their behalf. A global debate about the gains and losses of globalisation is a good thing: the acceleration of the world economy in the late 20th century is too often presented as inevitable and beyond the capacity of individual countries, let alone individuals, to affect. We need global participation in constructing the rules which determine the livelihoods of individuals and communities; without it, powerful multinational corporations cosy up to governments to advance their interests unchecked - often at the cost of consumers and the environment.

So this great debate is welcome. But we must keep it balanced. We need to steer clear of some of its wilder expressions opposed to trade in any form. Trade is a motor of economic wealth. It is knitting the world in ever closer mutual interdependence; we enjoy drinking wine from all corners of the globe, and buying cheap clothes from Taiwan or the Maldives. Restricting trade with high tariff protection has never done any country (or the environment) benefit in the long run. But we also need to be wary of those multinationals and politicians who advocate trade liberalisation as an end in itself. That poses a real threat to international environmental treaties when they conflict with WTO rules. This is a clash of international jurisdictions. The US argues that the WTO should have supremacy; but that threatens the entire edifice of vital international environmental law. At present, countries could challenge the biodiversity convention or the climate change convention under WTO rules; only the risk of embarrassment hold them back. This needs to be urgently clarified by a WTO agreement recognising the supremacy of the 70-odd international environmental treaties painstakingly negotiated to protect our planet and the species which live on it.   (*The Guardian*, 1999d)

Lines 7-9 in the second section suggest that some multinationals and politicians, who advocate trade liberalisation, do so 'as an end in itself'. Why they do so is not explained. The text also states that 'The US argues that the WTO should have supremacy' over environmental laws. Yet, it does not explain why the US supports this view. Nor is it explained why (other) countries would choose to 'challenge the biodiversity convention or the climate change convention under WTO rules'. On the other hand, why countries have not challenged international environmental treaties under WTO rules is explained: 'only the risk of embarrassment hold them back'. What this 'risk of embarrassment' involves is not specified. It is simply implied that there is an urgent need for a WTO agreement that recognises 'the supremacy of the 70-odd international environmental treaties painstakingly negotiated to protect our planet and the species which live on it'.

While 'free traders' are represented as misguided by a somewhat obscure 'dark' and 'evil' force, *The Guardian* texts emphasise the morally legitimate intentions of their criticisms and the public good that could come as a result of their proposed changes. In the *'Sleepless in Seattle'* editorial referred to above, a call for a 'globalisation from below' is made:

We need global participation in constructing the rules which determine
the livelihoods of individuals and communities; without it, powerful
multinational corporations cosy up to governments to advance their
interests unchecked - often at the cost of consumers and the
environment.

Calls for other types of global governance were made in other texts commenting on
the 'Battle of Seattle'. The 'contestation and reform' mode of protest discourse was
articulated in the *'Feeding Mammon'* editorial analysed above. This is how the text's
last section prescribes what should be done to obtain a fair and sustainable trading
regime:

The world desperately needs a rules-based trading system. But it must
be one which renders corporations subservient to democracy, rather
than democracy subservient to corporations. Businesses should be
made to seek a licence to trade, which they will not receive until they
shoulder their social and environmental responsibilities. Any other
outcome would leave the world not with a free trade agreement, but
with a charter for corporate government.   *(The Guardian*, 1999a)

An opinion by regular columnist George Monbiot (11.11.1999) articulates a critique
of trade liberalisation that is consistent with both a 'delinking' discourse and
technocratic project discourse:

We are but plankton to big business

The latest round of trade talks will serve captains of global greed

The market is imperfectly responsive to demand. No one sells cars on
the basis that they will run 150 miles to the gallon, even though the
demand is well-established and the technology has been available for
years. No one sells phone lines with the promise that if a fault occurs
you will not be cast, when you try to report it, into a limbo of machines
masquerading as human beings and human beings masquerading as
machines, despite the fact that such considerate service has turned
thousands of mild citizens into psychopaths.

