

**CLIMATE IN THE NEWS**

**THE BRITISH PRESS AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION  
OF THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT**

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## Abstract

The media have a crucial role in the production, reproduction and change of ideas and are a central marketplace of arguments for the public and political construction of climate change. The thesis aims to analyse the various representations of this complex issue in the British 'quality' press, more specifically in the *Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Times*. Using an innovative framework for discourse analysis, the thesis deconstructs the ways the science and the politics of climate change were reported and debated in the press between 1985 and 1997.

Critically reading media discourse in order to understand how the interpretations advanced by various social actors are amplified or challenged by newspapers, to shed light on to how scientific knowledge is presented to the public in the news and how this relates to value systems in the media, as well as to evaluate the role of the media in consolidating or contesting political options and ideological standings are the thesis' main goals.

My analytical approach to discourse integrates various dimensions and tools of analysis, with highlight to discursive strategies and discursive effects, and ideological standpoints. Such framework has both a synchronic and diachronic scope.

Discourse analysis indicates the existence of important differences between the three newspapers' depictions of climate change - they truly promoted alternative versions of reality. I suggest that such differences are associated to ideological cultures that are sustained by media institutions and by the individuals they give voice to (journalists and other contributors). In fact, together with the news medium, the author of the article seems to be a central factor explaining variations in the framing and portrayal of climate change.

The thesis helps us know the extent to which the British 'quality' press legitimates certain political options, positions and values, or promotes a valuable critique of various alternatives.

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I dedicate this thesis to my late father Manuel Carvalho, to my mother, and to Jarle.

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# CHAPTER 1

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## INTRODUCTION

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Human perception of the environment has changed substantially over the last two decades. While there was previously some awareness of the risks posed by transformations in the environment, concerns were limited to the immediate space surrounding people, the local and national levels being the focus of attention and decision-making. In the eighties and nineties, a different kind of environmental threat appeared in the horizon: 'global' environmental change.

The 'global' environment came to occupy a central place in scientific and political agendas, and public opinion data shows widespread concern with regard to problems like ozone and climate change (Bostrom et al., 1994; Bord et al., 1998). The present scientific, social and political 'status' of an issue like climate change was not acquired suddenly but gradually developed as a result of a multitude of claims and debates involving various types of social actors.

The scientific and political history of global environmental change has been traced by scholars in the fields of international relations, politics and geography (Benedick, 1991; Litfin, 1994; Rowlands, 1995; Shackley and Wynne, 1995b; Paterson, 1996; Demeritt, 2001), providing essential contributions into the choices, assumptions and conditions involved in the making of knowledge and the making of political decisions.

Yet the role of public spaces like the media in the definition and redefinition of problems like climate change is still relatively under-researched. The few accounts of how the global environment came to have certain meanings in the media (Mormont and Dasnoy, 1995; Trumbo, 1996; McComas and Shanahan, 1999; and Weingart et al., 2000) have gaps in terms of the amount and detail of qualitative analysis.

This thesis claims that a critical history of media representations of climate change is necessary. The media's ways of talking about and framing climate change, and the discursive (re)construction of the arguments and claims of various types of social actors need to be analysed along two axes: synchronic and diachronic. On the one hand, alternative depictions of climate change should be confronted at any given moment. On

the other hand, we need to understand how today's discursive constructions become the foundations for tomorrow's; in other words, how discourses build on previous discourses and how this sequence leads to sedimentation or revolution.

This chapter aims at bringing to the fore the historical background of climate change science and politics and starts engaging with the theoretical issues that underpin the thesis.

## 1. THE BIRTH OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA

If there is to be a scene-shifting impact on politics and culture, then global warming will be a lever of change. ... Global warming is a problem poised on the horizon, indicating a separation between the present and a future world that *will* be different. (Myerson and Rydin, 1996: 88)

A number of key markers integrate the history of environmental awareness. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the image of the Earth seen from the Moon in 1969, the Club of Rome's 1972 report on the *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) and the Brundtland Commission's *Our Common Future* in 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) are some icons of a new consciousness. Accidents gave body to environmental risks, and concentrated attention and debate on the degradation of the environment. The explosion of a nuclear reactor in Three Mile Island in 1979, the spill of toxic chemicals into the Rhine River in 1986, the 1986 nuclear accident in Chernobyl, and the 'Exxon Valdez' oil spillage in 1989, to mention but a few cases, mobilized media interest around the world (Gale, 1987; Rubin, 1987; Daley, 1991). Yet, the perceived geographical scope of these problems was still relatively limited.

From the 1980s onwards, a new type of environmental problems became the principal target of public attention. These are issues that transpose national borders and, in the case of ozone and climate change, are global in the sense that their effects are felt everywhere on Earth (although possibly differently)<sup>1</sup>.

The depletion of the ozone layer was the first global issue to generate international

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as discussed further on in this chapter, if the origin of such problems is accounted for, the term 'global' becomes inaccurate as there are abyssal differences in amounts of emissions produced in different regions of the planet and we may be diluting the responsibility of industrialized countries (Roe, 1994; Demeritt, 2001).

attention and to lead to international political action. Research undertaken during the 1970s and early 1980s had led to a divergence of opinions about the seriousness of the rate of ozone depletion. However, in May 1985, the real extent of the problem became evident when the British Antarctic Survey published their discovery of a significant reduction of ozone levels above the Antarctic continent (Farman et al., 1985). This 'hole' in the ozone layer conferred a high tangibility (Rowlands, 1995) to the issue. Its relation to spray cans and other CFC-generating products<sup>2</sup> and the potential health effects of a diminished ozone layer in the atmosphere soon captured media attention (Bell, 1994a), and led to public mobilization and behavioural changes with regard to patterns of consumption.

International negotiations to regulate emissions of CFCs and other chemicals that harm the ozone layer led to a new kind of politics: a regime for international management of the environment (Young, 1989). The 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and the 1990 London and 1992 Copenhagen Adjustments and Amendments to the Protocol are the main outcomes of what is often cited as an example of successful environmental diplomacy (Benedict, 1991; Litfin, 1994).

Climate change has had a slower development in international political agendas (Depledge, 2001) and so far achieved much less than the ozone regime in terms of regulation and especially implementation. Below, I will briefly discuss the causes and consequences of the problem.

In the last two centuries, industrialization, motor transportation and agriculture have generated billions of tons of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, CFCs and other gases (Firor, 1990). The molecules of these gases let incoming solar radiation through the atmosphere but absorb the energy that is in turn released by the Earth's surface. Subsequently, these gaseous molecules re-emit radiation in all directions, thereby warming the planet. This process and these so-called 'greenhouse gases' (GHGs) are natural and highly beneficial for life on Earth. However, the continuous atmospheric buildup of GHGs in recent periods of human history has enhanced this effect to a risky extent. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has

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<sup>2</sup> CFC stands for chlorofluorocarbons.

increased by approximately 25% since the 18<sup>th</sup> century due to human-generated emissions. Methane has risen by 150% and nitrous oxide by 16% over that period (e.g. IPCC, 2001c).

The vast majority of GHGs are emitted by industrialized countries. The United States is responsible for over 20% of GHG emissions, the United Kingdom for 3%. Prospects of economic growth in China and India make these two countries some of the future's biggest emitters. However, at present their part in global emissions remains comparatively small.

The production of GHGs is deeply embedded in the way in which modern societies work and in predominant lifestyles. Transportation, heating and other domestic uses of energy, the production of goods and other industrial activities are the main human-related sources of GHGs. Climate change has strong links with powerful economic activities and organizations such as the oil industry.

In addition to a higher mean temperature globally, other consequences of an enhanced greenhouse effect include increased instability of weather patterns and a higher frequency of extreme weather events. Traditional seasons may be altered and reliability diminished. Storms and tornados may occur more often and more severely (e.g. IPCC, 2001a).

Climate change can have a number of impacts, which are more or less well known (IPCC, 1990a; IPCC, 1996b; IPCC, 2001a). Animal and plant species will be affected around the globe. Some species have already been lost as they have not been able to adapt to the rate of change. The nature of whole ecosystems will also necessarily change. Many areas will be prone to desertification as they become hotter and drier, for example.

Human activities will be affected (ibid.). Agriculture may become unviable in some areas of the planet, while yield may actually increase in others. In most cases, climate change will require important adaptations in terms of farmed products, timings, techniques, etc. Tourism in certain areas may have enormous losses, such as where snow is important or in locations that may become too hot. Contrastingly, traditionally cold destinations may become more appealing as the climate warms up. The insurance industry has already been seeing dramatic losses as a consequence of freakier and more extreme weather. As these transformations in the environment take

place, mass human migrations may be expected as life may become too difficult or unpleasant in some areas of the planet. The social and political consequences of this are difficult to imagine. More common and more severe storms, tornados and floods are likely to cause massive material damage in housing and all sorts of other structures, and possibly the loss of human lives. Climate change may have implications for human health, as well. Malaria and other tropical diseases are expected to expand their ranges as temperatures rise. Outbreaks of cholera and bubonic plague are feared.

Higher average temperatures tend to mean increased melting of the ice caps which leads to a rise in the sea level. Such rises have been consistently recorded and accelerated in the last few decades (e.g. IPCC, 2001c). As a consequence, low lying islands in the Pacific may in the future become submerged or see their land area reduced as sea waters go up. Other places like Bangladesh or some of the UK's eastern counties are also at risk.

From all these scenarios, we may conclude that climate change is one of the biggest environmental challenges ever posed to humanity, although some still attempt to deny it. It is the most encompassing and critical environmental problem that the world faces, and requires the coordinated action of governments, scientists, corporations and individuals from all countries.

We will now turn to the 'biography of climate change' and pinpoint its most significant dates (see Rowlands, 1995; Paterson, 1996; Leggett, 2000; Demeritt, 2001). Although scientific investigations into climate change had been undertaken in previous decades<sup>3</sup>, it was in the 1980s that a scientific consensus started to emerge. In 1985, an international conference on carbon dioxide and climate variations was held in Villach, Austria, under the auspices of the World Climate Programme<sup>4</sup>. Reviewing scientific advances on climate, the scientists present at the meeting concluded that higher atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> would raise global mean surface temperatures quite dramatically (between 1.5 and 4.5° C for a doubling of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration – WMO, 1986). Initiating the process of politicisation of climate change, the scientists recommended that research be done into policy options to limit or adapt to the

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<sup>3</sup> See Paterson (1996) for the historical development of climate change scientific studies.

<sup>4</sup> The WCP had been created in 1979 by the World Meteorological Organisation.

problem, and suggested that a global convention may be deemed necessary (ibid.).

With gradual political progress in the two following years, climate change really began to attract political and public attention in 1988. As a drought of massive proportions hit the USA, James Hansen, chief climate scientist at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, appeared before the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June of that year. He stated that he was 99% certain that the temperature rise experienced during the then-current decade was evidence of global warming and called for action being taken to address the problem. Hansen's testimony attracted widespread interest.

The first international political gathering on climate change took place on 27-30 June: the Toronto conference on 'The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security'. In the conviction that they were dealing with 'an uncontrolled globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war' (Toronto Conference, 1988: 46), representatives from 48 countries recommended a 20% reduction of carbon dioxide by 2005 as an initial goal. With the stakes now heightened, climate change rapidly rose in political agendas across the world. In the UK, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher publicly claimed that humanity may have 'unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of the planet itself' (cit. by e.g. Porritt, 1988). In the USA, President George Bush pledged to intensify attention to the issue.

On the scientific front, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was also established in 1988. Endorsed by the WMO and the UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), the Panel brought together the world's leading atmospheric scientists, by appointment of national governments. Its goals were (and remain) to make a full assessment of scientific, technical and socio-economic information on climate change and to formulate response strategies to address the problem. The IPCC does not carry out new research but instead reviews published studies.

Working Group I of IPCC, focusing on the scientific aspects of the climate, published its first report in May 1990. The report expressed the consensus among the world's most pre-eminent experts in the field. The Group stated that they were *certain* that increases in GHG emissions due to human activities 'will enhance the greenhouse



effect, resulting on average in an additional warming of the Earth's surface' (IPCC, 1990b: xi). Temperature rise was estimated at a range of 1-3° C in case no action was taken to restrain greenhouse emissions. Despite the confidence in forecasts, the IPCC asserted that there were uncertainties regarding the role of natural variability in the warming registered during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Panel also stated that a 60-80% reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions was needed for stabilizing concentrations in the atmosphere at then-present levels (IPCC, 1990b: 5).

The Second World Climate Conference, in November 1990, started paving the way for an international agreement on climate change. The conference declaration called for all nations to begin setting targets or establishing programmes for reducing GHG emissions. The General Assembly of the United Nations set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) in December of that year with the task of negotiating a Framework Convention on Climate Change. The document was to be drafted and adjusted throughout five INC sessions in the next two years. The formal signature of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) occurred in June 1992 in Rio, during the Earth summit. The Convention embodies a broad commitment to the reduction of GHG emissions by developed countries.

The developed country Parties ... shall adopt national policies and take corresponding measures on the mitigation of climate change, by limiting its anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and protecting and enhancing its greenhouse gas sinks and reservoirs. (UNFCCC, 1992)

The stated goal was the return to 1990 levels of anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other GHG emissions by the end of the decade. With the fiftieth country's ratification, the UNFCCC entered into force in 1994.

In March 1995, the Berlin Climate Summit made a new step in the international regime on climate change by acknowledging the need for more stringent targets than what was set up in the Convention. A Protocol to the UNFCCC was formally accepted at the third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) of the UNFCCC, which took place in Kyoto during 1-10 December 1997. The Kyoto Protocol mandates an average cut of 5.2% in GHG emissions to be attained in the following 15 years. Differential targets were agreed for the parties to the Convention. The United States was committed to cuts of 7%, the European Union 8% and Japan 6% below 1990 levels.

Since 1990, crucial progress was made in the scientific analysis of global warming. General Circulation Models (GCMs), computer models that simulate the complex machinery of the global climate, were substantially improved. The introduction of more variables in the GCMs and the complexification of the models in other forms turned them much more sophisticated and reliable. Nonetheless, there are still some aspects that are not very well understood such as ocean-atmosphere exchanges, the role of clouds in climate, and the impact of ocean circulation on regional and global climates.

In 1995, the IPCC issued its Second Assessment Report (1996a; 1996b; 1996c), which spoke of a 'discernible human influence' on climate. This report increased the level of scientific knowledge around climate change substantially. The Third Assessment Report (IPCC 2001a; 2001b; 2001c), published in September 2001, revised the forecasts upwards. For the present century, the IPCC now estimates the temperature rise to be between 1.4 and 5.8° C.

The small but loud group of so-called 'sceptics' (e.g. Singer, 1997) has tried to give an image of controversy in the field, by putting the emphasis on uncertainty and some little known factors. However, there is a remarkable level of consensus amongst most of the scientific community regarding the fact that climate change is *not* the result of a natural variation and in relation to most of its potential effects.

Notwithstanding the importance of an international agreement on GHG reduction, the major challenge will be the implementation of policies to achieve such a goal. This is primarily a national responsibility. Developed and developing countries are exploring a wide range of climate policies and measures (Hatch, 1993; Collier, 1994; O'Riordan and Jäger, 1996; Rajan, 1997). Significant GHG reductions can be achieved by improving power generating efficiencies, for instance employing more co-generation. Switching fuels offers a great potential for abatement. Natural gas has a lower carbon content than coal, and even greater reductions can be obtained by switching to carbon-free generating sources, i.e. renewable energies like solar and wind power. The replacement of fossil fuels – which were central to the development philosophy of the last century – by cleaner sources of energy is one of the most

substantial transformations required by climate change (e.g. Collier and Löfstedt, 1997).

The climate change issue calls for a crucial re-structuring of industrial economies and policies. It cannot be confined to environmental policy measures. Efficient responses to this problem crucially depend on emission reduction objectives being integrated into other policy areas, especially energy and transport<sup>5</sup>. This requires both procedural and institutional changes, to ensure policy coordination and coherence (Collier, 1994). Finally, this ‘meta’ policy issue demands coordination between and within administrative levels – international, national, regional and local (O’Riordan and Jordan, 1997: 22).

To be addressed effectively, climate change requires substantial state action. Dual responsibilities on the promotion of economic development and environmental protection have often led governments to engage in a process of ‘environmental managerialism’ in which they attempt to legislate a limited degree of protection sufficient to deflect criticism but not significant enough to derail the engine of growth (Redclift, 1986; Torgerson, 1995). Nevertheless, climate change and the threats it presents demand more structural action. This environmental problem poses some fundamental questions to the political economy of the Western world. The tension between the role of the state as a facilitator of capital accumulation and economic growth and its role as environmental regulator has to be resolved (see Litfin, 2000). Much political commitment has to be brought to addressing the global environment. More than in any other environmental issue many different parts of the economy and the society have to be involved. Energy efficiency industries, renewable energies, the insurance industry, the environment movement, consumers and many others have a part to play.

Climate change is also fundamentally a *public* problem. It concerns every individual and every society as a whole. Effectively addressing this problem will require the

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<sup>5</sup> In 1991, the main sources of carbon dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom per sector were the following:

Power generation - 37.9%

Residential/Commercial - 18.8%

Transport - 24.15%

Industry - 15.1%

Rest - 4.2%

Source: Commission of the European Communities (1991: 16).

engagement of each individual in bringing about change in habits of energy use and transportation. Moreover, political action on climate change is bound to oscillate depending on public attitudes and on the public significance of the issue.

Policy action has so far fell much short of the dangers posed by climate change and the levels of emissions continue to rise despite the (weak) commitments made at Kyoto. In a recent development, the US, the single most important part in the problem, has simply pulled out of any international commitment when newly elected president George W. Bush decided to abandon the Kyoto protocol because it was contrary to American interests and would harm the American economy<sup>6</sup>.

It is essential to understand how change and permanence have been sustained in the politics of climate change, how options have been justified and legitimated, as well as whether and how they have been challenged. Both scientific advances in the field and the action (or inaction) of decision-makers have a public face that we ought to question. The evolution of climate change is necessarily tied to understandings of the issue which are constructed and contested in and by the media, as a central piece of the fabric of modern societies.

## 2. THE MEDIATION AND (RE)CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

If key problems like acid rain, global warming, or the diminishing ozone layer, are to be seen as examples of historically constituted sets of claims, the question for empirical research is what these claims were, where these claims came from, and above all, how they were combined and recognized as a policy problem. (Hajer, 1995: 24)

Despite indications that some consequences of the enhanced greenhouse effect are already taking place, more severe impacts will be experienced in the future. Today, visible manifestations are relatively sparse and not necessarily clear-cut effects of this phenomenon. Predicting how climate change is going to affect different societies in different parts of the world is no simple task. Even linking concrete weather events at a given moment and the greenhouse effect<sup>7</sup> requires a array of specialist tools and various forms of knowledge. Thus, climate change is in many ways distant from the

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<sup>6</sup> This was stated in several news reports (e.g. Kirby, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Heretofore I will employ the expression 'greenhouse effect' to refer to the *humanly enhanced greenhouse effect*.

common citizen: it expands over space and time scales that are removed from everyday life, and a potentially effective solution escapes the perceived powers of the individual person. Although the lay public may sense the problem in some forms, climate change is mainly a scientific reality. As Schneider (1988, cit. by Ungar, 2000) put it, climate change mainly exists in the silicon chips of supercomputers.

So, how does this complex scientific issue become a public problem and the target of political negotiations and international deliberations? There is no simple answer but the process of claims-making is necessarily part of it. The expression of the importance of climate change by scientists and scientific organizations is a requisite for any form of public and political attention. In other words, the public and political visibility of the issue depends on certain agents saying the problem, telling of its significance and discursively constituting it into a risk<sup>8</sup>.