Companies compete, in other words, on limited grounds. The market
heeds some consumer demands - principally low price - but not others.
The bigger a company becomes, the less responsive it is likely to be. If,
for example, the bakery at the bottom of my road decided to alter the
way it baked its bread and I complained, threatening to take my custom
elsewhere, the owners would be mortified. If half a dozen customers
complained, they would go back to the old way of baking immediately.

I have power in this marketplace, because they are not much bigger than I am.

If I make a similar complaint to a supermarket, I will doubtless be treated with respect, and perhaps even asked to fill in a form, but when I have gone, the staff will tap their heads. The superstores are big enough not to have to worry about me. As businesses grow, their customers' power becomes blunt and diffuse.

At the end of this month ministers from all over the world will gather in Seattle to launch one of the most important events since the fall of the Berlin wall: a new round of global trade talks. The World Trade Organisation furiously contests claims that a new agreement will disadvantage the developing world, threaten the environment and destroy the regulations protecting consumers and the workforce. We can (and in subsequent columns, doubtless I will) argue interminably about these issues, but one outcome of the talks is inevitable, which is perhaps why it has scarcely been discussed. A new world trade agreement will enable big business to get bigger.

(The Guardian, 1999e)

According to this text, trade liberalisation will enable corporations to become bigger and more powerful at the expense of both people and the environment. This critique is consistent with left-liberal discourses on market regulation that maintain that markets must be regulated to protect people and environment from its inherent destructive features. The text also seems to articulate a discourse consistent with the 'delinking' discourse in lines 3-9 of the second section. In the ideal world described in these lines, small-scale businesses are responsive and sensitive to the demands of the community. It is when businesses become big that 'their customers' power becomes blunt and diffuse'. This is, then, this text's moral legitimation for why trade liberalisation should be resisted.

The above analysis of texts found in *The Guardian* shows that often these texts identify inconsistencies between what is being said and what is being done. In particular is it the inconsistency between preaching 'free trade' while at the same time, in practice, rejecting the dismantling of regulations that protect important national (self) interests that are identified. My analysis of the texts found in *The Economist* identified a tension caused by an inconsistency that arises when opposing discourses on market regulation are woven in hybridity (note the difference between inconsistencies between what is being said in one text and what is being said in another text, and the inconsistencies between what is being said in a text in one place

and what is being done in practice). I suggested that the managing of these tensions (caused by inconsistency in the logic of the discourse) could obscure ethical questions. I also suggested that one way of obscuring the tension between opposing discourses on market regulation, was to colonise the meaning of the terms trade/free trade. In the following I will examine attempts to decolonise what arguably are neo-liberal colonisations of terminology. I will first describe what I regard as unsuccessful attempts to challenge the neo-liberal colonisation of the term 'free trade'. This is how a news story (9.11.1999) describes the upcoming WTO protest:

Protesters from around world to flock to Seattle trade summit

It is the worst nightmare of US conservatives. Hundreds of protest groups, tens of thousands of political activists from all over the world, plus Fidel Castro and the Mexican Zapatista revolutionaries, will gather in Seattle next month for the biggest protest against global capitalism ever held.

In this excerpt the protest is described as 'the biggest protest against global capitalism ever held'. This implies that all protesters are against capitalism *per se*. And the unwarranted generalisation continues:

People with grievances ranging from the sweatshop workers of Mexico to the small farmers of India see it as their last chance this century to register their dismay at the globalisation of the economy, which they claim has already had a disastrous impact on the economies of weaker countries.   (*The Guardian*, 1999c)

Thus, not only are the protesters against capitalism, they are also against globalisation of the economy *per se*. As I have shown in the above analysis of *Economist* texts, this kind of simplification can have the effect of marginalising 'moderate' anti-globalisation movement discourses that call for more regulated forms of economic governance. This is, in my view, an example of an unsuccessful attempt to decolonise the term free trade.

For all that, I believe successful attempts to *decolonise* the arguably neo-liberal colonisation of the term free trade occurred. For example, the *'Sleepless in Seattle'* editorial analysed above describes the demands of the protesters thus:

89

Sleepless in Seattle

The pressure will be on the WTO: rightly

The demonstrations in Seattle next week are likely to be the biggest
expressions of political activism in the US since the Democratic
Convention in Chicago in 1968. No fewer than 1,200 non-
governmental organisations (NGOs) have formed a coalition calling
for a halt to the World Trade Organisation's drive to cut trade tariffs
and open up markets. They want a halt to further liberalisation, a
review of the impact of the WTO's work since it was set up in 1995
and reform of the institution. They argue that the WTO's powerful
disputes system, which allows for punishing sanctions if trade rules are
broken, undercuts international agreements on the environment and
affects the sovereignty of countries on issues as diverse as food safety
and labour standards.   *(The Guardian*, 1999d)

In the above excerpt protesters are described in a more nuanced way. They are not

represented as being against capitalism, globalisation or trade *per se*. Rather they are

represented as wanting to 'halt' further liberalisation and review the impact of the

WTO's work. In my view, this is an example of a successful attempt to decolonise

the term free trade. Still, the absence of any explanation why certain actors, despite

all the 'obvious' problems of trade liberalisation, choose to believe in the public

good of further trade liberalisation (recall that, according to the text, they do this 'as

an end in itself'), in my view, makes this text problematic. I will discuss this further

below.

Effective or ineffective oppositional cultural politics?

What all of the above *Guardian* texts have in common is that they are sceptical of the

claims of the various public goods arising from trade liberalisation. They call for a

fairer and sustainable global trading regime. This is neither a new nor a controversial

call. As I have shown above, texts found in *The Economist* make similar calls. It is

not hard to agree that a trading regime that is fair and sustainable is needed. Nor is it

hard to approve the slogans of many left-liberal agencies, for example, the Australian

Greens have a car bumper sticker that reads *'Green, not greed'*. These calls are all

popular – and therefore politically important – discursive elements of a shared

storyline on the environmental problems of Western industrialised countries.

My analysis shows that the above *Guardian* texts identify gaps between what

is being said and what is being done about market regulation. In a sense then, these

texts identify what arguably is a 'gap' between rhetoric and reality. Rhetoric, in this sense, is thus merely 'empty words' or 'unkept promises'. Unkept promises are, of course, not something new. Rather, it is what makes politics possible and necessary (Fairclough, 2000, p. 155). It is when gaps between what is being promised and what is being done become visible, that it becomes possible to engage in contestations, or negotiations, over the meaning of events and phenomena. Herein lies a possibility to challenge social forces and the discourses that work to morally legitimate them (see also discussion of Fiske's (1990) definition of hegemony in Chapter One, pp. 9-10).

For all that, despite *The Guardians's* identification of what allegedly are gaps between rhetoric and reality, I nonetheless see as problematic the way in which actors that believe and support particular discourses on sustainability are demonised. This is because such demonisation might suggest that the causes behind the unsustainable practices associated with neo-liberal regimes of governance are to be found in an individual's morally illegitimate values and properties, rather than in conscious institutionalised strategies and the discourses that underpin them. As discussed in Chapter Four, this way of individualising error behind the causes of the unsustainability of Western industrialised countries can obscure tensions in hybrid discourses and thereby constrain social movements geared at contesting them. In a sense, *The Guardian's* demonisation of antagonistic actors can work as a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it can mobilise political action against the antagonistic actors and their discourses. This might be likely among politically active actors that have more knowledge of the issues in question, like, for instance, some green groups and activists. Yet, on the other hand, demonisation can also obscure the potential tensions found in antagonistic hybrid discourses and thereby minimise the risk of undermining their legitimacy. This might be the case for members of the readership that are not politically active and who are not familiar with the basic ideological assumptions that underpin neo-liberal eco-modernist policies. For such readers personalised accounts might suggest that it is the 'bad' properties of political actors, and not their policies, that is the key problem. In this way demonisation can also depoliticise political issues and facilitate a tendency of public disengagement with politics that does not serve the interest of agencies geared at challenging the legitimacy of existing practices and structures. It is for this reason that I have reservations about the effectiveness of the oppositional cultural politics the above *Guardian* texts engage in.