Conceptualisations of the sociology of claims-making have mainly been advanced by American scholars. Spector and Kitsuse (1973; 1977) made one of the first contributions to understanding claims-making when they defined social problems not as static conditions but as the result of collective definitions and called attention to the ‘the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims to organizations, agencies and institutions about some putative conditions’ (1973: 146). In a seminal paper from 1976, Solesbury maintained that to achieve success in advancing an environmental issue in the political system, issue entrepreneurs (or sponsors of social problems) ought to engage in three tasks: ‘commanding attention’, ‘claiming legitimacy’ and ‘invoking action’.

Where are these aims to be pursued? Which spaces should be used by issue entrepreneurs for greater efficiency? A decade after Solesbury’s article, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) advanced a ‘public arenas model’ which referred to the various fora that are involved in the definition and legitimation of social problems: mass media, government, research community, educational arenas, courts and public inquiries, industry, and non-governmental organizations. Highlighting the competition between issues for attention, legitimacy and societal resources, Hilgartner and Bosk noted that

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<sup>8</sup> According to Beck (1992), social invisibility is indeed one of the main traits of modern environmental risks. Knowledge is therefore so important that Beck asserts that *relations of definition* (and not relations of production) are the main lines of conflict and differentiation in the present risk society.

public arenas have limited 'carrying capacities' and work on the basis of certain 'principles of selection' of social issues. More recently, Hannigan (1995) has reformulated Solesbury's proposal by maintaining that 'assembling', 'presenting' and 'contesting' claims are the three tasks involved in the social construction of environmental problems. In sum, research on claims-making suggests that the agency of social actors is important for public awareness of a certain issue or reality and for subsequent decisions and actions in relation to it, and that the type of forum or arena where social actors attempt to publicize their claims is equally crucial.

In contemporary societies, the mass media of communication are a central arena of public life. The media are central because they bring together and make links between other arenas (e.g. the government and the research community). While they are largely autonomous institutions with their own rules and logic, they depend and impact on all other social institutions, articulating other fields of society, mediating their relations and especially their image next to the public. The media can also be said to be central because of the space they occupy in people's lives. Most persons in the so-called Western world have a daily contact with print, broadcast and/or online media and rely on them as sources of information, opinions and entertainment. The metaphor of a 'window into the world' serves well the perceived function of the media for most of us.

But the media are no direct and transparent window. They are no simple conveyers of information or ideas about reality. Instead, they re-construct reality in ways that are not self-evident. What the public receives regularly under the label of 'news' is the result of a set of choices and operations made by interested individuals and organizations (see Tuchman, 1978; Galtung and Ruge, 1965). 'News' is as much about 'reality' as it is about the functioning modes and codes of the self-referential systems (Luhmann, 2000) that constitute the media. The power of the media resides in rendering those constructions largely unquestionable (Weimann, 2000).

By talking of certain aspects or fragments of social life, the media amplify them. The magnitude that is acquired in the media transforms certain occurrences into collective memories and a basis of thought and action. As Beaud (1984) put it, events only gain reality in the media, that is, when they come to exist in the eyes of the public and, therefore, for public-opinion-bound policy-makers.

Debates about citizenship have often identified the media as the central space of modern societies, where individuals can exchange ideas and arguments, and subsequently make informed judgements. These views of a ‘deliberative democracy’ are inspired by the work of J. Habermas (1989), who nonetheless called attention to the danger of commercial interests dominating the media and restricting plural access to this sphere of public life. The media appear as the centrepiece of today’s ‘public sphere’ and as enhancers of citizenship under the idea of idea of ‘public journalism’ (Lambeth et al., 1998; Glasser, 1999), and in the works of Keane (1991), Thompson (1995), and Morley and Robbins (1995), amongst others. However, a large body of literature has also denounced the illusionary aspects of a media-generated consciousness, the very differential conditions of access to media spaces, the perverse effects of market pressure, and the multifarious controls and forms of manipulation of media’s depictions of the world (e.g. Hall et al., 1978; Chomsky, 1989; McManus, 1994; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Franklin, 1997; Weimann, 2000).

Whatever their degree of independence or the opportunities for bias and social control, it is agreed that the media have an enormous power. The media can influence knowledge, attitudes and identities; values, ideas and ways of life; decisions, programmes and policies. They are a fundamental and inescapable part of modern societies.

As other social issues, the environment and, more specifically, climate change require, as we have seen, the mediation of certain social actors and of the mass media to reach the public. It is essentially through claims-making activities and their re-enactment in the media that the common citizen gets to know about some environmental risks. There is no question that informed citizens are an important condition for individual action and for policy-making. Therefore, much research has attempted to understand the relation between media coverage and public knowledge<sup>9</sup>.

High levels of public concern, as stated in polls, have been found to be linked to high levels of media coverage of the greenhouse effect and other environmental problems (Mazur and Lee, 1993; Krosnick et al., 1998). The media would therefore

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<sup>9</sup> Ungar (2000) has recently argued that rather than ‘knowledge’, ‘ignorance’ should be the departing point for analysis on the public understanding of science as ignorance is the rule and not the exception for most issues.

play an agenda-setting function telling people *what* to think about (Cohen, 1963; Shaw, 1979). Inquiries into the relation between media exposure, knowledge of climate change and behaviour have found a correlation between a *correct* understanding of the causes of climate change and the verbalized intention to address the problem (Bord et al., 2000). So, both the *nature* of the information that reaches the public through the media and their *engagement* (Stamm et al., 2000) with the issue are important.

In fact, although some scholars linked public concern for the greenhouse effect to amounts of media attention and not to media content, media studies generally point to a strong relation between *content* of media coverage and public understanding of issues that are non-intrusive in people's lives in the present (Zucker, 1978; Dearing and Rogers, 1996), like climate change (as opposed to certain intrusive issues like economic ones). So, media coverage matters both quantitatively and qualitatively for raising public awareness and mobilizing concern.

Looking at media texts on climate change, some scholars have attempted to assess the accuracy of scientific information and have generally encountered unsatisfactory levels of rigour (Bell, 1994a; 1994b), as well as poor records of knowledge of the issue both on the side of reporters and on the side of the public (Kempton, 1991; 1997; Kempton et al., 1995; Bell, 1994a; Bostrom et al., 1994; Wilson, 2000a, 2000b). But is this all that is worth researching or indeed what really is most important? Is the role of the media merely to channel information to the public? 'No' would be my answer to both questions, as suggested by earlier reflections in this chapter. Notwithstanding their interest, implicit in some of the analysis mentioned above is what Weingart et al. (2000: 262) called a 'rationalist-instrumental' model of communication that puts the accent on the flow of information between the spheres of science, politics and the public and 'assumes that, ideally, the content of the information passes on unchanged [from the scientists to politicians and the media] and initiates political action almost automatically'. If the expected outcome does not occur, 'this model assumes misrepresentations of scientific information by the media, the ignorance of policy makers, etc' (ibid.). This is a simplistic and mechanistic view of communication.

The relation between the media and other arenas is much more intricate, and the ways in which such arenas mutually influence each other much more complex. Scientists, for example, use the media for much more than 'popularise' scientific



knowledge. They may intend, for example, to advance scientific agendas, achieve closure or open up certain debates, and promote individuals and organizations (Bucchi, 1998). The media, in turn, function according to their own rules and may or may not give voice to scientists or other claims-makers. Even if they do, original arguments will appear re-embedded in the media's own discursive constructions that are essentially different from the scientists'. The media operate a 'diversionary reframing' (Freudenburg, 1997, cit. by Trumbo and Shanahan, 2000: 201) of the statements and standings of social actors. The subsequent effects of media's talk, or silence, about an issue may assume many shapes and shades. Public understanding and public attitudes are important factors but so are the reactions and reformulations of other agents in the process. If, instead of science, we look into the sphere of politics we will find that the roles of the media are equally complex.

The very constitution of the greenhouse effect into a global environmental problem may substantially be an outcome of the mediation of the mass means of communication. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many were the scientists who pointed to similar findings to the ones that are advanced today by the IPCC (see e.g. Wilson, 2000a). Yet, little or no attention did politicians or the public pay to their claims and predictions before the 1980s. Moreover, a 'global view' of the environment had already been advanced in previous decades by some scientists (see Harré et al., 1999). Yet, it was only in the 1980s that it gained force. Harré et al. (ibid.) argue that the forms of presentation and representation of the environment in the media and the spreading of media systems of global reach in the last two decades were crucial factors in the generalization of this global discourse. What they call 'Greenspeak' would have become a new world language in and through the media.

The media appropriate the goings-on of other spheres, transform them and then re-launch them into a wider space. A constant re-construction of reality takes place thereby. It is then important to pay a close attention to the ways the meanings of social issues are produced, reproduced and challenged in and by the media. How and with what effects do the media (re)construct the science and the politics of climate change? That is the question that frames this thesis.

### 3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DISCOURSE

Representation is ... not so much a confinement of the real in signification, but a specific realisation of possibilities. (van Loon, 2000: 235)

The previous section has argued that understandings of (global) environmental change have been shifting, that they are linked to claims or propositions advanced by individuals and institutions, and that the media are a crucial arena for the constitution and contestation of the meanings associated to this and other social and political issues.

The environment and indeed the whole of reality, does not present itself directly to people. This does not mean to say that tornados do not hit people directly (or to deny the ontological existence of the world), but that individuals' perception and interpretation of tornados, as well as the ways they act in relation to them, depends on forms of knowledge, ideas and values acquired from school, the media, interpersonal relations, and other domains of social life. In some societies, tornados would be seen as a sign of God's rage. In others, some people may see them as a natural phenomenon while others may link them to manmade GHGs.

The ways in which individuals view and relate to the world are always conditioned by assumptions, concepts and categories that are acquired in social processes. The meanings attributed to reality are not inscribed in that reality, ready to be discovered. They are instead a social product or construction. They entail particular ways of looking at the world, which are advanced and reproduced by people in a constant process of communication.

The questions that I have been outlining are at the centre of the theoretical and epistemological orientation of 'social constructivism' (or 'constructionism'). In their foundational book about *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), Berger and Luckmann suggested that the three main processes that constitute and sustain society are *externalisation*, *objectivation* and *internalisation*. People externalise ideas about reality through some social practice (talking to others or writing a book, for example). Such ideas are then passed on by others and become social 'objects', i.e. they acquire an existence or reality that makes them look like a 'natural' part of the world, instead of the product of someone and of social interaction. Future generations then internalise

this objectivated idea: through the process of socialization it becomes part of their consciousness.

Far from being a unified set of propositions, constructivism has many strands in the fields of sociology, social psychology, linguistics, philosophy and geography<sup>10</sup>. It draws on structuralism and post-structuralism, as well as on postmodernism in the case of some varieties, and the works of Foucault (e.g. 1972; 1976; 1979) and Derrida (1974; 1978; 1981) are amongst its most important references.

By telling us that we are always (re)making the meanings of reality through communication, constructivism also contends that ideas about reality are not fixed, but vary across cultures and throughout time. Our knowledge of the world is, in other words, historically and culturally specific. Action, constructivists claim, is related to our (particular) representations of reality. Such representations legitimate certain courses of action and exclude others. Also, by acting in a certain way we sustain and reproduce a certain understanding of the world, or possibly transform it.

It is easy to see that the role of language is central to social constructivism. Individuals can only communicate with others about reality through the means of a language: verbal, iconic or other. But language is far from being a mere conveyer of thoughts. The concepts and categories with which we think the world are provided by language, and language is a form of social action as it is through/in it that the world gets socially constructed.

The term 'discourse' refers both to the use of language and to sets of meanings that construct an object in a certain way. Discourse theory and analysis is therefore an important constructivist approach. Presenting many nuances in a wide range of social and human sciences, discourse theory and analysis has gained recognition as a set of propositions about the processes of fabrication of reality, and the deconstruction and understanding of such processes (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1988b; Fairclough, 1992b; 1995b; Wodak et al., 1999).

The social construction of environmental issues has been examined by a significant number of works in geography, political science, international relations, sociology and other disciplines. Climate change science has been looked at as a social artifact that

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<sup>10</sup> See Burr (1995) and Hacking (1998) for discussions about varieties of constructivism, and Demeritt (1998) about Heidegger-inspired 'heterogeneous constructionism'.

cannot be separated from political biases, interpretations and expectations of funders and regulators, as well as particular epistemic commitments (e.g. Jasanoff, 1990; Wynne, 1994; Shackley and Wynne, 1995a; 1995b; Demeritt, 2001), ‘with a well meaning but futile wish to *appear* neutral, objective and separate from policy making.’ (Jäger and O’Riordan, 1996: 3).

Discourse-analytical readings of the environment as a political and cultural issue have been advanced by scholars to focus on such diverse matters as the ways knowledge is integrated in international negotiations about the depletion of the ozone layer (Litfin, 1994), ecological modernization as a language for policy-making on acid rain (Hajer, 1995), the rhetoric of new ideas in the field of environment (Myerson and Rydin, 1996), the various entities, assumptions, agents and metaphors implicit in understandings of the environment (Dryzek, 1997), environmentalism as a new global language (Harré et al., 1999), and (discursive) differences in dealing with climate change in the realms of science, politics and the media (Weingart et al., 2000). The role of the media in constructing environmental problems has been widely examined by Schoenfeld et al. (1979), Burgess (1990; Burgess and Harrison, 1993), Hansen (1991; 1993b), Hannigan (1995), Neuzil and Kovarik (1996), Anderson (1997), Allan et al. (2000), amongst others.

In what ways do constructivism and discourse analysis contribute to my research? Constructivism is a basic epistemological assumption of this project. I claim that it is important to analyse media discourses on climate change because such discourses have a constitutive power. They create fields of action or, in other words, they create a world for individuals to inhabit, in which to make choices and to act. To give two examples, telling the public that climate change will allow them to have warmer beach holidays in Britain or that it will bring malaria to this country creates quite different systems of intelligibility, with potentially quite different consequences; the political implications of the image of a solid and mature climate change science are quite different from an emphasis on uncertainty and controversy.

The constructivist literature and the field of discourse theory and analysis also have a more specific influence in my work. To the extent such scholarship highlights that social meanings involve choices that individual or collective actors try to impose on other actors, it leads to questions about what those choices are. What options were

behind apparently natural meanings? What biases do those choices incorporate? What alternatives are there? So the constructivist literature stimulates the analysis of the means by which meanings are constituted, and discourse analysis provides crucial theo-methodological tools for doing it.

By rejecting the possibility of knowing the world such as it exists, constructivism is in opposition to positivist epistemologies. Some strands of constructivism have taken this to the extreme and deny the existence of an objective reality outside of human's interpretation of it. The approach to be adopted in my research is far from being that radical, since I assume that the external world exists independent of being thought of or perceived, insofar adopting a realist standing<sup>11</sup>.

The understanding of discourse in this thesis, as well as of the roles of discourse in society, is primarily Foucauldian (Foucault, 1972; 1976; 1979). Foucault's conception of discourse can be contrasted with, for instance, that of Habermas. While for Foucault there is power producing certain objects in and through discourse, Habermas (1987) points to a set of communicative actions not disturbed by domination. Amongst Foucault's essential contributions to the study of discourse are ideas such as the constitutive nature of discourse (discourse constitutes both social 'objects' and subjects); interdiscursivity and intertextuality (discursive practices are defined by their relations with others); and the discursive nature of social change (modifying discursive practices is an important part of social change [Fairclough, 1992: 55-6]).

While discourse analysis has been employed by some in a more strictly linguistic fashion, several scholars have recently promoted a more 'critical' form of discourse analysis (e.g. van Dijk, 1988a; 1988b; 1991; Fairclough, 1995; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) which constitutes an important backdrop of this thesis. A critical stance will avoid simplistic analysis of social reality and instead propose readings that can account for its essentially constructed nature. Critical discourse analysis then aims at opening up the categories of meaning that govern our understandings of reality.

Climate change is a challenging object for critical discourse analysis. In an inescapable relation of dependency with the environment, humankind has appropriated and transformed it to the point that this intervention has come to imperil its own

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<sup>11</sup> Torfing (1999: 45-7) shows that discourse analysis is compatible with both realism and materialism.

existence. Scientists, economists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and politicians, displaying different rationalities, each propose their diagnosis and prognosis for this situation. In the 'contested ground' (Hawkins, 1993) of climate change, the media operate at two levels. On the one hand, they advance their own readings. On the other hand, they reconstruct the views of other social actors.

Media institutions have an important position in the politics of discourse – in the production, maintenance or transformation of the meanings, in circumscribing legitimate action, and sustaining or contesting various forms of social and political power. Media texts, then, do not just 'cover' climate change. The representations of the problem that such texts embody also 'do' things. As van Loon (2000) has recently maintained, a more productive, or performative, understanding of news media systems is required.

While useful analysis of media representations of climate change have recently been proposed by Wilkins and Patterson (1990), Ungar (1992), Mormont and Dasnoy (1995), Trumbo (1996), McComas and Shanahan (1999), and Weingart et al. (2000), none looks at the United Kingdom<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, most of these studies are not either sufficiently detailed or authoritative in terms of their empirical basis of analysis, nor do they take sufficiently far the kind of critical approach that I have been arguing for.

This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of the public career of climate change in the UK. By engaging in a discourse analysis of a substantial amount of articles that appeared in three British newspapers between 1985 and 1997, it seeks to unravel the strategies used by journalists and other social actors for promoting their views on climate change, as well as to shed light on the discursive effects that may have followed and on ideological dimensions of the press discourse.

#### **4. OBJECT AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

The international profile of the United Kingdom identified the country, in the months that preceded COP-3 (1997), as one of the main promoters of ambitious

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<sup>12</sup> To my knowledge, the only exception is Purvis (1998) who focuses on the iconographic dimension of the press coverage.

quantitative targets for GHG reductions. Indeed, the government then claimed to be at the forefront of the international community in tackling climate change. Being strongly market-oriented turned the UK into an even more interesting case. Addressing the amelioration of climate change, I have argued above, calls for a strong state intervention and this did not seem easily compatible with the neo-liberal philosophy of recent British governments. In addition, the country's economy has for long been highly energy-based and business interests seemed antagonistic to climate-friendly policies. The UK is also home to some of the leading scientific teams that have been increasingly alerting to the risks involved in the greenhouse effect. With an active NGO community, always driving attention to the problem, all the ingredients were there for a rich and intense social debate.

The quite diverse news media of the UK were bound to be important pieces of this complex jigsaw, with a role in the articulation of all the inconsistencies mentioned above and the confrontation of views, values and proposals. All these conditions turned the British media into a worthwhile and legitimate object of research.

However, we must avoid discussing 'the' media as if they were a monolithic system and instead acknowledge that we are talking about a multiplicity of forces often pulling in different directions (van Loon, 2000). The media may be considered not one but a set of arenas (Cracknell, 1993) and their differences ought to be investigated. The thesis will focus on a set of British 'quality' newspapers, namely the *Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Times*<sup>13</sup>.

Over television, radio and 'popular' newspapers, 'quality' ones have the advantage of allowing for lengthier debates and deeper reflections on social issues. Not being as recency- and brevity-bound as television and radio, and not as concerned with simplicity and straightforwardness as the 'popular' newspapers, the 'quality' papers give more space to discussing the contexts and backgrounds of issues, the available options for politics, and the perspectives and arguments of various social actors. These are some of the aspects of discourse that this thesis aims to study.

Furthermore, the so-called 'quality' newspapers extend their influence beyond their readership, which is relatively reduced if compared with the 'popular' tabloid press

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<sup>13</sup> Henceforth, the latter two will be designated simply as *Independent* and *Times*.

(cf. Seymour-Ure, 1996). In fact, the broadsheets often set the agenda for other media and their interpretations of issues are taken up elsewhere. Apart from its size, the audience of these newspapers includes those in the most influential ranks of politics, social movements, business and academia. Amongst their public are people who have the power to make decisions, as well as those that are in the best positions to contest such decisions and propose alternatives (see Sparks, 1987).

A reason for focusing specifically on the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Times* is that they are positioned quite differently along the political spectrum. The latter is traditionally a conservative, right-wing newspaper. The *Guardian* tends to subscribe to socialist views and the *Independent* oscillates between the two sides, depending on the issues and on the times. The thesis will thus cover material that corresponds to most of the range of social and political ideas in the UK. The *Times* was traditionally the newspaper of record, with an identification with the British ‘establishment’, or the ‘people who run the country’ (cit. by Wheeler, 1997: 65). Under Rupert Murdoch from 1981, the *Times* and the *Sunday Times* became more right-wing and typically supported the Conservative Party, mainly while it was in power. The Mirror group, to which the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* belong since 1994, traditionally supports the Labour Party but the standing of these newspapers in relation to Conservative and Labour governments has not always been the same. The only of the three papers to be exempt from conglomerate power and where editors are not appointed by newspapers owners (Wheeler, 1997), the *Guardian* is the most leftist of all three papers (and of British broadsheets in general).

The period covered by my research is justified by the political history of climate change. 1985 was chosen as the initial year in order to understand how climate change was dealt with by the media before the constitution of the problem into a political issue, which occurred mainly in 1988 and 1989, and examine that very transformation. 1997 is the year of the crucial Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC.

The thesis will be structured in eight chapters. While chapter one has introduced the problem of climate change and discussed the role of the media in the social construction of reality, the second chapter will elaborate on the main theoretical framework for the thesis. I will critically review the literature on media and the environment and take up issues pertaining to news-making, ideology and communication. Chapter three presents



the methodological procedures for gathering and selecting the data, and discusses a set of quantitative aspects. The fourth chapter concentrates on discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological ground for research. I discuss the conceptualisations of several authors and academic traditions and propose an analytical approach to discourse which integrates multiple dimensions and tools of analysis and has both a synchronic and diachronic scope.

The next three chapters correspond to the empirical part of the thesis and are organized chronologically. A detailed discourse analysis of the articles published by the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* in 1985-90 on climate change constitutes the basis of chapter five. Particular attention is paid to certain 'critical discourse moments'. The sixth chapter is centred on a period of time when climate change largely got off the political and media agendas: 1991-95. Chapter seven focuses on the debates that were prominent at the time of the Kyoto conference (1997) and their depiction in the British press.

The final chapter summarizes the main findings and conclusions of the thesis. I discuss how arguments on climate change evolved throughout a decade, and assess the implications of the public 'career' of global environmental change. I will also discuss the theoretical and methodological contributions of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 2

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### MEDIATING THE ENVIRONMENT: ARENAS, SOCIAL ACTORS AND NEWSMAKING

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#### INTRODUCTION

There has recently been a surge of interest in the environment in most social sciences. Recognizing human relations with nature as the site of crucial developments for the present and future conditions of societies, heads have been turning to this domain in the fields of sociology, communication, economics, politics, international relations and others. The kind of social practices involved in relating to the environment, the responsibilities of social and economic institutions in the production of environmental damage, and the social and economic impacts of environmental change are examples of key themes of research in the social sciences. As a consequence, our understanding of the social and cultural contexts of environmental change has been much furthered.

While the social sciences have made valuable contributions to the study of the environment, the environment has also brought important developments to the social sciences. Mutual benefits can derive from this two-way process (Benton and Redclift, 1994). Involving both the physical and human realms, the study of the environment often requires a bridging effort and a true interdisciplinary engagement which often challenges epistemological and analytical assumptions of many disciplines. For some scholars, the environment has thus been the basis for a wider revision of social theory (e.g. Beck, 1992; Goldblatt, 1996; Redclift and Benton, 1994).

In the previous chapter I have maintained that environmental problems are not self-evident, and their definition and social construction depends on a number of social institutions and individuals. Realizing that language has a constitutive nature, several academics have started to look at the discursive processes involved in the management of the environment (Roe, 1994; Litfin, 1994; Hajer, 1995; Myerson and Rydin, 1996; Dryzek, 1997; Harré et al., 1999). With the recognition that people decide and act on

the basis of certain mental, social and linguistic representations we have come to realize that there is not one but multiple environments, not one but multiple natures (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). Probing into the ways and means of production and consumption of multifarious meanings of the environment, scholars have shown the fundamental roles the media play (Burgess et al., 1991; Hansen, 1991; 1993b; 2000; Burgess and Harrison, 1993; Anderson, 1997). Interest in relations between the media and the environment has thus arisen in several academic fields. Such has been the case of geography which, with its long-term commitment to research on the environment, is uniquely positioned to make the necessary bridges between the natural and social worlds (Burgess, 1990).

In spite of important advances in studies of discourse and the environment, the multi-faceted relations between the environment, media and discourse remain under-examined. This thesis aims to fill this gap with a detailed discourse analysis of media representations of the enhanced greenhouse effect, perhaps the central environmental problem of our time.

In many respects the media are the most visible face of environmental debate. However, two other spheres are determinant in the definition and re-definition of environmental problems: science and politics. In the first part of this chapter we will therefore look at the modes of production of environmental knowledges in these arenas. Climate change will receive particular attention in our critical examination of the (contingent) conditions, actors, rationales and other (con)textual aspects of the construction of environmental issues. Social constructivism can also provide important insights into the study of public perceptions and behaviours and one section in part one will be devoted to conceptualisations of the public understanding of the environment.

While some of links between science, politics, public representations and the media will be discussed throughout the first part of the chapter, the second part will focus exclusively on the media and address issues of the production of news; social agency and the media; and ideology and the media.

# 1. SCIENCE, POLITICS AND THE MEDIA: THE ENVIRONMENT IN A VARIETY OF SOCIAL ARENAS

Since it constitutes physical reality, the environment is central to the many different arenas of public life, not least those of science and politics. What are the dominant rationalities of each sphere? What are the mechanisms and logics of production of the environment in each forum? What is the career of climate change in each of these arenas? How are such fora connected? What are the roles of the media for each of them and in bringing them together? These are some of the questions this section will address. I will illustrate how a social constructivist approach can help us understand such issues.

## 1.1. Sociological perspectives into science and science-making

Most of the claims that circulate in political circles and the media about climate change are *knowledge* claims. What is happening to the atmosphere? What are the causes and the consequences of the problem? What can we do? Climate change only came to be seen as a public and political problem because (some) scientists argued that it was a serious issue. Science was therefore a necessary – albeit not sufficient – condition for the rise of the greenhouse effect as a public and political issue.

As studies in Public Understanding of Science have shown, science enjoys a significant degree of credibility and exerts a great deal of social and political authority (e.g. Irwin, 1995). Scientific knowledge tends to be viewed as the product of neutral and rational operations of analysis by most people. Although lately this image has been challenged (Latour, 1987; Aronowitz, 1988; Jasanoff, 1990; Irwin, 1995; Shackley and Wynne, 1995a; 1995b), there is a pervasive assumption that the products of science and technology are necessary and positive goods. Associations of science and technology with ‘progress’ are deeply entrenched in the Western world. Irwin (1995) notes that this moralistic reading of science includes the idea that it is a force for human improvement. People experience science and technology as superiorly imposed and ‘natural’ realities. Science and technology are responsible both for

enormous benefits to human health and well-being while at the same time causing environmental degradation. As put by Hill (1988), we live the ‘tragedy of technology’. Science functions as a hegemonic discourse that overpowers other representations of reality.

Moreover, most of the characteristics of science mentioned above are nevertheless contestable. The discursive force of science gives an appearance of necessity to what is in fact (partly) arbitrary and indeed the product of specific agents and circumstances. As Wynne (1994: 170) put it, the goal for sociology of science in relation to the global environment is then to answer the following question: ‘What social or cultural factors do particular scientific discourses about the global environment tacitly reflect as if natural, and thus exempt (whether deliberately or not), from wider debate, negotiation and responsibility?’

Analyses of the role of science in policy-making have often called attention to the social, political and economic interests that are interplayed with knowledge in the formulation of advice (Boehmer-Christiansen, 1994a; 1994b; Buttel and Taylor, 1994). Yet, the truth is that such matters are already at stake in the very moment of production of scientific knowledge. The conditions of production of knowledge should then be investigated. Looking at science as a process, as something that is being created, helps us grasp its undetermined nature. Latour’s (1987) contrast of ‘ready-made science’ with ‘science-in-the-making’ is quite useful. When retraced throughout their production, scientific ‘facts’ appear much less solid and stable. ‘Uncertainty, people at work, decisions, competition, controversies are what one gets when making a flashback from certain, cold, unproblematic black boxes to their recent past.’<sup>1</sup> (ibid.: 4)

In a similar line, Bucchi (1998) uses Goffman’s (1959) concepts to perceive science as involving backstages and frontstages. Backstages are the domain of contingent repertoires, frontstages the locale of rational argumentation, specialized terminology and conventional impersonality. Power structures are influential at the laboratory and even in pre-laboratory stages: the decisions to undertake certain research programmes are based upon specific preferences and agendas. Funding is also a powerful mechanism to direct science. In some cases, research is explicitly commissioned by

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<sup>1</sup> The term black box refers to what is unquestioned in science, to all the knowledge data that is taken for granted and not reopened.

policy-making institutions and closely monitored. This occurs with some frequency in environment or pollution-related science (Hajer, 1995). As Jasanoff (1990) has argued, scientific research is guided by principles and priorities that are ideology-laden, or value-laden. Because it is dependent on certain institutional contexts, personal factors and social relations and relies on a set of assumptions, principles and logics that could be different, all knowledge is contingent knowledge. Yet, scientific knowledge is deployed as 'natural' and carries claims to independence and objectivity.

What is the role of science in the career of climate change? The international management of climate change relies heavily on natural sciences. The IPCC, the top international advisory body for climate change, is dominated by physicists, at the expense of other fields that could make important contributions to the study of climate change (Wynne, 1994). Moreover, the IPCC's preference is for a highly-controlled, model-based research where certain variables are omitted or reduced to what is known (*ibid.*; Demeritt, 2001).

The social power of science is also linked to its dimension of persuasion. Science has indeed an important rhetorical side that has been highlighted by an array of social and human scientists (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Gross, 1990). This rhetorical function has been important in the last two decades of debate about climate change.

In the last few years, climate modelling has come to embody the scientific contributions to climate change debates. This development is itself disputable as the problem could be addressed quite differently, for instance from the perspective of the international political and economic structures that originate it<sup>2</sup> (Wynne, 1994; Demeritt, 2001). Global Circulation Models (GCMs) are simulations of the world's climate systems on the basis of a large number of variables, complex mathematical equations and supercomputers. Certain assumptions about the behaviour of natural systems, such as the amount of absorption of carbon dioxide by forests, are implicit in GCMs while, at the same time, other factors are excluded, like cloud behaviour. In assuming as certain the chosen parameters of variation for the factors involved in climate models and in keeping other factors out of the equations, climate science is

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<sup>2</sup> IPCC excludes from the analysis central matters of international political economy such as North-South inequities or the debt burden of developing countries.

largely constraining and simplifying. It is a reductionist exercise (Demeritt, 2001; see also Shackley et al., 1998).

Built into GCMs are social and cultural values, normative issues and even models of human agency. The way national GHG emissions are dealt with in these models can illustrate this. In GCMs, emissions are reduced to standardized numerical data insofar deleting any cues to the social context in which they were produced. Thus, excessive car use in the USA becomes equivalent to the working of factories that ensure the basic income of people in developing countries (Agarwal and Narain, 1991). Turning emissions into standard numerical data therefore naturalizes and reinforces the unequal condition of the individuals that produce them. The homogenisation of emissions is not only a reductionist abstraction but also it involves political constructs, in which 'global citizens' are apparently equally responsible for GHG emissions.

The constitution of climate change as a global issue has a series of implications. 'The environment is not self-evidently or exclusively global in nature' (Demeritt, 2001: 313). Framing GHGs as a global problem dissolves the vast inequities that can be found across countries and puts aside the fundamental social, cultural and political dimensions of the problem.

Up to this point we have looked at the process of production of science and discussed some of the assumptions and commitments of climate studies. Let us now turn to the relation between science and the media, or between scientists and journalists. Research on media representation of scientific knowledge has only recently started to embrace the complex processes that link the science community, the media and the public. The long predominant view of science communication as 'popularization'<sup>3</sup> rested upon a simplistic view of the relations between these three arenas (Hilgartner, 1990). Reporting science was viewed as a transfer of information in a linear fashion from one arena to another. The media's role was deemed (merely) to consist of a linguistic translation: to present scientific advances in a language that would be accessible to the public. Such a 'canonical account' of the communicative relationships between science and society served scientists well as it allowed them 'to

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<sup>3</sup> As Bucchi (1998: 3) remarks the 'use of terms like 'popularization' or 'dissemination' is itself symptomatic of this idealized and largely unproblematic vision of public communication of science'.

dismiss any involvement in the process' and they would thus be 'free to deprecate its faults and excesses, namely inaccuracy and spectacularisation.' (Bucchi, 1998: 3). In turn, journalists relied on such ideas to justify their work.

Within this linear model of communication a typical academic analysis consists of comparing the 'original' science ideas with their media representations and judging the rigour with which they are transmitted. In the field of climate change, there are several examples of this type of research (Bell, 1991; 1994a and 1994b; Wilson, 2000a). Bell, for example, denounces misreporting on climate change, pointing at scientific/technical inaccuracies, as well as non-scientific ones, misquotations, omissions and other faults. This is a serious allegation and one that requires a careful revision of the professional practice of newsmakers. Asking whether the science of climate change is covered with precision by the media is therefore a relevant enquiry; however, if not appropriately contextualised in the larger picture that is the media's role in the construction of reality, this question may lead us to assume a 'realist' position, and to claim that the media are – or should be – a sort of carrier or microphone that merely conveys or amplifies information that is originated elsewhere.

The effects of media coverage of science go much beyond the transmission of data or knowledge. The media can be, for instance, an important 'validator' of science, as Gamson (1999) suggests. Considering facts as 'institutionally validated claims about the world', Gamson argues that social institutions with the capability to bestow facticity on claims in a given realm are the 'primary validators'. An example is the IPCC in the field of climate change. Media act as 'secondary validators' by reporting on and diffusing the factual claims of 'primary validators'. But the media also act as 'primary validators' in certain cases. In controversial issues, their gatekeeping role is more important as they decide which 'would-be primary validators will be given voice, and how much of a voice' (Gamson, 1999: 27). The 'power to determine *which* expert is believed'<sup>4</sup> (Barnes, 1985: 110 cit. by Irwin, 1995: 170) is a very important form of media power.

Yet, media's discourse on science should not just be read as the result of journalists' and editors' decision to cover certain issues. On the contrary, many news stories on

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<sup>4</sup> Emphasis in original.



science originate mainly from scientists' own attempts to publicize their work. The move to the public arena can be motivated by various goals, such as defining and questioning boundaries between disciplines; communicating ideas to different categories of researchers and practitioners; and establishing a new theoretical tradition in cases of strong controversies which cannot be resolved without appealing to external actors (Bucchi, 1998: 17). In issues that appeal to many disciplines, such as climate change, disciplinary boundaries can be contested and originate 'disputes over whose rules, constructs and methods are most relevant or 'weighty' in a given situation' (Herrick and Jamieson, 1995: 109). The media may thus be a useful arena for the assertion of certain claims on boundary conflicts between scientists, NGOs and policy-makers.

Moreover, media reports have often led to important changes in public policy with regard to science-related matters. Nelkin (1987) notes, for example, that extensive media coverage of disputes over waste disposal dumps helped bring about changes in national policy and forced reorganization and restaffing of the US Environmental Protection Agency in the 1980s<sup>5</sup>.

What all of the above shows is that various agendas and interests are interweaved in the production of media texts on science. However, Nelkin (1987; 1991) maintains that science reporting is very uncritical of science. Its limitations, motivations and contingencies are not discussed. 'Relatively little appears on the methods and social organization of research, or on the choices and priorities involved in major decisions about science and technology.' (Nelkin, 1991: xiii) Instead, the media build an 'image of science as a solution to intractable dilemmas, a means of certainty in an uncertain world, a source of legitimacy, an institution we can trust' (ibid.: x). The 'ideal of a pure science that is the key to progress and the solution to social problems', Nelkin (ibid.: xii) notes, runs throughout news reports. The backstage of science (Bucchi, 1998) are almost never disclosed or debated. Scientific work is depicted as 'arcane activity outside of, indeed, above the sphere of normal human understanding, and therefore beyond serious criticism' and scientists as 'problem solvers, authorities, the ultimate

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<sup>5</sup> Nelkin also mentions that media coverage has implications for financial support of science. For instance, already in the 1940s, the proliferation of cancer stories in the press helped convince Congress to support research by the National Cancer Institute.

source of truth' (Nelkin, 1991: xiii). Metaphors of alchemy (scientists as magicians), of warfare (scientists battling disease) and revolution (computer revolution, biotechnology revolution) help construct this image in the media.

As we have seen, the media have an important role in the constitution of science as an object of public attention and this can have important consequences. Amongst other goals, this thesis will analyse the modes of discursive representation of science in the British broadsheets. Hence, the first research question that will guide the analysis of news texts is the following: How have scientific knowledge(s) on climate change been (re)constructed in the press? The scientific study of climate change is distinct from other scientific domains in several respects. First, being a complex and multi-faceted issue, a whole array of disciplines (biology, chemistry, physics, meteorology, etc.) produce knowledge relevant for understanding climate change. Progress is therefore gradual and not linked to 'big discoveries' or revolutionary methods. Second, there is an international 'umbrella' body, the IPCC, that regularly reviews research and issues assessments of the problem. Finally, climate change is a domain where forecasting is crucial. Unlike other domains where what matters is knowing how things *are*, in climate change it is essential to have an idea of how things *will be*. Futurology necessarily involves a degree of uncertainty. All of these issues represent added challenges for the media. Hence, which aspects of scientific progress are selected, the kind of readings of climate change that they come to support, how forecasts are interpreted, and how uncertainty is represented are all focus of interest for the analysis of news texts in this thesis.

## **1.2. Policy-making at a crossroads**

As collective problems, many environmental issues have a political nature and require analysis and decisions at the governmental level. Nevertheless, environmental conditions are not always perceived as political problems. The constitution of the environment as a political matter often involves a course of debate, propositions and counter-claims in which scientists, environmentalists, business, journalists and government representatives, amongst other actors, take part. This section will discuss

the issues and considerations that go into political decisions about the environment, the dynamics of politics' relation with science, and the roles of the media in the policy process.

Policy-making on environmental issues tends to appeal to scientific knowledge, especially at the level of problem definition. How is environment-relevant science integrated into politics? The role of knowledge or science in international environmental politics has been mostly examined under the theme of 'epistemic communities' (Ernst Haas, 1990; Peter Haas, 1989; 1992). Epistemic theory views scientists as networks of knowledge-based communities working outside of politics, which feed the policy process with information. Scientific knowledge, conceived as consensual, would then influence interest formulations and decision-making.

In contrast with this reading, constructivist approaches suggest that the production of science is not alien to political matters, as we have seen in the previous section, and that knowledge is often conflictual and not self-evident. For example, Litfin (1994) and Hajer (1995) claim that in issues like the depletion of the ozone layer and acid rain knowledge needed to be constantly re-interpreted and re-presented to acquire political significance. Scientific information required reconstruction at the level of the discursive order of politics, whose logic and rules are quite different from those of laboratories and research centres. Scientific 'facts' and 'truth' are in a large measure open to interpretation and require translation(s) in order to be meaningful to policy-makers. The policy implications of science are therefore always derived and re-derived from science rather than being mandated by it.

According to Litfin (1994), there are certain actors whose institutional commitments involve interpreting knowledge for policy-makers and who are the best positioned to control definitions of problems<sup>6</sup>. Ultimately the evolution of the international negotiation process in the ozone regime that Litfin analysed depended on the 'persuasive ability' of such 'knowledge-brokers' in relation to national delegates.

Scientific advice for policy-making is imbued with all the particular choices and commitments already discussed. But it is also charged with even more specific values

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<sup>6</sup> These agents often do not rank very highly in the political hierarchy. In the case of the ozone regime, Litfin attributes a large influence to 'ecologically minded' (ibid.: 187) knowledge brokers associated with EPA (US Environmental Protection Agency), NASA and UNEP.

and standings as an array of other agents and institutions, such as advisory committees and agencies, is involved in the re-interpretation of science into politics.