Part IV The Popularisation of Environmental Concerns

In the above case studies I identified textual practices that work to simplify both *The Guardian's* and *The Economist's* coverage of environmental issues. This practice of simplifying political issues of public concern is common in mediated political discourses, and the 'tabloid' press especially have been criticised for it. The result of simplifying might be that complex political discourses are articulated in ways that blur the generic distinction between news and entertainment ('infotainment'). Such popularised forms of journalism – of which personalisation is a defining characteristic – can be understood as part of a wider social tendency of an aestheticisation of politics. Harvey (1989, pp. 108-109) suggests this tendency is inevitable. He suggests that in the face of the complexity of (late) modern societies, political discourses can only be legitimated if they are comprehensible to the community as a whole. Harvey thus suggests that constructions of political discourses therefore are 'bound to engage to some degree in the aestheticization of politics'. In a sense then, the popularisation of environmental concerns entails an aestheticization of environmental politics. In the following concluding chapter I discuss different perspectives on popularised environmental journalism.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion – Instrumentalisation or democratisation?

While many analysts see populist media politics as a prerequisite for the legitimation of particular regimes of governance, they often disagree on what the effects upon society are. Often the debate is centred on a distinction between what can be called 'tabloid' and 'quality' media. For many the term *tabloidisation* (originally referring to the physical format of a newspaper) connotes a decay of journalism that ultimately undermines the democratic function of the media (Gripsrud, 2000). Bourdieu (1998), for instance, suggests that instead of providing information 'citizens ought to have in order to exercise their democratic rights' (p. 18), contemporary mediated political news discourses often take the character of frequent updates on an unfolding 'soap opera'. These updates are (as discussed in Chapter One), for mainly economic reasons, framed in ways that are believed to be the preferred language of the audience. Tabloidisation, as Bourdieu suggests, can thus be said to facilitate a tendency that is believed to contribute to an increasing public disengagement with politics (reflected in decreasing electoral polls in countries where the public sphere is heavily mediatised) (see also Habermas, 1996, for similar lines of critique).

Jan Pakulski's and Stephen Crook's (1998, p. 5) description of the 'ebbing green wave' in Australia, provides a perspective on how the public's disengagement with green politics might have occurred. They use the Weberian concept of routinisation to describe how the environmental movements might have been constrained as a result of the popularisation of environmental concerns. *Routinisation* involves 'an idiomatic shift from protest to affirmation, from the new and special to the expected and familiar'. They contend that the process of routinisation reduces the intensity of media coverage, public concern and political debates. Furthermore, concerns that are routinised become 'familiar and normal, and are therefore less affected by moral panics, vicissitudes of electoral contests and media fashions' (p. 19). Pakulski and Crook (p. 20) therefore see the process of routinisation as a form of

> ideological-political absorption: 'new issues enter the public agenda, sit awkwardly with the old ideological-political divisions, and are finally accommodated by the old ideological divisions and political programs. In the process they diversify in form, content and institutional carriers.

They thus contend that concerns about the environment are no longer 'niche concerns', but have become 'mainstream'. The result was that environmental groups had to compete in a more crowded scene to legitimate their ideas.

Yet, other analysts seem to have a more positive assessment of the role the media play in the negotiation over sustainability. As noted in Chapter One, Hartley (1996, pp. 82-85) argues that without the media and the creation of what he calls popular readerships, there could not be a public sphere in the contemporary period, nor large, complex democratic civil societies. About personalisation he says elsewhere (1982, p. 78): 'Individual people are easier to identify – and to identify with – than structures, forces or institutions: hence the government is often personalised as 'Mrs Thatcher, etc.'. He is therefore sceptical of what he labels 'a standard leftist denunciation of journalism' (1996, p. 26) that assumes that commercially organised media outlets tend to produce texts that reproduce, rather than challenge, the existing social order. In his view such a denunciation denies the possibility that audiences, and not only leftist intellectuals, are capable of negotiating and 'de-constructing' media texts. Moreover, for Hartley the creation of popular readerships entails increased participation of previously marginalised groups (i.e. women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals) in the public sphere. The popularisation of political issues thus involves a democratisation of the traditionally restricted bourgeois, patriarchical public sphere, and should therefore not be rejected per se.