The process of 'sub-politization' highlighted by Beck (1992) suggests new facets of the relation between science and politics. Subpolitics is related to the structural displacement of important political decisions to other, formally non-political realms (Hajer, 1995: 39). Many major decisions in the environmental field, such as determining what are the safety levels for the emission of certain chemicals, take place in regulatory institutions which are neither politically or publicly accountable. This extends the distance that separates the public, who have real stakes in such processes, and the decision-making process (Irwin, 1995).

The operation of science in politics is a process of successive translations which, in most cases, are *reductions*: reduction of complexity, reduction of uncertainty, and reduction of possible alternatives for action. In the field of climate change, however, science has been characterized by a considerable uncertainty and such uncertainty has often been publicly highlighted with implications for possible courses of political action. Roe (1994) argues that uncertainty has been narrativized to justify policies on climate change, and talks of successive stages of 'certainty-making'. Through the omission of accumulated uncertain premises, *atmospheric warming as a scientific problem* is transformed into *global warming as a crisis scenario*. In the latter, atmospheric warming (which, according to Roe, is full of uncertainties) becomes a given, from which other propositions are elicited. *Global warming as a crisis scenario* urges action, and requires it to be undertaken by the entire international community.

Constructing climate change as a global problem defines the global level as the only adequate one for action. The international community as a whole is granted responsibility for the problem. The 'global discourse' then has a strong prescriptive value (Roe, 1994). A second essential political implication of this category is the legitimation of the passivity of authorities at the national and local levels where, crucially, it is proven that the problem can be effectively managed. The global actually justifies and excuses inaction (ibid.).

Science is thus a powerful tool of legitimation for official discourse. It justifies options and surrounds decisions with the walls of rational analysis and academic authority. The assumption of the superiority of science in relation to other forms of

knowledge is thus dominant within the sphere of politics (Irwin, 1995; Demeritt, 2001). Challenging such hegemony, Plough and Krimsky (1987) contrast scientific rationality with cultural rationality. The latter encompasses contextual issues, such as values, ethics, and other cultural aspects. But these dimensions are rarely accounted for in politics. Policy-making on environmental issues is founded on certain forms of risk evaluation and sustained by certain forms of risk communication. Scientific and cultural rationalities have important expressions here. While scientific rationality tends to mean a quantitative form of risk assessment, typically with a cost-benefit analysis, and be associated with top-down, one-way modes of communication ruled by expert views, cultural rationality looks at risk acceptability (Douglas, 1986) in the framework of lay persons' views and cultural data, and makes more qualitative judgements (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Wynne, 1996).

What are the modes of articulation of the political and media systems? Several scholars have spoken of a symbiotic relationship between politics and the media (Cohen, 1963; Bennett, 1988; O'Heffernan, 1991). O'Heffernan speaks of an 'interdependent mutual exploitation'. Mutual dependence and mutual gains would then bring political actors and journalists together. Some researchers see more power in the hands of the former than the latter (Hall et al., 1978; e.g. Herman and Chomsky 1988; Chomsky, 1989; 1991; see also Lippman, 1922). Such is the perceived importance of the media for policy-making that an extensive literature now exists on the topic, especially concerning foreign policy issues (e.g. Arno, 1984; Berry, 1990; Serfaty, 1990). O'Heffernan (1991) identifies the following forms of influence of the media in the policy process: media can inform policy choices, define acceptable policy performance, effect attention to goals, constrain government's options and set the pace of policy. Similarly, O'Heffernan claims that government officials can use the media for several purposes such as keeping options open, creating support or even influencing other members of government.

*Agenda-setting* is possibly the most widely discussed issue in American scholarship on media and politics. The model of agenda-setting was first hinted by Cohen (1963) and later conceptualised by McCombs and Shaw (1972). The basic idea is that people's perception of reality at a certain moment in time is duplicated from the

representation of such a reality in the media. That is not to say the media tell us what to think but, as Cohen maintained, that they tell us *what to think about*. More recently, attention has focused on the capacity of the media to set the political agenda and vice-versa (e.g. Gormley, 1975; Patterson and McLure, 1976; Rogers and Dearing, 1987). With regard to environmental issues, Schoenfeld (1979), Atwater et al. (1985) and Proress et al. (1987) are amongst those scholars who attempted to explain the relation between media agendas on the one hand, and public opinion and policy agendas on the other. Early notions of agenda-setting were typically rather simplistic. The focus on the frequency of news coverage of issues as an indicator of their public or political importance was derived from a 'hyper-simplified, pre-semiotic communication model' (Wolf, 1987: 147). Lang and Lang's (1981) concept of 'agenda-building' brings a welcome contribution. As these authors suggest, relations between the media and the political agendas are not linear. For issues to be 'built' into the media or into politics other factors play in and have to be accounted for.

In fact, the relation between media and politics is vastly more complex than what is suggested by models of agenda-setting. The meanings that circulate in ever-more pervasive and diversified media have a wide function in society and democracy and an important relation to 'public opinion' (Habermas, 1989; Dahlgren, 1995; François and Neveu, 1999). Political discourse is doubly determined (Bourdieu, 1977; cited by Fairclough, 1995: 182): it is always engaged in two struggles, an internal one in the field of politics, and an external one with the wider societal universe of ideas and understandings. Politicians and political institutions constantly search for legitimation in the eyes of the public. Furthermore, the policy process is largely a function of the evolution of social and cultural discourses. From this perspective, the perceived opinions of the public re-shape political strategies and positions. The 'state-centred' view that characterizes many analyses of the mediation of politics is therefore rather limited (Schudson, 1995). Often left to the realm of a narrowly confined 'political communication' (often meaning media and elections), the study of the relation of media and politics has to expand its horizons.

Social constructivism in general and discourse analysis in particular can bring positive contributions to these debates. The political value of issues is constructed through (symbolic) negotiation between different social actors. The media, due to their

mediating role between policy-makers, scientists, pressure groups and the public, is one of the most important arenas for the construction of that meaning, i.e. for the constitution of issues into *political* issues. The media are a *locus* for the making of politics. Besides being an 'arena', the media are also in a large measure an autonomous actor of their own right, with its own agendas and preferences, which political institutions cannot ignore.

This analysis leads us to the second research question of this thesis: What roles have the media played in consolidating or contesting policy options with relevance for climate change? I will be interested in examining how the media have depicted political action and inaction in relation to climate change and the judgements they have made of it.

## **2. MANUFACTURING NEWS: MEDIA AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Although there was an upsurge of media coverage of the environment in the 1970s, as noted in chapter one, the history of environmental reporting goes much further back. As shown by Neuzil and Kovarik (1996), the media were already playing important roles in environmental conflicts in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the USA. Academic interest for the media and the environment can be traced back to the 1970s. O'Meara (1978, cit. by Schoenfeld et al., 1979) analysed environmental coverage in two American newspapers between 1962 and 1977 to discover that it underwent important fluctuations with upsurges in 1970 and 1973-74 and subsequent declines (although maintaining a much higher level than in the early 60s). Schoenfeld et al. (1979) identified a more holistic understanding of the environment in the 70s in the US media. Instead of seeing environmental problems as single, isolated issues, the media began to adopt a more comprehensive view of the nature of ecology, and to acknowledge its interconnectedness with human action. Nevertheless, the grasp of the continuous inter-relation of environment and society remained rather limited and media coverage tended to focus mainly on specific events such as environmental disasters (Gale, 1987; Rubin, 1987; Wilkins and Patterson, 1987). The rise of global environmental issues like ozone depletion and climate change in the 80s and 90s was identifiable in media coverage and prompted a new wave of environmental media research (e.g. Lacey and Longman,

1993; Mazur and Lee, 1993; Bell, 1994a and 1994b). New research embraced a social constructionist approach becoming theoretically more sophisticated than earlier analyses (e.g. Hansen, 1991; Burgess and Harrison, 1993; Anderson, 1997).

This part of the chapter will be structured around three key themes in academic research on the environment: news production; social agency and the media; and ideology and the media.

## **2.1. The making of mediated reality**

Newspaper articles, television news, radio news broadcasts and other forms of news texts are the products of individuals and institutions. Such texts result from routinised working procedures in which not only journalists, but also editors and media owners, amongst others, have some degree of influence and participation. The process of transforming reality and concrete events into news is an obvious and essential object of study of communication research. The issues that merit attention at this level concern the relations of the media with other social and political institutions; the nature of news organizations in terms of ownership, hierarchy and power relations inside news organizations, and the processes and principles involved in newsmaking. Theoretical paradigms in 'sociology of news production' have not varied widely and the chosen methods have mainly been participant observation of news professionals at work, in-depth interviewing and surveys. This section will discuss the key themes of such studies and their main findings. Refusing to take news for granted, we will enter the organizations where they are fabricated and reflect on the conditions and 'occupational norms' (Dunwoody and Griffin, 1993) of this work, as well as the consequences for environmental reporting.

### **a) Influences, norms and constraints on journalistic practice**

News organizations exist in specific social, cultural and political contexts that permeate the activity of journalists and other professionals in multifarious ways. One form of spelling out the variety of institutions and social forces that influence the process of newsmaking is by distinguishing between levels of analysis, as proposed by



Dimmick and Coit (1982): supra-national (international regulation agencies or multinational firms); societal (government or national social institutions, such as political parties); medium-level (competing media firms, advertisers); supra-organizational (chains, conglomerates); the community (city, local business); intra-organizational (groups or departments within an organization); and individual (role, social background, personal attitude, gender, ethnic origin) (cit. by McQuail, 1994: 188-9).

The web of social actors and powers that surrounds and infiltrates the media has an impact on the exercise of journalism. The process of production of media texts – a form of ‘discourse practice’ (Fairclough, 1995) – is affected by such factors. Here, I will just discuss the most important ones. First, in the media, as in other institutions, ownership is a dimension to consider. The interests and commitments of media companies, shareholders, advertisers, and sponsors can be sources of pressure over news content, although it is often difficult to find direct links between the two (see Turow, 1997). Like many modern media in the western world, the newspapers that are the object of this thesis are the property of private companies. The *Guardian* is unusual since it belongs to a trust, the Scott Trust, which also owns the *Observer* since 1993 (owned earlier by Lonrho). The *Times* and *Sunday Times* are the property of Rupert Murdoch’s News International group that controls a worldwide media empire. The *Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*, initially owned by a trust, were bought by the Mirror Group Consortium in 1994 (see Seymour-Ure, 1996; Wheeler, 1997). Media ownership in the UK is strongly concentrated: in 1987, just four conglomerate groups – Associated Newspapers, Mirror Group, News International, and United Newspapers – controlled 77% of newspaper circulation. By 1995, the four groups controlled 76% of circulation (Seymour-Ure, 1996)<sup>7</sup>.

Second, a number of commercial and financial constraints impede journalistic practice. First, news outlets are companies that function with much the same logic as any other companies. The need to make a profit means that consumer behaviour is carefully watched and a constant pressure to sell the kind of news the readers (apparently) want. This does not mean that the market is the only force in news

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<sup>7</sup> After Robert Maxwell’s disappearance the Mirror Group was taken over by a consortium.

production but it is certainly an important one (see McManus, 1994). Costs of coverage are another form of financial limitation. In an attempt to cut costs, newspapers have cut staff (see Davis, 2000), tending to avoid lengthy or investigative types of work, and sending reporters on expensive work trips. As a result, the more complex and multifaceted a topic is, or the farther an event occurs from usual 'centres' for news, the less likely they are to be covered.

Third, the nature of each medium of communication is an important constraint on newsmaking. Newspaper, radio, television or online media have structural characteristics that condition news texts (see Ericson et al., 1991). Hence, newspapers are almost exclusively dedicated to news genres rather than a mix of entertainment and information, as we find in radio and television, and therefore have more scope for in-depth news analysis and debate. Also, there is more opportunity in newspapers for examining complex and multifaceted issues such as climate change. Furthermore, newspapers are not as image-dependent as television. However we must be aware that, even in newspapers, space is a limited resource, a factor that makes the job of addressing complex matters ever more difficult.

Fourth, news tends to be deployed to the public in standard formats. Newspapers and other media have pre-assigned spaces (or times) for certain theme categories, typically politics, economics, foreign news, and so forth. Those formats are like moulds for depicting reality. The rather unpredictable and changeable character of real world events and processes is made to conform, day after day, to these structures. The Glasgow University Media Group (1976; 1980) maintained that the hidden purpose of this is to reinforce a framework of normality and control which is profoundly ideological, as discussed below. The organization of newspapers according to 'beats' is an added difficulty for environmental issues. For a long time, newspapers did not have an environmental 'beat'. Even today few titles feature a regular section on the environment. Being frequently cross-sectoral, environmental stories 'have often fallen between the gaps in journalistic specialisms' (Harrabin, 2000: 53).

Cottle (1993) has argued that commercial imperatives of media industries combined with the formats of certain news products distort the possibility of a free and unhindered debate on environmental issues, in the Habermasian terms of 'public sphere'. Issues with deep political and economic roots, such as global warming, are

reduced to the more immediate and mundane leisure concerns of ordinary consumers: ‘Will the weather allow a beach holiday this summer?’ ‘How can we believe in global warming in face of cold weather at the moment?’

Fifth, newsmaking is also affected by organizational hierarchies and power relations. Editors tend to be more sensitive to external pressures and editing is an important tool of control in newsrooms. In anticipation of editor reaction, some journalists have modified or deliberately overlooked significant stories which involve environmental wrongdoing (Friedman, 1983, cit by Hannigan, 1995). Journalists have to abide to the decisions of editors regarding the stories to be covered, the means to allocate and even the meanings to enshrine in the final text. The texts that reach the public are therefore ‘embedded talk’ (Bell, 1991). Many voices and viewpoints are present.

Despite the constraints outlined above, the journalist has most of the responsibility in the construction of news stories. There is scope for autonomy in newsmaking and journalists will push the boundaries if they can. Hence, the journalist’s engagement with issues, ideas and value systems are important factors in determining what (and how) s/he says about reality. Role perception is another important vector in relating to, and reporting, society. Whether the journalist view her/himself as a more ‘neutral’ or more ‘participant’ actor in the making of reality (Cohen, 1963), whether s/he views her/his mission as more of an ‘interpreter’, a ‘disseminator of information’ or an ‘adversary’ (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, cit. by McQuail: 1994) translates in different approaches to news. In interviews, environmental reporters tend to say that they feel committed to the environmental cause (Anderson, 1993; 1997; Einsiedel and Coughlan, 1993; Linné, 1993), and occasionally acknowledge that a certain degree of advocacy permeates their work, despite their fidelity to the principle of neutrality. The next section will focus on this and other professional myths of newsmakers.

## **b) Filtering the world: journalistic principles, news values and the construction of news**

‘The art of the reporter should be more than anything else a celebration of the truth’, claims F. Keane, BBC foreign correspondent (cit. by Allan, 1999: 48). The idea

that journalists regularly deliver the ‘truth’ about the world to their audiences is commonly used by the profession as a legitimating device. Reporters claim that they communicate the actual ‘facts’ to the public in an ‘objective’ fashion and therefore expect public trust in return. Ingrained in this position is the notion of news as a ‘natural’ and somehow ‘inevitable’ image of reality.

The principles of ‘objectivity’, ‘accuracy’ and ‘impartiality’ are important to ‘news culture’ (Allan, 1999). Yet, these are far from unproblematic ideas. The nature of newsmaking means that complete objectivity is unattainable but this is not say that any truth claims are acceptable. Indeed, by relativising truth to the extreme, some postmodernist approaches may lead to the acceptance of any depiction of the world, including ones that are straightforwardly false. Lichtenberg (1991) has therefore come to the ‘defense of objectivity’, suggesting that the notion of objectivity should not be totally abandoned in media research.

Iggers (1998: 92) aptly distinguishes between objectivity as an epistemological concern – correspondence between facts and news about those facts – and objectivity as a professional ritual – ‘procedural objectivity’. The latter refers to the unspoken rules by which journalists claim to respect ‘the way things are’. This may translate in reporting two opposing viewpoints as if they were equivalent, or in an excessive emphasis on the views of authorized sources due to the belief in their better access to knowledge (Becker, 1967, has termed this practice the ‘hierarchy of credibility’). Objectivity, impartiality, accuracy and other ethical principles of journalism can therefore have an ‘ideological function’ (Iggers, 1998: 50). Instead of stimulating, they foreclose inquiry and resolve ‘fundamental tensions in journalistic practice by defining the problem in a way that avoids conflict with institutional interests.’ (ibid.: 51). A critical awareness of the functions of this and other journalistic ‘ideals’ and their implications is always required in media sociology.

News stories are an essentially ‘constructed reality’ (Altheide, 1976; Tuchman, 1978), the product of a fixed system of work which entails a number of routines that news media have developed in order to deal with the constant flux of events. Tuchman (1973; 1977) first called attention to the impossibility of an idiosyncratic treatment of each event. In fact, a number of standard procedures is used to process new issues and events. Thereby, stable production practices are applied to a profoundly unstable

object: reality. One such practice is the assignment of news 'beats' – politics, education, economics, etc. Another tool for 'routinising the unexpected' (Tuchman, 1973) is given by agreed criteria for 'deciding what's news' (Gans, 1979).

The process of newsmaking is highly selective. While millions of events take place at any given moment, only a handful is allowed into air waves or newspaper pages each day. Research has long emphasized the role of 'gatekeeping' in news media (White, 1950; Donohue et al., 1972; Gans, 1979; cf. Westley and MacLean, 1957). The vast amount of information received by news organizations are constantly filtered by professionals who decide what items to admit to the news production process. While initial studies tended to emphasize the subjective character of those decisions (White, 1950) attention was subsequently given to the weight of norms and interests of news institutions (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979). Organizational and ideological factors seemed crucial in deciding what is news.

Media research has shown that news professionals use a number of criteria or 'news values' in the process of newsmaking. An event's potential to become news depends on various characteristics that are deemed important and sought after in the manufacture of news. In their seminal 1965 article 'The Structure of Foreign News', Galtung and Ruge identified a series of factors that influence the selection of news topics. Their study was based on an analysis of foreign news in the Norwegian press but has proved valid for many other geographical contexts. Media scholars such as Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979), Golding and Elliot (1979), Wolf (1987) and Bell (1991) have later added to, or partly reviewed Galtung and Ruge's original framework. I will highlight here those news values considered crucial by most researchers.

The newsworthiness of events obviously involves the dimension of time. *Recency* (Golding and Elliot, 1979) refers to the fact that the media are interested in reporting events that have just taken place. In television, the obsession with covering the 'present' has lately generated a great emphasis on 'live' broadcasts. The consequence of this concern with temporal immediacy is that issues with no clear definition in time or which do not translate into concrete happenings have trouble fitting news criteria.

The *novelty* factor (Gans, 1979) determines that only what is new is news. This is related to the time during which events occur but also to the fact that certain knowledge or information was not available previously. Novelty is also linked to

*unexpectedness*. The more surprising an event, the more interesting it becomes to news professionals. Social or natural processes that do not generate striking or surprising outcomes often have a lower probability of being included in the news agenda.

Journalists tend to have a preference for tragic, dramatic events arguing that bad news attracts audiences. In other words, *negativity* is another sought-after characteristic. News media assess the newsworthiness of events with regard to perceptions of what their audiences will be interested in. *Relevance* is therefore a measure of the impact a certain issue or event may have on the audience. The more it affects the public, the higher the news value of a certain topic. A related factor is *meaningfulness*. Does an event resonate with a particular readership? This depends on geographical *proximity* but also on cultural familiarity.

News media consider certain features of events useful or even fundamental for the construction of good news stories. *Personalization*, i.e. the fact that an issue can be pictured in personal terms, is one of such features. The preference goes for those events that involve well-known or highly positioned members of society (*eliteness*).

Journalists like to tell clearcut stories. *Unambiguity* thus increases the probability of a given theme or event reaching the public. It follows that matters which are complex, multifaceted, and not completely known come low down in the scale of potential news. Tuchman (1978) also identified a search for *facticity*: names, locations, and numbers, the substance of so-called 'hard news'. News values are also important after a story is written, and are found in the news text itself. *Clarity*, *brevity* and '*action*' are the main requirements of news stories (Gans, 1979).

A number of characteristics of the news process itself also function as guidelines in the process of news selection. Hence, once a story makes the headlines it often continues doing so: there is a tendency for *continuity* in newsmaking. Considerations of balance in the *composition* of news products, a newspaper or a news broadcast, also dictate that certain issues stay in or out of the realm of news. News decisions also depend on the behaviour of other news media. *Competition* between news institutions determines that there is a constant search for exclusive stories. At the same time, *mutual expectation* steers news media to include stories that others are talking about. This 'me-too' tendency of the media reduces diversity and leads to uniformity of news across media.

In journalistic practice, news values are not weighed one by one but taken 'en masse' as guiding ideas for the selection of news. Instead of a logical and coherently applied set of principles, news values work as a means to increase the efficiency of news production. Being part of journalists' and editors' common-sense, news values turn the news selection process easier, quicker and less demanding in terms of reflection. Such ideas also serve as a rationale for journalists to justify their options, and constitute an easily available motive for choices (Gans, 1979). News values are part of the armoury with which journalists impose some kind of order or coherence onto the social world (Allan, 1999: 61-2). As many of the assumptions about what is important that are implicit in news values can be contested, journalists' uncritical adherence to such 'rules' is a grave form of naturalization of the unnatural.

### **c) Reporting the environment**

In comparison with other realms of life, key news issues, such as time-frames, space-frames and causality, are quite different in the field of environment. First, many environmental problems unravel slowly and do not easily match the frequency of news in the media. Moreover, in some issues, such as climate change, different time-scales are important. Secondly, the environment does not easily fit certain spatial categories, such as the nation-state. While some environmental problems such as floods or droughts are locally specific, others concern whole regions of the globe or even the entire planet. Given that the media typically structure news in terms of the 'national' and 'foreign', where does the global level fit? Thirdly, in environmental problems cause-effect links are not always as simple and linear as media discourse requires. Climate change, for example, has a variety of causes that are inter-related in a complex fashion, and results in a number of different effects, some of which are diffuse.

How do the media deal with the environment? How are the science and politics of environmental problems represented? What are the criteria used by news professionals to decide whether an environmental issue will become news? Are environmental problems judged by the same standards as other domains in terms of newsmaking? These are some of the questions this section will address.

In a study of the practices involved in science journalism, Hansen (1994) found that science reporting is largely based on the same principles of newsworthiness as any other form of journalism. To decide whether a specific scientific development will 'make the news', journalists deploy criteria such as whether it is a breakthrough, whether it involves controversy, geographic proximity, etc. The factor that is deemed the most important for covering science is its 'relevance for the reader', where the 'human angle' of stories stands out. Einsiedel and Coughlan (1993) reached similar conclusions in their study of environmental reporting in Canada. In general, journalists 'considered themselves reporters first, environmental reporters second. The majority seemed to think the routines of newswork served them well. That is, for most hard news stories, accuracy and balance were considered key to doing a good job' (pps.137-8).

Researchers have repeatedly found that environmental reporting has a strong event orientation<sup>8</sup>. In their content analysis of five American newspapers, for example, Wilkins and Patterson (1990) found that in order to make the news, slow-onset environmental hazards such as acid rain, ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, and Rhine River pollution 'had to 'find' an event' (p. 16). Their conclusions point to a highly stereotypical form of information, and one that is very similar to the media coverage of traditional risky events (usually linked to disasters): event-oriented, official sources-based, and framing risk in terms of human activity rather than social and political contexts. Dunwoody and Griffin (1993) speak of three major types of environmental events that typically become news: catastrophes, milestones (Earth Day, Rio Summit), and legal/administrative happenings. Event orientation means that there is a tendency to focus on situations of disaster, such as oil or chemical spills (Wilkins and Paterson, 1987; Daley, 1991). Notwithstanding the importance of these moments, they are only *some* of the expressions of environmental problems. Others, like climate change, have a much more continuous nature and long-term effects that it is crucial to be aware of. But, as Nelkin (1987) has argued, reporters avoid the substantive issues at the basis of environmental problems because they do not feel qualified to tackle their many dimensions. In relation to climate change, several authors

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<sup>8</sup> Together with 'recency' and 'newsworthiness', the link with an event has been considered one of the three 'rules of news visibility' (Hall, 1973 cit. by McQuail, 1994).



have noted the importance of the 1988 summer drought and heat in promoting the issue on media agendas (Ungar, 1992; Mazur and Lee, 1993). Previous claims by scientists about the problem had failed to attract public attention until this 'real-world event' marked the shift.

Media coverage of environmental issues is impaired by two further problems – equal representation of unequal opinions and lack of rigour. The former is associated with professional claims to objectivity, the latter with news values. In reporting arguments about the environment which are often characterized by a degree of uncertainty, journalists typically divide claims-makers in 'pro' and 'con' and give a similar space to each side. Rooted both in a claim for 'balance' and on journalists' liking of conflict and controversy – occasionally stretched to levels of sensationalism – this strategy is an easy way out for journalists. But it may have grave implications for citizens. In resorting to an 'equal time' technique, journalists make no attempt to resolve who is right (Hannigan, 1995: 68) and therefore avoid personal commitments and (sometimes) complex judgements. Furthermore, the 50/50-type representation in the media usually does not correspond to real-life distribution of opinions. In the history of climate change over the last decade scientific opinion has come to an almost universal consensus about anthropogenic changes to the world's climate system. Only a rogue minority continue to deny the evidence. Yet, the search for 'balance' in media reports leaves the impression that the scientific community is truly and equally divided. This makes moves for policy change difficult.

In the process of making science lively and acceptable to readers, most media reports introduce some errors of omission, emphasis, or fact (Singer, 1990). When asked to evaluate news stories about their work, scientists have in general been unsatisfied and pointed (some) of the following faults in news reports: misquoting of researchers, omission of relevant information about methods and results, misleading headlines, and scientists being quoted out of context (Tankard and Ryan, 1974; Nelkin, 1987). In climate change news, Bell (1991; 1994a and 1994b) found similar problems: excessive certitude and exaggeration in the representation of scientific knowledge, omissions and inaccuracies, and confusion between global warming and ozone depletion.

The attempt to make environmental stories conform to news values and professional norms of interest certainly explains some of the deficiencies mentioned above, but they are also probably linked to other problems such as journalist's training, (lack of) care and competence in reporting, time constraints, etc. In interviews about their work, environmental reporters have often acknowledged that they do not have the appropriate background to understand the science behind environmental issues (Einsiedel, 1990; Anderson, 1997).

## **2.2. Social agency and media's representations of reality**

How do the media relate to the frameworks of interpretation advanced by different social actors? Whose views are the most influential in the media's ways of depicting the world? What are the conditions that determine the media's choice of a certain definition? Do the media have consistent preferences for certain actors' constructions of reality?

Competing theoretical traditions in media studies give quite different answers to these questions. Pluralists tend to view the media as more or less open-access arenas where a myriad of voices competes for attention. The media system is conceived as a space of debate and arbitration and therefore an important warrantor of freedom of speech and democracy. In this free market place of ideas, the media are viewed as a means of surveillance of the government and other social institutions. In contrast, Marxist-inspired political economy approaches find structural biases in the relation between the state, corporations and the media and argue that the latter reinforce the power of the ruling class(es)/institutions by reproducing their ideas (Murdock and Golding, 1977; Garnham, 1979; Murdock, 1990)<sup>9</sup>.

Placing the emphasis on ideas and cultural aspects rather than property or material structures, Stuart Hall and others at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies also hold that access to the media is structurally differential and favours the 'establishment'. Hall et al. (1978; Hall, 1986) argued that 'accredited' sources in government and other institutions have a privileged access to the media. The terms of

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<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, see Lippman, 1922, and Herman and Chomsky, 1988, Chomsky, 1989.

the structured relationship with the media permit that those sources establish the 'initial definition or primary interpretation of the topic in question. This interpretation then 'commands the field' in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place.' (ibid.: 58).

Hall's work has recently been subjected to various criticisms (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Anderson, 1997). Backing their work on a study of crime reporting in the United Kingdom, Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) find various problems in Hall's conceptualization of the media's relation to different definitions of reality. They argue that the notion of 'primary definition' addresses the issue of source power on the basis of structuralist assumptions, closing off 'any engagement with the dynamic process of contestation in a given field of discourse' (p. 21). Schlesinger and Tumber make some valid points about the limitations of the notion of primary definition, not least that it does not account for contention between official sources in the definition of an issue; the differential access of official sources to the media; transformations in the relation between sources and the media throughout time; and activities of sources that attempt to generate 'counter-definitions'.

In spite of having potential problems, studies of environmental journalism have largely confirmed Hall et al.'s views in that official sources tend to dominate reports. As indicated before, the sourcing patterns identified by Wilkins and Paterson (1990) conform to a typical 'event coverage' – U.S. or non-U.S. government officials, some with scientific credentials, were the number one source, followed by scientists. These are all agents with a significant authority image. In their analysis of the Canadian press, Einsiedel and Coughlan (1993) also found that environmental journalists relied heavily in institutional sources. In a study of climate change news, Bell (1989, cit. by Bell, 1991) found that out of 150 sources cited only two were not affiliated with some organization or institution. Together with government sources, scientists tend to rank quite highly in environmental news, in contrast with the minority position of environmental groups (Morgan, 1988; Greenberg et al., 1989; Wang, 1989; Warren, 1990<sup>10</sup>).

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<sup>10</sup> Morgan (1988), Wang (1989) and Warren (1990) cited by Anderson (1993).

However, as detailed below, some authors have found that environmental pressure groups have come to be seen as more legitimate sources (Anderson, 1993; 1997; Hansen, 1993a). Anderson found that for some environmental issues, such as the death of seals in the North Sea in 1988, environmental pressure groups can indeed have a 'primary definer' role. In this case, given the silence and inaction of both government and government-related scientists, the press turned to Greenpeace as a major source. Contrarily to what Hall et al. (1978) suggested, Anderson also contended that, grounded on Greenpeace's claims, the press (in the case, the popular press) had an agenda-setting role in relation to the government.

Research in the field of media sociology has recently been considered too media-centric by scholars like Schlesinger and Tumber (1994; Schlesinger, 1990) who have argued that studies have often been exclusively concerned with the internal dynamics of the media, concentrated on finding explanations for media output in the sphere of the media, and disregarding processes that take place outside news institutions. In spite of these claims, a number of researchers have previously called attention to the ways sources attempt to actively participate in public discourses and shape the media's representations of social issues (Molotch and Lester, 1974<sup>11</sup>; Gitlin, 1980; Gandy, 1982; Ericson et al., 1989). More recently, other studies have looked at the concrete strategies that a range of social actors deploy in their attempt to shape the media's agenda (Anderson, 1991; 1993; 1997; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994).

Proposing an analytical shift from media-centric approaches, some scholars have spoken of a 'source-centred model' (Anderson, 1991; 1993; 1997)<sup>12</sup> or of 'sources in action' (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). In this terminology, the expression 'source' still constitutes social actors in terms of a relation to reporters and of the utility of such social actors for newsmaking. Instead, I prefer to refer to *actors' communication strategies*, especially those oriented towards the media. Various types of social actors actively seek to shape the news agenda on specific issues and undertake certain strategic practices for that purpose.

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<sup>11</sup> Molotch and Lester suggestively spoke of 'news as purposive behavior'.

<sup>12</sup> Still, Anderson (1997: 73) wants to avoid putting excessive emphasis on sources, which could get us close to pluralist approaches in presuming equal conditions of access to the media.

With particular relevance for the subject of this thesis are scientists, politicians and environmental organizations. I will briefly reflect on the agency of each of these actors with regard to the media. Scientists' agency is a crucial factor in the generation of media coverage and many are the strategies used for captivating media interest, from press releases previous to the publication of science papers to the invitation of the press to certain conferences and workshops. The relationship between journalists and scientists-as-sources depends on issues such as the credibility and public image of scientists. Essential aspects of the relationship are also worked out at the personal level. Whether a specific piece of research becomes news often depends on a subtle process of personal interaction in which issues of trust and friendship are not unimportant (Tunstall, 1971). There is also, at times, a dimension of complicity between scientists and journalists where both sides are aware of potential gains. Important processes of negotiation between journalists and scientists may take place over what is going to be said and how it is going to be said (Bell, 2001). Bucchi (1998: 18) refers other factors that may decide the newsworthiness of science.

...the public level can be more or less easily mobilized depending on the intrinsic public resonance of the issue at stake, ... on the visibility of the scientific actors or institutions sponsoring it, ... or on the relations between a scientific field and the public at a given historical moment ...

Science communication is a changing field. Gregory and Bauer (forthcoming) have identified a tendency for public relations (PR) to dominate science communication in recent years. In areas like bio-technology, science is increasingly linked to large corporations that have professionals specialized in image-making and the preparation of 'media events'.

Politicians have several potential means of influencing the news and shape the media agenda. As the main 'authorized' source, they have a large scope for control of what gets to the media. Bennett (1988) provides a detailed analysis of the techniques politicians and their media managers use for managing the news. The following 'recipe' seems to be popular:

1. Composing a simple theme or message for the audience to use in thinking about the matter at hand... 2. Saturating communications channels with this message so that it will become more salient than competing messages... 3. Surrounding the message with the trappings or credibility so that, if it reaches people, it will be accepted... (pps.73-4)

As in science, in the last few years, there has been a trend towards professionalization of political communication. Political marketing has become a prominent feature of most democracies and has changed political culture (O'Shaughnessy, 1989). The role of PR and 'spin doctoring' is increasingly important (Esser et al., 2000; Gaber, 2000; Miller and Dinan, 2000). Esser et al. (2000) claims that 'spin doctors' maintain a 'half antagonistic, half symbiotic relationship with journalists'. News management techniques have grown in number and sophistication, and include both open and covert modes (see Gaber 2000). Notwithstanding the naïve character of many PR studies, they point to an important trend that may have severe consequences in terms of media(ted) communication and lead to impoverished participation and access in contemporary public spheres (Davis, 2000).

Media dependency on policy makers as sources for environmental stories, as discussed earlier in this chapter, means that political actors have a potentially significant capacity of setting the media agenda in this field (see also Weaver and Elliott, 1985; Olien, Tichenor and Donohue, 1989; Gwinn, 1990).

In the last few years, research about the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (Finger, 1994), the ivory trade regime (Princen, 1994), the protection of the Antarctic (Clark, 1994), the protection of the oceans (Stairs and Taylor, 1992; Ringius, 1997) and the ozone layer regime (Bramble and Porter, 1992) have consistently documented the importance of NGOs in international environmental policy-making and in 'world civic politics' (Wapner, 1996). The capacity of environmental organizations to influence agendas and decisions has been widely related to their resources, such as money, organization, staff, activists, etc.

The media have been an essential discursive arena for environmental groups (Molotch and Lester, 1974; Brookes and Richardson, 1975; Solesbury, 1976; Lowe

and Goyder, 1983; Lowe and Morrison, 1984; Hansen, 1993a; Hansen, 2000; Anderson, 1997). Such organizations see media coverage as a means to influencing decisions, shaping the climate opinion and key to 'their own continued buoyancy and legitimacy' (Lowe and Goyder, 1983: 78). Indeed, the promotion of environmental problems into the public and political agenda has depended to a great extent on the claims-making activity of environmental groups.

Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) have conceptualised the relationship between the media and social movements as a 'mutual dependency' of 'interacting systems'. Social movements often provide appealing forms of representation of reality for the media, through their interpretations, comments, demonstrations, etc. Also, NGOs feed the media with the 'protest' and 'conflict' food they like. But social movements need the media even more, claim these scholars, for mobilization of the public; validation of their status; and enlargement of the scope of conflict (in political matters, for instance, as a way to alter power relations). Therefore, the media system has a greater power in the relationship. Anderson (1997), for example, notes that environmental groups value newspaper coverage quite highly, even above television, due to the perceived impact of the press on politicians and the other media<sup>13</sup>.

In his study of the coverage of Greenpeace in British newspapers, Hansen (1993a) found indicators of the effectiveness of this organization's agency with regard to the press. Similar patterns of coverage in four newspapers pointed to Greenpeace's capacity to set the news agenda. Moreover, Greenpeace's presence in the media was frequently related to its major campaign initiatives (Hansen, 1993a: 176). More generally, Hansen argues, the organization has increased its legitimacy and credibility as a news source in a variety of contexts. Anderson (1993; 1997) and Linné (1993) also found that during the 1980s environmental organizations became more authoritative media sources in the UK. However, this is not universally true as there are signs of important differences in the representation of these groups and their claims by different news media (Hansen, 2000). Greenpeace has been the most mediagenic environmental organization. However, other groups such as Friends of the Earth and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) also strive for and get a considerable share of

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<sup>13</sup> This point further reinforces my option for analysing newspaper discourse rather than other media.

media coverage. There is therefore a certain degree of competition for media attention between environmental NGOs but also an increased co-ordination in the last few years (Anderson, 1993: 196).

What are the key traits of Greenpeace's public strategies? First, the group carefully manages its own public interventions. Greenpeace's campaigning actions are well planned and targeted (Anderson, 1997; Hansen, 2000). Also, as Hansen notes (1993: 168), Greenpeace's policy of having clearly defined spokespersons for each issue assures that the group speaks with a single voice or, at least, that potential differences within Greenpeace are not publicly on display in media coverage. Secondly, Greenpeace judiciously manages its relations to other organizations. It targets and times its actions regarding established news fora, like science and politics, with great precision. By linking their actions to routine media fora, Greenpeace manages to capture media attention and advance alternative interpretations of issues. This capacity of re-framing issues already in the public domain is even more important than Greenpeace's activity in constructing new problems for social attention (Hansen, 1993a).

In the field of climate change, Gough and Shackley (2001) note three main modes of NGO engagement with debate: lobbying and campaigning, developing creative policy solutions and knowledge construction. Knowledge is indeed a key ingredient of successful claims-making by NGOs. Eyerman and Jamison (1989) argue that with its selective dissemination of information and claims, Greenpeace has achieved a significant mastery in transforming knowledge in an organizational weapon. Greenpeace professionals act as 'intelligencers': they produce *strategic* information (ibid.) which is certainly appealing to the media.

From the media professionals viewpoint, environmental organizations are useful as they undertake the time-consuming task of monitoring the activities of a wide range of institutions, and draw journalists' attention to certain developments that 'might otherwise have remained buried in the mountain of propaganda, information and press releases landing on the desk of a journalist every day' (Hansen, 1993a: 172). More generally, as put by Princen and Finger (1994), NGOs have a 'translational' role – they translate the bio-physical into the political and the local into the global. Environmental issues are not just technically complex, but above all require new 'analytic processes...



integrative, interdisciplinary, multilevel approaches' (Princen, 1994a: 31) which can be supplied by trained NGO personnel. Jamison (1996) has maintained that environmental groups have recently shown a trend towards professionalization and are now often dominated by experts, including communication experts. Their relations with the media will certainly reflect these transformations. Streamlining and the avoidance of strong confrontation with institutional powers may preclude more radical forms of thinking (Poncelet, 2001).

Besides scientists, politicians and environmental pressure groups another type of agent attempts to influence what media says of climate change: business. The position of denial of the problem is quite common and often means 'hiring' scientists to publicly state that climate change is a myth. Recently, however, many companies have been realising that it is a better public strategy to admit global warming and have been engaging in 'green marketing' (e.g. Bernstein, 1992). The extent to which notions of corporate responsibility are being revitalized and translated in less damaging practices remains to be seen (see Shrivastava, 1995). Moreover, corporate environmentalism may have the consequence of reducing the scope for critique by other social actors and close-off debate.