Fiske (1992) underlines the relevance of this argument. He sees the public disengagement with politics not only as a result of what Bourdieu (1998, p. 3) calls 'demagogic simplification' but also as a result of 'the quality media's' use of 'anti-popular forms for significant information' (p. 60). He thus suggests that the quality media – and especially those outlets that brand themselves as 'progressive' (like for instance, The Economist and The Guardian) – have much to learn from the ways in which tabloid media attempt to produce popularised explanatory frameworks.

This means that tabloid journalistic techniques, such as personalisation, can both facilitate and inhibit the democratic function of the media. Consequently, this also means that the effects popularised simplifications can have on what can/cannot be said in media discourses on sustainability must be established case by case. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, pp. 83-89) provide a way to understand the relations of domination and subordination that result from this process of mediated aestheticization of environmental politics. They use Habermas' distinction between

an instrumental rationality geared at maximising efforts of institutional systems and communicative rationality geared at achieving understanding as a background on which these relations can be understood. About the relationship between these two types of rationality they write (p. 84):

> The two forms of rationality are not in an either/or relation, because modern societies cannot do without a measure of instrumental rationalisation; but on the other hand instrumental rationality depends upon communicative rationality in crucial ways. The political project is not replacing instrumental by communicative rationality, it is (negatively) preventing instrumental rationality from spreading too far at the expense of communicative rationality with socially pathological consequences, and (positively) creating the social conditions in which the full emancipatory potential of communicative rationality can be realised.

This means that it takes many forms of journalism to sustain a democratic public sphere, and that without a certain degree of instrumentalisation societies could not function. Yet, it also means that a dominance of some popularising journalistic techniques, like for instance personalisation, can advance an instrumental rather than a communicative rationality.

In my analysis of texts found in *The Economist* and *The Guardian* I have shown that popularised forms of journalism are present in so-called quality media publications. My analysis also shows how the mediated popularisation of environmental concerns can advance an instrumental rather than a communicative rationality. In the analysis I also suggested that the practice of demonising antagonistic actors could empower polemical discourses of moral denunciation. For an actor, such as *The Guardian*, that apparently embraces the scepticism of the anti-globalisation movements (it should be clear by now that 'anti-globalisation' is a misleading term) this kind of denunciation appears to me, as noted before, to be a rather ineffective form of oppositional cultural politics. Rather than directing attention to the 'bad' properties of individual actors, a more effective politics would be to direct attention to systems and the hybrid discourses that work to legitimate their exercise of power. As discussed in Chapter One, is it the capacity to use knowledge about the world and the capacity to reflect over social practices that, above all, determine the effectiveness of the politics working to legitimate/de-legitimate discourses. By providing *populist explanatory frameworks* that describe

and analyse the political discourses that legitimate or de-legitimate certain policies, practices and actions, a public debate over the logic of particular discourses could be better facilitated. Such a debate could do more to stimulate the scepticism towards neo-liberal and eco-modernist practices and the hybrid discourses that work to legitimate them. It could also better facilitate public deliberation and reflection on which ideas should be used as guidelines to realise sustainable development. This may result in exclusions and elisions in socially constructed discourses on sustainability being identified and discussed.

The political project for those wishing to advance a communicative rationality, while at the same time sustaining the necessary instrumental rationality, is utopian in the sense that it will never be able to stabilise the relationship between these two forms of rationality. Yet, in my view it nonetheless sets an important ethical and practical ideal that is worthwhile striving for. Chouliaraki (2000, p. 293) suggest how to advance this political project:

> the facilitation of deliberative processes among audiences is a matter of not only changing institutional arrangements (towards a regulation of marketized media) but also of changing the mode of articulation of media discourses itself; even though the latter may be a consequence of the former, each is a *sine qua non* for deliberative democracy.