Essentially, over the last few years, there has been a tendency for all the social actors discussed above to manage their communication with the media more intensely. An important question is whether they employ the same strategies and what are the consequences for media representations. Furthermore, while we have looked separately at the strategies of different actors, the reality is that they interact and that between them, and between them and the media there is an 'interplay of competition and complementarity' (Mormont and Dasnoy, 1995: 59).

In analysing press discourses on climate change this thesis will also address a third research question: How were the views of different social actors on climate change represented in the press and how did they shape the debate on the issue, i.e. what was their definitional power? By comparing different newspapers, I will examine the arguments advanced by different actors and how were they strengthened and/or contested in each newspaper.

### 2.3. Ideology and the media

In attempting to shape the ways the media represent the world, social actors are not just advancing 'objective' claims about what happens or about how reality is like. Their 'truth claims' are embedded with certain worldviews, value judgements and preferences. The notion of ideology is quite useful to understand these dimensions of social discourse. 'Ideology' is however one of the most controversial concepts in social and human sciences as shown by Eagleton (1991), who lists sixteen definitions in current use. Instead of starting off by comparing an array of definitions, I shall discuss some of the work that has been done on ideology and the media, identify some of its problems and suggest an alternative conceptualisation which will, I hope, be adequate for this thesis<sup>14</sup>.

Innovative research on the ideological roles of the media was undertaken at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s. Stuart Hall (e.g. 1977; 1982; 1996; Hall et al., 1978) is its most important representative. Significant contributions to the analysis of ideological issues in the media can also be found in the work of Todd Gitlin (1980), John Hartley (1982), Norman Fairclough (1995b), and Teun van Dijk (1998b; 1998c), amongst others.

Hall (e.g. 1982) aptly suggests that the power to signify is not a neutral force but is always at the service of particular ideologies. Representations play a key role in maintaining certain social structures, divisions, patterns, etc, by promoting them as natural and unavoidable. Naturalization, an essential effect of the media, is the process of transforming contingent propositions about the world into apparent manifestations of 'truth'. Most accounts of ideology broadly share a Marxist perspective. Hence, ideology is often said to be at the service of the ruling class (whatever the dividing lines) and the media are seen as one of the 'ideological apparatuses of the state' in the line of Althusser (1971) (see Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; 1980). As conceptualised by the Birmingham school, ideology sustains certain forms of state

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<sup>14</sup> Properly debating these issues would obviously require a separate volume. Thus, I will merely pinpoint some issues, remaining aware that they deserve further reflection.

exploitation or control. Fairclough (1995b) also evokes the idea of domination in his definition of ideology. Drawing on Thompson (1984; 1990), Fairclough maintains that 'ideologies are propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination' (ibid.: 14; see also Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

Let us try to unpack the nature of domination in the media. The work of Gramsci (1971) has been very influential with regard to Hall's analyses of ideological processes in the media. Rather than imposed on people by the dominant class through ideology, domination is for Gramsci the process of presenting the will of the dominant class as fulfilling the interests of other classes. Instead of coercion, there is therefore consent in domination. Hegemony is a pervasive, hidden and amorphous mode of domination that makes us believe that we are free to choose. It is 'our lived system of meanings and values' (Williams, 1977: 110). Hall maintains that media representations play a key role in winning, securing and maintaining the ideological consent of audiences.

Hegemonic domination is not a given. It has to be constantly re-established and re-negotiated (Taylor and Willis, 1999: 34). According to Hall et al. (1978), ideology ought not to be seen as a ready-made (super)structure but as set of definitions and ideas that constantly compete with other definitions and ideas, and constantly evolve. The media are then not mere vehicles of propaganda of the government and other powerful groups but (one of) the site(s) where such groups struggle for domination or hegemony. This is not done in a forceful way but by the engineering of consensus (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Although the notion of hegemony is very illuminating, I do not find the association between ideology and domination always satisfactory. Firstly, many readings of ideology presuppose a social dichotomy between dominant and dominated that is rather simplistic. There are many forms of domination and many forms of resistance. The 'dominant' (e.g. men, the state, corporations) are not always or totally dominant. The 'dominated' (e.g. women, electors, consumers) often hold some form of power. Also, those in a somewhat subordinate condition espouse some form of ideology, which is not a prerogative of the powerful.

Secondly, the concept of ideology, often used in a derogatory sense, is frequently associated with the activity of concealing, legitimating or in other ways reinforcing

certain forms of domination. Notwithstanding the crucial work that scholars like Hall have done in denouncing forms of ideological control, reducing ideology to domination and to the legitimation of such domination transforms ideology in a sort of instrumental operation. 'Ideology' loses the 'ideo' component and becomes the exercise of control as such. This seems somewhat pre-emptive.

Thirdly, there is a potential for resistance and contestation in ideology that tends to be overlooked in most conceptualisations. Ideology can indeed serve to empower the powerless and challenge the dominant. For those that are in a subordinate position, ideology can be a path of subversion and change (e.g. feminism in the 60s).

A related problem is the association of ideology to falsehood in some theorizations. Although criticizing the Marxist idea of a 'false consciousness', Laclau (1996), for example, defines ideology as distortion – not as the distortion of reality but as the construction of reality by distortion (see Torfing, 1999: 216-7). This seems like a reductionist use of the concept of ideology. An ideology (e.g. anti-racism) does not necessarily entail misrepresentations and can even denounce the illusionary aspects of another ideology (without being itself misleading).

In contrast with more rigid propositions, Van Dijk has recently proposed a more encompassing notion of ideology:

... the basis of the social representations shared by members of a groups. This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, *for them*, and to act accordingly.' (1998b: 8)

There are however some difficulties in this formulation. As in Mannheim (1936), van Dijk's understanding of ideology is tied to social groups and their members. This presupposes an important degree of organization of people with respect to the issues and views they share. However, for many people, ideology is a more diffuse and less unified reality. More diffuse because they do not 'belong' properly to a group that can be associated to a certain ideology (e.g. a woman can be a feminist without being involved in any women's groups). Instead people get ideological input from a variety of sources beyond social interaction. Ideology is also less unified than van Dijk suggests, since each person may retain only some aspects of a given ideology and/or

espouse a number of different although non-colliding ideologies (e.g. feminism, anti-racism, economic neo-liberalism).

How then will 'ideology' be understood in this thesis? The normative aspect of ideology that van Dijk highlights seems worth retaining. Ideology comprises judgements about what is right or wrong. It is, thus, intricately tied to value systems. There is also an important political dimension in ideology. How society should be organized and how resources should be distributed are some of the questions ideologies tend to address. As noted above, definitions of ideology (in the media) as domination are too narrow (see Allan, 1999). However, ideologies do have a relation to power. I would propose the following formulation of ideology. Broadly defined, ideology would be a set of ideas and values that may legitimate 'action for the preservation, reform, destruction and reconstruction of a given order' (Seliger, 1977: 119-20). Being plural and diverse, ideologies tend to have a programme of action vis-à-vis a given social and political order.

It is important to clarify the way I view the relation between media and ideology as mutually constitutive. On the one hand, media texts result from ideological standpoints, they are produced within certain ideological frameworks. On the other hand, media texts produce ideology: news (and other media genres) either reproduce and/or challenge a certain ideology (in the latter case, certainly drawing on other ideologies). The media should not be seen as mere conveyers of the ideologies of other actors. As Schlesinger and Tumber (1994: 19) argue, Hall et al. (1978) tended to overstate the passivity of the media as a 'subordinate site for the reproduction of the ideological field'. In fact, besides allowing or disallowing other social actors to advance their ideological standings, the media can also have an important agency in bringing in new ideological readings of issues or confronting those of the dominant.

Are environmental issues exempt from ideological frameworks? In 1984, Lowe and Morrison wrote that the media had been able to foster environmental protest insofar as environmental issues could be depicted in non-partisan terms 'relating to the quality of life rather than its organization' (p. 83). Still in the 1970s, Schoenfeld et al. had noted the subversive nature of environmental claims with regard to the economic and political orders and wrote that to the extent that 'they are representatives of the "system"',

newspaper publishers may have felt that they ought not to provide a platform for early environmentalists, since the environmental movement was seen by many as ‘anti-business, even Anti-American’ (1979: 49). As argued by Anderson (1997), the environment has later acquired many political meanings and is even constructed along party lines.

Arguments about the relation between humans and the environment are deeply embedded with views on the value of nature, on individual rights, on progress, on the role of the state, etc. Discourses on the environment thus have an important ideological dimension that we need to spell out. The final research question that will frame this thesis is therefore the following: What ideological issues are interplayed in the discursive construction of climate change in the British ‘quality’ press?

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on constructivist grounds, the long trajectory of this chapter has started with an incursion into the spheres of science and politics in order to grasp their *modi operandi* and the ways the environment gets constructed therein. The multiple roles of the media in these arenas were debated. I have aimed to go beyond the apparent inevitability of news texts and help understand the processes through which they are fabricated. Being a routinized social practice, newsmaking is embedded with professional constraints, norms and values that shape the resulting discourses. Given the importance of claims-making discussed in chapter one, I have then discussed matters to do with the representation of the voices of social actors in the media and their capacity to define issues for the latter through specific communication strategies. Finally, I have argued that ideological commitments in the media are of interest and that environmental meanings, too, have ideological dimensions partly constructed by the media. The chapter has also outlined the research questions at the basis of this thesis. The following step will be to present the data in which such questions will be tested. That is the task of chapter three.

## CHAPTER 3

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### THE DATA: COLLECTION, TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION AND MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION

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#### INTRODUCTION

Having presented and discussed the research programme of the thesis in previous chapters, as well as the ways it is embedded in various theoretical literatures, I will seek to introduce the thesis' empirical project in this chapter. I will therefore start by explaining how the data to be analysed were collected and selected. In the second part, the chapter will look at the distribution of the data over the period 1985-1997. In the third part, I will move to a quantitative characterization of morphological aspects of the data, in particular regarding authorship, page numbers and article size.

#### 1. DATA COLLECTION AND SELECTION

The empirical basis of this thesis is a corpus of 2310 articles from the *Guardian* (and the Sunday broadsheet *Observer*), the *Independent* (including the *Independent on Sunday*) and the *Times* (including the *Sunday Times*)<sup>1</sup>.

How was the data put together? How was the set of articles for analysis constituted? Answering these questions is the aim of this section.

##### 1.1. Data gathering

Literature on media research methods (e.g. Stempel III and Westley, 1989; Priest, 1996; Gunter, 2000) is notoriously lacking with regard to methodologies for gathering media data. Manuals leave that moment of research aside and move directly into advice

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<sup>1</sup> The choice of these newspapers has already been justified in chapter one, and their readership and political tendencies analysed therein.

on the analysis of the data<sup>2</sup>. As this chapter will suggest, assuming the unproblematic nature of data collection may be a false point of departure. I will start by describing the procedures involved in collecting and selecting my newspaper articles and the possible implications of such procedures.

The articles were retrieved from electronic databases. I mainly used the CD-ROM databases published by each newspaper, although the FT-Profile database<sup>3</sup> was used to complement short periods that were not available in CD-ROM. Both kinds of database store the full text of newspapers, excluding advertising and most graphic material. Wilkins and Patterson (1991), Hansen (1993a), and Lacey and Longman (1993) are some of the earliest researchers to use this method for searching and collecting newspaper data. More recently, Myerson and Rydin (1996), McComas and Shanahan (1999)<sup>4</sup> and Hansen (2000) have also employed this database facility<sup>5</sup>. The advantages and disadvantages of this kind of tool will be detailed below.

The first step in collecting the data was a search in the database of each newspaper employing the keywords '*climate change*' OR<sup>6</sup> '*global warming*' in each year of the period 1985-1997. This option ensured that all the articles containing *at least* one of these expressions in the title or body of the text were selected. The use of these terms has several advantages. First, they are unambiguous expressions which can only be employed to refer to the issue under consideration in my research. Second, these expressions account for almost the entire population of articles on the topic. Nevertheless, it later became clear that there were some relevant articles that did not contain any of the two expressions mentioned above. Essentially these were articles that talked about the (enhanced) greenhouse effect without necessarily mentioning global warming or climate change as its consequence. To amend this problem a second search was made in the three newspapers with the keyword '*greenhouse*' (to avoid repetition the search was made with the instruction 'NOT '*climate change*'' and 'NOT

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<sup>2</sup> Deacon et al. (1998) provide some basic information on archives.

<sup>3</sup> FT-Profile is a database created by the Financial Times Group, which includes a number of British newspapers.

<sup>4</sup> McComas and Shanahan (1993) and Wilkins and Patterson (1991) used the American LEXIS-NEXIS database.

<sup>5</sup> See also Altheide (1996) on using electronic databases for newspaper data.

<sup>6</sup> 'Or' was a Boolean operator used in the search.



‘global warming’<sup>7</sup>). The method that was pursued guarantees a fairly exhaustive access to newspaper articles dealing with the issue of climate change.

Hence, I have constituted a comprehensive database of articles on the topic by downloading them to disks. The use of CD-ROM databases for gathering the data has the advantage of being very time-effective, as downloading articles to a floppy disk is much faster than copying from either microfilm or the actual paper-version of a publication. Also, as detailed later in this chapter, storing verbal data in computer-readable format allows for treating it in useful ways with computer tools that would not be possible to employ otherwise.

As previously mentioned, the period covered by the search is 1985 to 1997. The *Independent* was launched on 7 October 1986 (the *Independent on Sunday* started on 28 January 1990)<sup>8</sup>. However, a CD-ROM database of the *Independent* is not available until the beginning of 1988. Unlike others, this newspaper does not publish an index of contents, which would make the task of locating articles on climate change between October 1986 and December 1987 extremely time-consuming. Given that in the other two newspapers there is a very low number of articles in 1986 and 1987, this gap is likely to have a minimal impact in the overall study. Hence, my analysis of the *Independent* will start in 1988. For the *Times*, the analysis starts in July 1985, for similar reasons.

The table below offers a view of the distribution of articles mentioning climate change or global warming. It shows the full number of articles with the selected keywords, which is one indicator of the importance of the issue in the press<sup>9</sup>. In this one and in the following tables and graphs, the columns for the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* also include the issues of the *Observer*, *Independent on Sunday* and *Times on Sunday* respectively. Notwithstanding some institutional differences, such as property issues (e.g. the *Observer* was not initially owned by the *Guardian*) and

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Not’ was a Boolean operator.

<sup>8</sup> See British Library (2002) for a concise history of the British press and Seymour-Ure (1996) for further discussion.

<sup>9</sup> Every newspaper genre is included in this dataset, from ‘news’ to editorials and letters to the editor. On media genres see Altheide and Snow (1979) and Fairclough (1995b).

different staffs, there are important ideological similarities between the weaklies and the Sunday papers, which justify putting them together here.

Table 1. Articles with the words ‘climate change’ or ‘global warming’

Year/Newsp.	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1985	2	N/P	0 (Jul-Dec)	(2)
1986	1	N/A	2	(3)
1987	4	N/A	3	(7)
1988	24	28	22	(74)
1989	171	146	191	508
1990	253	296	339	888
1991	167	131	134	432
1992	246	202	187	635
1993	119	108	69	296
1994	105	123	63	291
1995	142	119	120	381
1996	160	165	120	445
1997	357	381	243	981
Total	1752	1699	1493	4944

N/P – Newspaper had not started publication yet.

N/A – Not available.

The articles with the keyword ‘*greenhouse*’ were not included in this table because of the various meanings of this term, which led to many hundreds of articles on gardening, for instance, coming up in my search<sup>10</sup> and requiring a ‘manual’ filtration to remove them from the database<sup>11</sup>. I estimate that between 800 and a thousand more articles in all the three newspapers mentioned (either in passing or centrally) the greenhouse effect<sup>12</sup>. This adds up to a set of around *six thousand* articles in the whole period.

As detailed in chapter five, most of the articles using the word ‘greenhouse’ (effect) were concentrated in the first few years. By 1990, the term ‘global warming’ had started replacing ‘greenhouse effect’ (see Lacey and Longman, 1993), and ‘climate change’ was becoming increasingly common. Thus, because it does not include articles

<sup>10</sup> Lacey and Longman (1993) use the term ‘noise’ to refer to these ‘unwanted’ articles.

<sup>11</sup> Despite the polysemy of the word ‘greenhouse’ I found that it was more accurate to employ it as a search term, rather than the expressions ‘greenhouse effect’ or ‘greenhouse gases’, because some articles would refer, for instance, to a ‘greenhouse warming’ and would otherwise not be included. Following the same logic, it could be argued that the words ‘climate’ and ‘warming’ should have been used, instead of ‘climate change’ and ‘global warming’ respectively. However, such option would generate an enormous amount of ‘noise’ and make the data collection for such a long period almost unfeasible. McComas and Shanahan (1999) used the same keywords in article headlines as I did for either the headline or text.

with the term ‘greenhouse’, table 1 under-represents the amount of coverage of the problem in the eighties (cf. Lacey and Longman, 1993). This is corrected in table 2 below, which includes all the post-selection ‘relevant’ articles.

## 1.2. Constitution of the corpus

The second main step of data gathering was the selection of the retrieved articles for analysis. As mentioned above, word-based computer searches bring up all the articles that employ those words. Although many articles included the mentioned key expressions, climate change was not the (chief) issue under consideration therein. The selection thus required a scan-type reading of *all* the articles, and in case of doubt, a more detailed reading (cf. Lacey and Longman, 1993). This process was very time-consuming and is a downside of computer searches, which do not provide any indication of the importance of a theme in a given text.

The criteria used in the selection are detailed below. The articles that were included in my corpus were, as a general rule, the ones whose main theme was climate change<sup>13</sup>. There were two clear indicators of climate change being the central topic of an article: the fact that the issue was mentioned in the headline or if it filled an important part of the article. Articles where climate change was one amongst other *main* topics were also selected. For instance, in the late eighties much of the coverage of the greenhouse effect was linked to the coverage of ozone issues. In this case, there are articles whose headlines emphasize ozone but which address the greenhouse effect within the text and are, therefore, significant in the media construction of the issue. If the main theme of the article was different from climate change but the latter was mentioned as the cause of the covered issue, such as an extreme weather event, the article was also selected. Similarly, if the issue under consideration was associated with causes or means to prevent GHG emissions, such as specific uses of energy, and such gases or their consequences were mentioned, the article was retained. By consistently respecting these criteria, I have constituted a corpus of articles that is relevant and homogeneous (Bauer and Aarts, 2000).

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<sup>12</sup> As explained below, I only retained the ones where the theme was central.

<sup>13</sup> See Bauer and Aarts (2000) on corpus construction.

Comparing the results of my searches with the thematic indexes published by the newspapers (e.g. *The Times Index*), I have found that the latter are rather incomplete and often categorize articles inaccurately. Hence, in the process of identification of relevant material, computer searches are by and large more exhaustive and reliable. A problem with this method of collection of newspaper data is that CD-ROM databases do not give access to the original format or layout of articles in the newspaper page. In order to overcome this obstacle with regard to a set of selected articles that will be included in full text in this thesis, I have resorted to the microfilm versions of newspapers. A further limitation is that electronic databases do not include most photographs and other graphic material such as cartoons, graphs and statistics<sup>14</sup>.

The goal of this thesis is to establish an authoritative study of the long-term coverage of climate change in the broadsheet press. The use of computer-based data sets is then mandatory, as locating articles manually from news archives would not be feasible. The loss of visual material is an important drawback as it means that there is a loss of appreciation of the significance of the actual layout of the articles and of the relation between text and images in the discourse analysis in the following chapters. However, as work by Hall (1973) and others show, it is the text which drives the interpretation of the illustration. Moreover, the study intends to enhance the understanding of verbal discourse rather than the consumption processes where the interplay between text and image might be more significant. It is also worth highlighting that the journalists/authors do not select any illustrations to accompany their pieces as this is done by picture editors (Bell, 1991).

All newspaper genres were included in the corpus, except letters to the editor. The latter were excluded due to their very different nature in relation to other types of media texts: letters are distinct in their mode of production, logic of publication, and status of authors<sup>15</sup>. Both 'hard' and 'soft' news (Bell, 1991) are part of the corpus of articles of this thesis. The former typically reports events that took place since the last edition of the newspaper. 'Soft' news are not so time-bound and can be features that

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<sup>14</sup> Purvis (1998) analysed examples of photographs and other iconic material used by newspapers to report on climate change.

<sup>15</sup> Letters were grouped separately and may be the object of a future research project.

often provide background and comment or similar types of texts. However, it must be noted that the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft news’, and indeed between media genres, is not always clear and often the same article entails both types (see Tuchman, 1978; McQuail, 1994). The following table shows the frequencies of articles that were selected as the corpus of my analysis.

Table 2. Articles in which climate change is a core theme (or associated to the core theme)

Year/Newsp.	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Times</i>	Total
1985	3	N/P	1 (Jul-Dec)	4
1986	3	N/A	2	5
1987	8	N/A	4	12
1988	31	24	30	85
1989	123	100	129	352
1990	138	163	192	493
1991	72	32	64	168
1992	86	84	93	263
1993	47	33	16	96
1994	50	36	15	101
1995	62	50	57	169
1996	47	49	44	140
1997	178	139	126	443
Total	848	710	773	2310

Using the keywords ‘greenhouse effect’ and ‘global warming’ in FT-Profile, Lacey and Longman (1993) also examined the fluctuation in coverage of the issue in the *Guardian* and *Times* between January 1987 and April 1991. Their data show similar trends to mine (see graph 1), although their numbers of articles are higher since they refer to all the articles with the mentioned keywords while I selected the relevant ones.

Mazur (1998) resorted to the *Times* index for a comparison with the *New York Times*. Although he does not provide specific numbers, his graphic display of news coverage shows the peak in the *Times* to be in 1992. My data set contradicts this. According to my search and selection procedures, the *Times* published more articles both in 1989 and in 1990 than in 1992<sup>16</sup>. This is probably explained by the inadequate categorization of articles in newspapers indexes, as argued above.

<sup>16</sup> Table 1 (of non-selected data) shows more articles in 1992 than in 1989 because it does not include articles containing the keyword ‘greenhouse’, which was the most frequently used term in the late eighties to talk about the problem, as mentioned before, and later largely dropped.

## 2. DISTRIBUTION OF PRESS COVERAGE IN TIME

Numbers of articles on specific issues are a significant indicator of the weight given to such issues by the press (van Dijk, 1988a; Lacey and Longman, 1993; Mazur, 1998). Agenda-setting theories (e.g. McCombs and Shaw, 1972), for instance, tend to put the emphasis in the quantity of coverage as a cause of public and political concern regarding an issue.

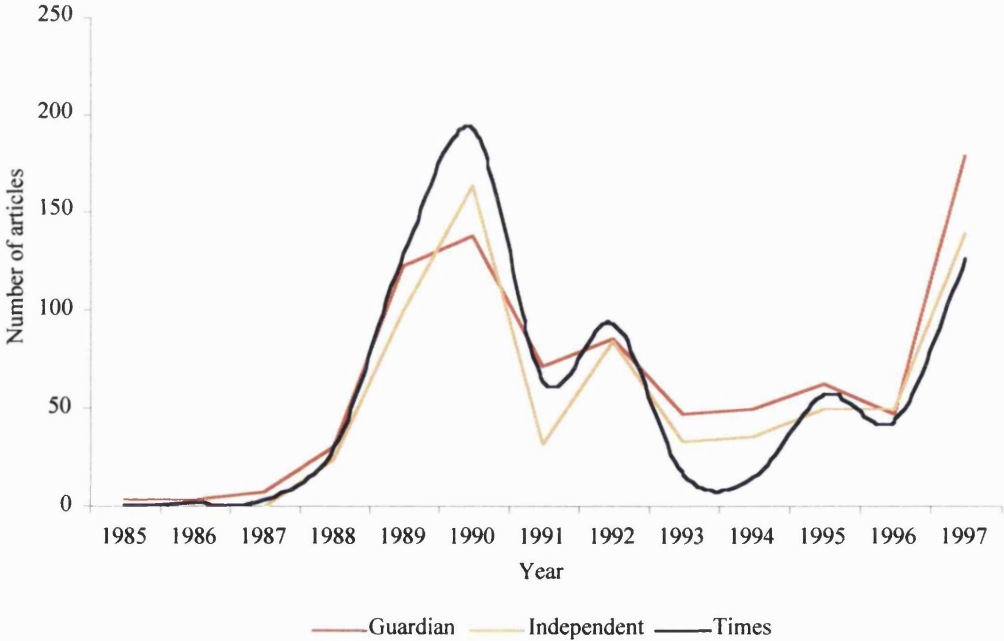
Literature on media coverage of environmental issues traces a rise in the 1960s reaching the peak in the early 1970s (Brookes et al., 1976; O'Meara, 1978, cit. by Schoenfeld et al., 1979). Coverage then receded, although maintaining higher average levels than in the early 1960s. The next significant increase took place in the late 1980s and in 1990 (Love, 1990). Public opinion polls registered levels of concern that followed similar trends (Anthony, 1982; Anderson, 1997). Tables 1 and 2 show that the issue of climate change was almost non-existent in the press until 1988. This year sees an average of 28 articles per paper on the topic. The largest increase in the number of articles in 13 years takes place between 1988 and 1989 – an increase by a factor of about 4. The rising trend continues into 1990 which is the year with the largest number of articles on climate change for the *Independent* and the *Times* (second highest for the *Guardian*). A similar trend is found in the American press, although the coverage peak there occurred in 1989 (Trumbo, 1996; Mazur, 1998; McComas and Shanahan, 1999).

The rapid ascension of climate change in the press in 1989 and 1990 is a very important phenomenon and requires detailed examination. What led to such a sudden ascendancy of climate change in the media agenda? Mazur (1998) points to several factors that may have explained such a fact in the USA: ozone carrying along 'its sister issue', as it surged upward in the news in the late eighties; environmental groups calling attention to the issue; political mobilization around it; the 1988 testimony of NASA scientist James Hansen about global warming; and the drought and high temperatures of 1988 in the USA. Mazur also suggests a strong influence of the American press over the British one and that of other countries. Ungar (1992) emphasizes the role of the 1988 drought as a 'real-world event' in the growth of the American media interest on the greenhouse effect. However, Wilkins and Patterson (1991) claim that the American

when questioned by journalists, scientists maintained that no clear cause-effect relation could be established. The authors suggest that, ironically, this scientific and journalistic good-practice may have led later to a ‘dampening’ (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988) of the problem. Story interplay was emphasized by Mazur and Lee (1993) who suggested that the rise in media coverage of the environment in the late 1980s was because various environmental stories became important at the same time, mutually reinforcing media attention. I will come back to the factors behind the sudden explosion of articles on climate change in the British press later in chapter five.

The following graph clearly illustrates how the coverage of climate change accelerated in the British quality press in 1989-90, as well as the dramatic fluctuation of articles published over the succeeding seven years.

Graph. 1. Distribution of newspaper articles – 1985-1997



In 1991 there is a striking drop in the number of articles published. The most vivid fall is in the *Independent*, down to a fourth of the volume of 1990. 1992 sees a small

In 1991 there is a striking drop in the number of articles published. The most vivid fall is in the *Independent*, down to a fourth of the volume of 1990. 1992 sees a small increase of coverage (quite considerable in the case of the *Independent*), probably stimulated by the Earth conference in Rio de Janeiro. This trend is sharply inverted in the following years in all the newspapers, and most obviously, in the *Times*.

Downs' (1972) concept of the issue-attention cycle may also help explain climate change's decline in the media agenda. Downs argues that the public life of social issues depends on cycles that have five stages: the *pre-problem stage*; *alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm*; *realising the cost of significant progress*; *gradual decline of intense public interest*; and the *post-problem stage*. 1991 would correspond to the third and/or fourth stages. Chapter six will return to this matter and attempt to understand this fluctuation in the British press coverage of climate change.

In 1995, there is a new expansion in the coverage of climate change which decreases slightly in 1996 and then increases significantly in 1997. The Kyoto protocol, agreed in December of 1997, and all the expectation that surrounded it largely explain the numbers of articles in 1997, as will be detailed in chapter seven. Kyoto is also the news peg behind dramatic rises in media coverage in the USA (Shanahan, 2000), France (Brossard et al, 2000), and Portugal (Dessai et al., 2001).

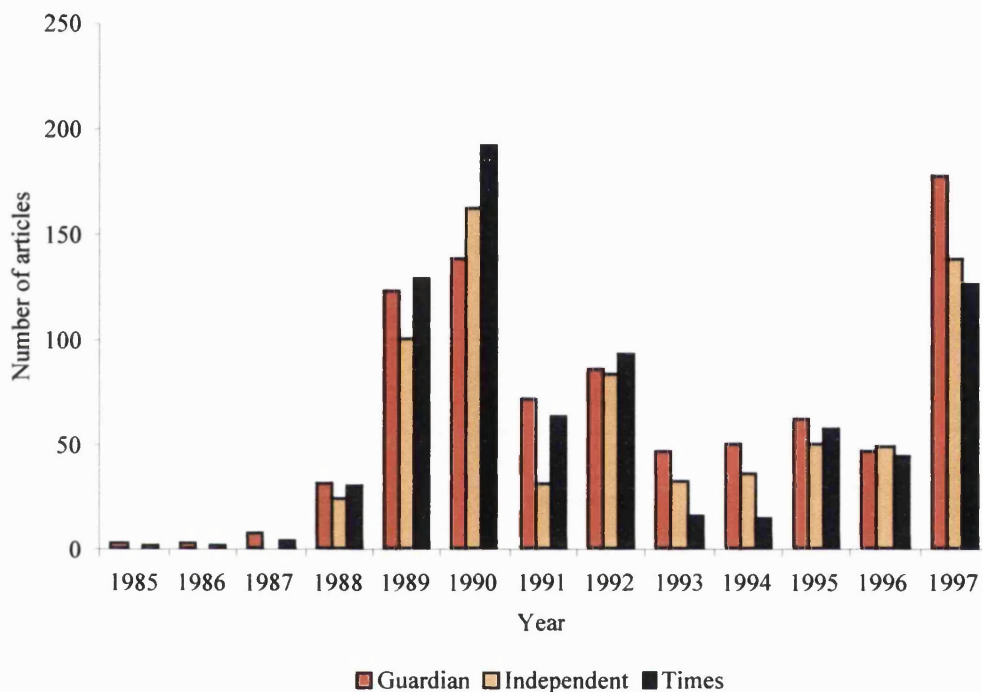
Possibly the most interesting aspect of the data is the fact that the three newspapers follow very similar time trends in coverage and carry similar quantities of articles (often they only diverge by less than ten articles per year). This similarity is visible from the very beginning of the period under consideration. Lacey and Longman (1993) found identical tendencies. The graph below displays the resemblance in coverage between the papers. Note how similar the following years are: 1988, 1989, 1992, 1995 and 1996.

While the *Guardian* is usually regarded as the most environmentally aware newspaper, its lead is only really obvious in 1997 (it is also proportionally significant in 1993 and 1994, mostly vis-à-vis the *Times*); and it is even overtaken by the *Times* and *Independent* in 1990. However, as noted by Lacey and Longman (1993), we should also account for the total number of articles in a newspaper in doing this kind of comparison. In the *Times*, that number is substantially higher than in the *Guardian*



between the two papers is in sections where climate change would not normally appear, it is still true that the *Guardian* awards proportionally more of its space to articles on this topic than the two other broadsheet papers.

Graph. 2. Comparative analysis of levels of newspaper coverage per year and per newspaper



### 3. AUTHORSHIP AND MORPHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PRESS REPRESENTATIONS

Quantitative analyses of press coverage tend to focus on temporal distribution of articles (Lacey and Longman, 1993; Mazur, 1998), as done above, and/or on categories of content analysis (van Dijk, 1988a; Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997; McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Brossard et al., 2000; Dessai et al., 2001). As I will discuss in chapter four, the thesis will offer a discourse analysis of selected articles instead of a content analysis. The latter solely looks at patterns of attention to themes (or sources) in the press (see Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1969; Bardin, 1977), while discourse analysis examines various levels of the meaning of issues and how those meanings are constituted. In complement occurrences through time of climate

while discourse analysis examines various levels of the meaning of issues and how those meanings are constituted. In complement to occurrences of climate change articles throughout time, I will consider the distribution of articles relative to authorship and a set of morphological characteristics, such as the newspaper sections in which they appeared, page number and article size. As explained below, authorship and morphological traits can suggest some interesting leads to the analysis of climate change coverage.

My computer database with the articles that form the corpus of analysis of this thesis allows for the automatic quantitative analysis of a number of variables. This analysis was done with the computer language Perl. Specific pattern matching programmes were written to retrieve the required information<sup>17</sup>. While being relatively simple, searching only for occurrences, these programmes were very valuable given that the size of the database would make manual counting very time-consuming.

### **3.1. Authorship**

Authorship has been a largely neglected aspect in analyses of newspaper articles<sup>18</sup>. I argue that it is important to account for this issue for two reasons. First, we should question whether individual journalists differ in their discursive construction of social issues. This is associated to issues of organizational constraint, as discussed in chapter two, versus individual freedom and ideological preferences (e.g. Tunstall, 1971; Golding and Elliot, 1979; Gallagher, 1982). Second, newspapers tend to have various contributors besides normal staff and it is important to know how these outside voices affect the representation of a contested issue like climate change. Naturally, these questions will only yield specific answers in the thesis' empirical chapters when I analyse news articles in detail. Nevertheless, it is important to know how many articles each author wrote over the 13 years under consideration.

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<sup>17</sup> The programming was done by Jarle Brinchmann.

<sup>18</sup> van Dijk (1988a) makes a short comparison of correspondent and agency dispatch materials.

The following table shows the names of those authors with the highest number of articles in the three newspapers<sup>19</sup>.

Table 3. Authors of 10 or more articles in each newspaper.

<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Independent</i>		<i>Times</i>	
Paul Brown a)	143	Nicholas Schoon a)	173	Michael McCarthy a)	106
Tim Radford a)	69	Mary Fagan a)	40	Nick Nuttall a)	84
John Gribbin b)	37	Geoffrey Lean a)	34	Nigel Hawkes a)	44
John Ardill	23	Tom Wilkie a)	28	Pearce Wright	30
Polly Ghazi a)	20	Richard North	27	Sean Ryan a)	11
John Vidal	20	David Nicholson-Lord a)	25		
Nigel Williams a)	20	Steve Connor	18		
Paul Simons	19	William Hartston	14		
James Erlichman	15	Colin Brown a)	12		
Geoffrey Lean a)	12				
Stephen Moss	11				

a) Writing alone or with others – in the latter case only when this is the first named author.

b) In many cases with Mary Gribbin.

Nicholas Schoon, Paul Brown, Michael McCarthy and Nick Nuttall clearly stand out in this set. McCarthy and Nuttall have worked as environment correspondents<sup>20</sup> for the *Times* and authored, respectively, 14% and 11% of this paper's articles. Schoon is environment correspondent for the *Independent*. He is responsible for over a quarter of the articles published in this paper. Paul Brown is environment correspondent for the *Guardian*. Brown wrote 17% of the *Guardian*'s articles on this topic. All four journalists have been covering climate change since it settled in the media agenda (N.S. since 1988; M.M., P.B. and N.N. since 1989). This matters for various reasons. First, throughout that time there was certainly a process of each journalist learning about the issues that will be reflected in their texts. Second, being involved with a topic for so long allows the journalists to develop and consolidate relations with a range of sources and vice-versa (Ericson et al., 1989; Peters, 1995; Berkowitz and Terkeurst, 1999; Bell, 2001). Third, given

<sup>19</sup> About 15% of all articles do not specify the author.

<sup>20</sup> Nuttall has also been technology correspondent.

their continued participation in (public) debates on climate change through their work, these journalists ought to be seen as key players in their own right (Cohen, 1963; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, cit. by McQuail, 1994).

The fact that environment correspondents (also Ardill, Lean, North, Ryan) and environment editors (Vidal, Nicholson-Lord) for the three papers are responsible for a considerable number of the articles on climate change is not surprising. It is, nonetheless, a meaningful fact, as Einsiedel and Coughlan (1993) found that the articles written by environmental reporters were more analytical, more often generated by the reporters rather than initiated by external sources, and more likely to challenge 'conventional institutional wisdom' than articles by general assignment reporters.

Other specialisms feature in the list of authors. Science is the second most common, as represented by Radford and Williams (*Guardian*), Wilkie and Connor (*Independent*), Hawkes and Wright (*Times*). The remaining journalists in the list are responsible for politics (Ghazi, *Guardian*; Brown, *Independent*), industry and technology (Fagan, *Independent*), and consumer affairs (Erlichman, *Guardian*)<sup>21</sup>. That journalists working on multiple types of news beats also write on climate change reflects the complex and multi-faceted nature of the issue. In the list above, there are also four authors who are not members of the staff of the newspapers: John Gribbin, a popularizer of science; Paul Simons, author of *Weird Weather*<sup>22</sup>; Stephen Moss, who is, like Paul Simons<sup>23</sup>, a regular contributor to a section entitled 'Weatherwatch' in the *Guardian*; and William Hartston, a freelance journalist on science matters. These authors contribute with a mixture of information and comment, so their articles are often between hard news and features.

The author list shows three main differences between the newspapers. First, the *Times*' lesser concentration of authorship suggests that, overall, more articles were written by external contributors than in the other papers. Other staff of the *Times* did not account for a very large fraction of all the articles. Second, the *Guardian* is

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<sup>21</sup> The order does not correspond to the proportion of articles.

<sup>22</sup> Published by Little and Brown, London, 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Moss and Simon are the authors of *BBC Weather Watch* with The Met Office (London, BBC Books, 1992).

isolated in having a substantial number of articles written by a consumer affairs correspondent and by three regular external contributors. Finally, as indicated by this list and consolidated in an analysis of the full list of authors, the *Independent* has the highest concentration of authorship. This paper is also unique in having a large number of articles written by a technology correspondent (Mary Fagan). Consumer affairs and technology correspondents certainly have particular perspectives on climate change which we will need to further examine in the following chapters.

The most striking aspect about the authorship of articles on climate change is the very large number of authors who contributed to the newspapers. Over 400 people in the three papers wrote on the topic between 1985 and 1997. The vast majority of those people wrote only one article. The nature of these texts varies widely from 'fact'-based news (e.g. claims about scientific knowledges) to features. This suggests that climate change engages a wide range of people and that discourses on climate change may have been rather multi-faceted.

### **3.2. Position of articles within the paper**

The page number is an indicator of the perceived newsworthiness of a topic. After the front page, the most important pages, given their visibility, are, in order, the following: last page, page number 3, odd pages (the closer to page number 1 the more important), even pages (same rule applies) (Agnés and Croissandeau,1979). Most of the articles in my computer database contain the page number. However, in a third of the articles that information is not available. This is mainly because the *Times* omits this information from a very large part of its articles in its CD-ROM databases. In some periods, the page number is also absent in articles of the other two newspapers.

The overall distribution of articles by page indicates that an apparently small proportion of articles were published on the first page, the most prominent area of a newspaper: 96 out of 1493<sup>24</sup> articles or 6%. Nonetheless, if one thinks about the

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<sup>24</sup> This is the total number of articles where page number information is available.

intense competition between a myriad of subjects for a place in the first page that takes place every day, and the choices that editors are confronted with, 6% acquires much importance. In the three newspapers taken together, the highest concentration of articles is on the third page (7%), which also features quite highly within a paper, closely followed by page number two (just a decimal below in percentage). From the fourth page and onwards even-number pages exhibit more articles than odd-number ones. Positioning, here, indicates lower valorisation of climate change.