This dialectical view of discourse opens up the possibility that it is possible for all actors – not only journalists but also politicians, NGO representatives, commentators and so on – engaged in media debates over sustainability to choose whether or not to obey commercially induced generic conventions that might advance an instrumental rationality at the expense of a communicative rationality. This dialectical view of discourse has also resulted in calls for projects geared at stimulating critical language awareness (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995a) and critical media literacy (Fairclough, 1995b). I see this thesis as part of that process.

In this thesis I have analysed the negotiation over the meaning of sustainability as it occurs in media discourses. Grounded in a dialectical view of discourse, I emphasised the 'openness' of social practice, including environmental journalistic practices. On the basis of ideal-type descriptions of competing discourses on sustainability, I analysed media texts that commented on sustainability issues for their discoursal hybridity. I suggested that the effectiveness of politics aimed at

legitimating and de-legitimating neo-liberal eco-modernist approaches to environmental problems can be understood in terms of the relationship between an instrumental rationality and a communicative rationality. I have shown how CDA can contribute to knowledge that can enhance the critical self-reflection actors need in order to effectively engage in cultural politics geared at removing obstacles that constrain both the realisation of a sustainable development and the democratic function of the media.

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Endnotes

[1] The protesters utilise new global communication technology to address global issues and to mobilise support and activism. The widespread use of this technology might partly explain the increased momentum of these movements, as well as the 'greening' of economic and political actors (see Chapter Three). As new communication technologies, particularly the Internet, have enabled social movements to organise and mobilise more effectively, the threat of negative publicity has apparently increased. This has caused the institutions that are targeted to be more sensitive and responsive to the demands and concerns of the movements. For all that, despite the potential of new communication technologies to induce institutional changes, any conclusion about their political impacts should not be exaggerated or drawn prematurely. In her study of environmental Internet activism in Britain, Jenny Pickerill (2001a; 2001b) found that while the Internet has the potential to provide a new method of recruitment, it has not played a central role in the recruitment of new activists. In her study she also found that the environmentalists' perceived importance of mainstream media seemed to remain constant, as 'environmentalists believe that the public and politicians still use it to primarily inform their opinions' (2001b, p. 368).

[2] This re-thinking of power as potentially exerted through all kinds of cultural practices has made several theorists suggest that it is better to think of the changed focus within social theory as the 'cultural turn' rather than the 'postmodern turn' (Nash 2000, p. 3).

[3] John Rawls is often considered to have provided a moral justification for this theory of rational self-interest (see Rawls, 1971).

[4] This following section is draws upon Brodschöll (2000).

[5] The Howard government supported the decision. The ensuing dispute has been said to signal 'a new context for industrial relations in Australia' (Wiseman, 1998, p. 1) and is according to Svensen (1998) arguably the most important industrial struggle in Australia last century.

[6] The privatisation of Telstra is considered to be a strategic economic reform for the Howard government (Walker, 2000, p. 26). By end of June 1999, 49.9 % of the formerly public owned company had been privatised.

[7] The texts are drawn from the 'alternative press, organizational documents, the world, wide web, and participant observation'. She defines a 'connection' between two movements to be 'a public embrace of each other's ideology and/or projects' (Starr 2000, p. 161).

[8] Giddens (1998, p. 58), in contrast to Giddens (2000), rejects the ecological modernisation discourse as 'too good to be true'.

[9] Hajer (1996, p. 246) says 'the public outcry focuses on specific 'emblems': issues of great symbolic potential that dominates environmental discourse'. These 'emblems' are changing over time and space. Today global ecological issues like ozone holes and global warming dominate environmental discourses.

[10] Hajer (1996) in fact sketches out one more ideal-type discourse – 'ecological modernisation as cultural politics' – where he calls for more research on the cultural politics behind the different constructions of ecological modernisation. As I already have described my approach to cultural politics in the Introduction and in Chapter One, I will not describe Hajer's cultural politics approach. Fisher and Hajer (1999) also call for 'cultural politics' approaches to the study of environmental discourses.

[11] Fairclough (2000, p. 23) employs the metaphor 'the ghost in the machine' to describe this absence.