A separate analysis of each newspaper shows that in the *Guardian*, most articles are on page 2, closely followed by page 3. Curiously, the *Guardian*, considered a newspaper with a strong environmental concern, is the paper with the least absolute (or relative) number of articles on climate change on the front page. In the *Independent* (where the page number information is available for almost all the articles), the number of articles on the first page coincides exactly with the number of articles on page 2. The highest concentration is on page 3. The *Times* surprises again with a very high number of articles on the front page. Although the page number is only available for 25% of the articles in its CD-ROM database, where such information is included it shows a high valorisation attributed to climate change by this newspaper: 15% of those articles appeared on the first page. However, this is played down by a low proportion of articles on pages 2 and 3 taken together: 9%, compared with 12% in the *Guardian* and 18% in the *Independent*.

### 3.3. Article size

In any mass media, there is a constant struggle for space (Gans, 1979). Being a valuable resource, space is an indicator of the importance awarded to an issue, together with the section, and the page number (e.g. van Dijk, 1988a). While space was traditionally measured by column-inches or square centimetres, my computer database makes a more precise form of measurement possible: by word. The average size of articles by newspaper is: *Guardian* - 587; *Independent* - 592, and *Times* - 541. Except for slight tendencies for decline in the *Times* and for increase in

the *Guardian* and *Independent* after 1995, there have not been significant variations throughout time, as far as article length is concerned.

## CONCLUSIONS

Three concluding remarks summarize this chapter. First, data collection has been shown to be an important moment of the research process and to involve decisions that have substantial implications. Spelling out the procedures and options involved in gathering news data is thus recommended. I have maintained that there are advantages in searches done in computer databases relative to ‘manual’ searches in newspapers. Second, the chapter has demonstrated that the temporal distribution of the press coverage of climate change is clearly divided into three distinct phases: an upward phase from 1988 to 1990, a downfall phase between 1991 and 1996 (with small recoveries in 1992 and 1995), and a new upward phase in 1997. This evolution is identical in all three newspapers and in other countries’ media. Third, the chapter has discussed the relevance of authorship, and provided an overview of some morphological characteristics of climate change coverage such as the positioning of texts within ‘quality’ newspaper and the size of articles.

## CHAPTER 4

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### THEO-METHODOLOGICAL OPTIONS: DEVISING A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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#### INTRODUCTION

Up to this point in the thesis I have set out a research agenda, reviewed existing literature on relevant fields and described the data that will be analysed. The question to be asked now is: *how* are such data going to be examined in order to answer the research questions that underpin the thesis? This chapter will discuss the potential of discourse analysis for interpretation and understanding of texts, and its wider relation to social contexts, as well as analytical procedures. After reviewing recent literature on discourse studies, and analysing the concept and theory of discourse, I will discuss three mainstream approaches to the analysis of media discourse: Critical Discourse Analysis, frame analysis and narrative analysis. Are existing models and analytical tools of discourse analysis appropriate for analysing the data described in the previous chapter? Would they adequately allow for the examination of the data and productively aid in its interpretation? In this chapter I will also make a critical assessment of (the implications of) theo-methodological options in discourse analysis, and propose an alternative analytical framework that addresses the problems found in other models.

#### 1. DISCOURSE: THEORIES AND ANALYSES

What is discourse? How does discourse relate to social processes? How can discourse be deconstructed and analysed? These fundamental questions receive many different answers among discourse analysts<sup>1</sup>. Under the label of ‘discourse analysis’

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<sup>1</sup> For this type of reason, discourse analysis has occasionally been criticized for imprecision and excessive flexibility. While the variety of approaches that fall into this field is very stimulating, this



we can indeed find a vast number of standpoints and research programmes. The aims, assumptions and conceptual tools of different scholars vary widely, with important consequences for the outcomes of research. This section will therefore explore some of the aspects that unite and that divide the field of discourse analysis, and start identifying guidelines for the empirical application of this method. It will focus mainly – although not exclusively – on those approaches that have been more fruitful in the examination of media discourse.

### **1.1. A discursive turn**

Discourse has become an important focus of social research in the last few decades. In a variety of disciplines, so much interest has arisen for issues to do with language and meaning construction that we can speak of a discursive – or linguistic – turn. In the field of politics and international relations relevant research has focused on the nuclear arms debate (Chilton, 1985; 1988), the discourse of war and conflict (Schaeffner and Wenden, 1995), political metaphors (Chilton, 1987; 1996), anti-Semitism and nationalism (Wodak, 1989; 1991; Wodak et al., 1999), the European Union (Diez, 1997; 1998) and political communication (Nimmo and Sanders, 1981). The ‘postmodern’ approaches to discourse brought by Der Derian and Shapiro (1989; see also Shapiro, 1992; George, 1994; Fox and Miller, 1995) to those disciplines have been very influential. Closely related to discourse is the analysis of ‘frames’ in political text and talk (Gamson, 1992). In various shades, attention to language and discourse appeared also with regard to science (Aronowitz, 1988; Lemke, 1990; Martin and Veel, 1998), education (Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu et al., 1994; Wodak, 1996), and psychology (Potter and Whetherell, 1987; Hollway, 1989). Other domains that have been studied with a discursive orientation include economics, business and organizational communication (Torfing, 1991; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Boden, 1994), medical discourse (Fisher and Todd, 1986; Fisher, 1995; Wodak, 1996) and judicial language (Wodak, 1984; Lakoff, 1990; Shuy, 1992).

Discourse analysis has also made an important impact on the study of

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should not be synonymous of permissiveness or lack of rigour. A clear and accurate use of concepts and theoretical views is evidently required. I will attempt to make a contribution in this direction.

environmental politics. Three studies are particularly valuable. Inspired by Foucault's (1979; 1980; 1983) poststructuralism, as well as by 'reflectivist' approaches to international relations (Wendt, 1992; Dessler, 1989), Litfin (1994) produced an analysis of the formation and operation of the international regime on ozone on the basis of the discursive practices of a variety of actors. She emphasizes the roles of interpretation and framing on shaping processes of international policy-making. Looking at a set of environmental issues characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, complexity or polarization, including global warming, Roe (1994) proposes narrative analysis as a method for identification of the stories that settle the assumptions for deciding or choosing one alternative. Roe has drawn on literary theory, especially Rifaterre (1990), as well as on policy analysis literature that has focused attention on stories and narratives. Hajer's (1995) influential study of policy-making on acid rain in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands pursued a discourse-analytical approach inspired by Foucault (1976, 1979) on the one hand, and by Billig (1987), Davies and Harré (1990; Harré, 1993) on the other. The main goal in Hajer's work is to understand how a paradigm of ecological modernization, advancing the idea that environmental protection and economic growth are compatible, became dominant, and how it shaped policy-making in the Netherlands and, in a smaller degree, in the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>. As mentioned in chapter one, other discursive approaches to the environment include Myerson and Rydin (1996), Harré et al. (1999) and Dryzek (1997), as well as Muir and Veenendall (1996) and a rhetoric-oriented volume by Herndl and Brown (1996), both focusing on policy case studies.

If we take the terms discourse and language in their wide sense, we find a vast related research in the field of media studies. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies produced significant interpretive work on media's representations of social issues (Hall et al., 1980). Amongst some of the earliest more applied literature, Burgess (1985) looked at urban riots from a Barthes-inspired semiotic perspective. In the field of semiotics, interesting analyses were also originated by Hartley (1982), Hodge and Kress (1988) and Kress and van Leeuwen (1990). Fowler (1991) examined linguistic aspects of news language, such as transitivity in

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<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere (Carvalho, 1999a) I have examined in more detail the theo-methodological implications of Hajer's, Litfin's and Roe's research.

syntax, lexical structure, modality and speech acts. Using the term 'frame' rather than 'discourse', a number of studies (e.g. Fisher, 1996; Entman, 1991; 1993; Trumbo, 1996) are nonetheless concerned with the means of production of meaning in the media and ought to be mentioned here. The most systematic discourse-analytical frameworks of the media so far have been suggested by van Dijk (1988a; 1988b; 1991) and by Fairclough (1995b). Writing from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, discussed below, these scholars bring together a range of intellectual traditions and propose novel forms of examining news discourse.

## **1.2. Discourses on discourse**

Instead of a homogeneous and unitary domain, we find a great deal of diversity within discourse studies. Discourse analysis is, in fact, a wide umbrella under which we find a range of forms of study of language use. Thus, for instance, conversation analysis looks at the interaction between participants and how they perform social acts in (oral) discourse, rhetorical analysis focus on persuasion, and argumentation deals with the justification or refutation of standpoints<sup>3</sup>. What this variety of approaches share is a rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world and a conviction of the central importance of discourse in constructing social life (Gill, 2000: 172). Hence, the research programme of discourse analysis goes past the mere description, or surface-level analysis, and into questioning the role of discourse in the production or transformation of social representations of reality, as well as social relations.

The intellectual context of discourse analysis is multifaceted as each approach to discourse analysis follows different schools of thought and reconstitutes certain intellectual traditions in diverse fashions. An important strand of theory behind some forms of analysis is structuralism (Saussure, 1917; Greimas, 1966). Building on the idea that meaning is constructed in texts by the means of certain structures, such as signs, narratives or myths, structuralists aim to uncover these underlying structures in

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<sup>3</sup> For introductions to varieties of discourse analysis see van Dijk (1985; 1997a; 1997b).

order to reveal hidden issues. Poststructuralism, as illustrated by Foucault's work (1972), rejected the possibility of (universal) structures underlying social phenomena, and was another important influence in studies of discourse. Meaning is not seen as fixed but shifting and contestable. In this vein, anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist postmodern insights brought by philosophers like Derrida (1981), Lyotard (1984), and Rorty (1980) have been taken up by some discourse scholars in the last decade. Interpretations of Marxism brought by Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1971) also contributed with important ideas to the study of discourse. Finally, some strands of discourse analysis draw on sociolinguistics (Labov, 1972; Halliday, 1978; 1985) and on critical linguistics (Fowler et al., 1979).

The heterogeneous character of discourse studies is also noticeable in the very understanding of discourse, which is far from consensual. Sometimes the terms 'discourse' and 'language' are used interchangeably. Often, however, the notion of discourse is stretched beyond the limits of verbal communication to include social, political and other conditions. This raises the issue of the limits of the text, or, in other words, the distinction between text and context. Fairclough (1995b: 56) maintains that a 'discourse is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view'. In partial intersection with Fairclough, van Dijk (1997c: 2) claims that the concept of discourse entails 'three main dimensions: (a) *language use*, (b) the *communication of beliefs* (cognition), and (c) *interaction* in social situations.'

Foucault (1972) viewed discourses as bodies of ideas and concepts that claim to produce knowledge about the world. Similarly, Hajer defines discourse as a...

... specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities. (1995: 44)<sup>4</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe's theorization (1985; 1987) is an interesting contribution to this discussion and can help us rethink the concept of discourse. Laclau and Mouffe propose a broad definition of discourse: a 'systematic set of relations' of meaning

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<sup>4</sup> Acknowledging the common difficulty of operationalizing discourse theory, Hajer puts forth the notion of story-line as a 'middle range concept'. 'A story-line ... is a generative sort of narrative that allows

(1987: 82). They view discourse as the totality of the linguistic and the non-linguistic, and argue that all objects and practices are discursive. For things and activities to be meaningful, they must be part of particular discourses. This does not mean that everything is linguistic, but that for things and activities to be intelligible they must exist as part of a wider framework of meaning (Howarth, 1995: 119; see Torfing, 1999 for a detailed discussion). Instead of looking at specific texts, these authors and their followers engage in discussions of whole political projects (e.g. Torfing, 1991 on the modern welfare state) with the aim of showing the contingent nature of social formations, i.e. that social identities are always constituted as one amongst multiple possibilities.

For Laclau and Mouffe the limits of the discursive are not questionable, since everything is discursive: linguistic practices, social realities and even nature. Let us take nature as an example. These scholars do not argue against its physical existence, which is of course external to discourse. But human perception of nature is always discourse-based. Nature's elements are viewed within a certain classificatory system (e.g. minerals, plants, animals) and a certain value-system which are essentially a human construct setting relations of meaning.

Despite being accurate in several respects, Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualization of discourse is in my view too stretched. It runs the risk of being confused with the notion of culture (as opposed to nature; everything that results from human interaction). Operationalization of such a notion of discourse for research purposes is also difficult. As an alternative, I propose the notion of discourse as a set of relations of meaning that is sustained and transformed by textual practices. While subscribing to the idea of discourse as relations of meaning, in line with Laclau and Mouffe, I contend that meaning is produced through texts, and that textual practice is an inherent part of the concept of discourse. It is essentially through verbal language that meanings are constructed, but other codes of communication such as iconic ones also perform the same function. Thus, the notion of text refers to the actual expression of any form of communication. What is distinct about discourse, and legitimates the existence of a

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actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena.' (1995: 56)

field of discourse theory and analysis, is that it is grounded in concrete practices of creation and circulation of texts.

To finalize, we can say that discourse is, on the one hand, a certain understanding or view of an object and of its relation with other objects. This is necessarily a temporary construction since it can be re-interpreted and changed at any time. Let us use an example: sustainable development is a discourse on environment, and on the relations between environment and economics. It is a specific construction of such objects. On the other hand, discourse exists in and through concrete texts. In the case of sustainable development, one of the texts that contributed the most for its conception and promotion was *Our Common Future*, by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987)<sup>5</sup>.

Analysts differ considerably in their conceptualisation of context<sup>6</sup>. van Dijk draws a fundamental line between text and context by viewing the latter as the ‘characteristics of the social situation or the communicative event that may systematically influence text or talk’ (1997c: 3). However, he considers the study of context as an integral part of discourse analysis. The distinction between text and context in Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985; 1987) theorization, if it existed, would be intra-discursive and not extra-discursive. In other words, the context is the (textually produced) discourse that precedes a new discursive construction. This is a helpful idea. In works on the environment, Litfin (1994) puts context outside discursive practices, while Hajer (1995) finds no pre-given context against which discourse would operate. The social context, the system of rules and relations, is itself constantly remade by discourse. Those rules and relations are taken up in discursive interaction and ‘produced, reproduced and transformed’ thereby. Context will be approached in a similar way in this thesis. Any backgrounds to texts that may help explain or understand them are themselves the subject of discursive configuration and therefore not extra-discursive and fixed. Obviously, physical realities like the environment are exogenous to discourse. What matters, though, are the discursive constructions of those realities.

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<sup>5</sup> See Dryzek (1997).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of context see Duranti and Goodwin (1992).

### 1.3. Theorizing discourse

What are the roles of discourse in society? What is the relation between discourse, and power and ideology? How do discourse studies view social agency? Below, we will discuss some of the main tenets of theories of discourse that provide answers to these and other questions<sup>7</sup>. Discourse analysis holds that discourse is both constitutive of social realities and shaped by them. Society, culture and the polity are ‘created’ and reproduced in/through language use. While Foucault (1972: 49) viewed discourses as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that it is the articulatory practices in discourse that create social reality. Articulation is defined as ‘any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice’ (1985: 105).

Drawing on Halliday’s (1978; 1985) systemic-functional theory of language, Fairclough (1995b) points to two main functions of the text – ideational and interpersonal. These functions relate respectively to the role of the text in generating representations of the world (systems of knowledge and belief) and in constituting relations and identities (social relationships and power issues). What this suggests is that not only are social issues constructed in/by discourse, but so is the subject. People’s identities, the positions they occupy and the system of relations they have with others are also discursively generated. In consonance with the post-structuralist views of Foucault and Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe regard the subject as discursively constituted and argue ‘against the classical notion of the subject as a substantial, essential entity, given in advance’ of social processes (Žižek, 1990: 250).

Power is a central notion in discourse studies. It is generally accepted that relations of power and control are produced and transformed in linguistic and other symbolic exchanges. Inversely, the shaping of discourse is a high stake in power struggles (cf. Lukes, 1974). Access to specific arenas of discourse, such as those of politics, the media or science, is itself a power resource (van Dijk, 1996; Fairclough, 1989). Concerning the discursive sphere of the media, attention has been given to the

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<sup>7</sup> See Macdonell (1986) and Torfing (1999) for a more detailed discussion of some of the theories of discourse.

reproduction of definitions of the powerful (Hall et al., 1978; van Dijk, 1991). Simplistic readings of the link between power and discourse and ‘zero-sum formulations of hegemony’ (Allan, 1999: 105) should however be avoided as there are never situations of total power or total domination (‘the *naturalization* of any truth-claim is always a matter of degree’: *ibid.*). Although, as suggested in previous chapters, the exercise of power encompasses tensions and episodes of contestation and resistance, most work in discourse analysis has been centred on the reproduction of power relations. We need a focus on discursive aspects of transformations of power relations (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 273). Another important tenet of discourse theory is that discursive practices are invested with ideologies and contribute to either reinforcing them or challenging them (van Dijk, 1998b, 1998c; de Beaugrande, 1999).

The role of the agent is another crucial and contentious issue in discourse analysis. In some studies the agent seems to disappear under constraining discursive structures (Foucault, 1971). Other works bring back the agent in different degrees (Foucault, 1976). Drawing on Giddens (1979; 1984), both Litfin (1994) and Hajer (1995) point to the duality of (discourse) structures, their constraining and enabling power. The (potential) opposition of agents and structures in discourse analysis may therefore be overcome with an interactive understanding of these two elements. We can say that discourse is a constraining structure insofar as it sets limits for the ways the world can be thought and for action upon it. Simultaneously, such structure allows agents to intervene directly on social reality insofar as it establishes a common ground, upon which new ‘discursive buildings’ can be erected. This means, then, that structures can be modified by agents, and that similarly they depend on agents to be reproduced.

#### **1.4. Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the single most authoritative current regarding the study of media discourse and will therefore deserve detailed consideration<sup>8</sup>. van Dijk (e.g. 1988a; 1988b; 1991; 1993a), Fairclough (e.g. 1995b; 1998) and Wodak (e.g.

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<sup>8</sup> For reviews of CDA see van Dijk (1993b; 1998a), Fairclough, (1995a), Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard (1996), and Fairclough and Wodak (1997).



Wodak, 1996; Wodak et al., 1999) are the most prominent representatives of this branch of discourse analysis, with media discourse having been thoroughly examined by the first two.

CDA has been developed by a set of scholars that have in common a distinctive concern with the relation between texts and social or cultural processes, as well as with the relation between the analysis and the practices analysed. Western Marxism, as represented by Gramsci (1971), Althusser (1971) and the Frankfurt school, is an important backdrop of CDA. CDA adjoins a certain epistemology of critique brought by 'critical social theory'<sup>9</sup> with a thorough consideration of the means of linguistic construction of sense, and critical linguistics is certainly a crucial influence in the field. Fowler (1991<sup>10</sup>) was one of the pioneers of the 'critical' approach to language in the news. Attempting to go beyond a traditionally 'descriptive' discipline of linguistics he brought in issues of power and ideology to the analysis of news reports.

Discourse is viewed as a type of social practice. Each discursive event is dialectically tied to society. CDA often involves a search for aspects or dimensions of reality that are obscured by an apparently natural and transparent use of language. The researcher then tends to be alert to power relations being exercised through discourse and aims to overcome the normal opacity of social practices (Fairclough, 1995b: 54). S/he wants to expose the causes and consequences of specific discourses and to denounce the social, cultural or political wrongs which they sustain. Political commitment was expressed by Fairclough (1992a) when he proposed Critical Language Study as a resource to enhance awareness of power implications of language. Such consciousness would be an important dimension of citizenship and a precondition of social emancipation (ibid.: 10).

Critical discourse analysis is not normatively neutral. It is often on the side of the oppressed, the ostracized or stigmatised, or aims to counter wider processes of domination and control (e.g., Fairclough's work on New Labour, 2000b, or on capitalism, 2000a). Recognizing that social inequality is constituted, reproduced and legitimated discourse, researchers have produced analysis of ethnocentrism and racism

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<sup>9</sup> As noted by van Dijk (1998a) CDA has counterparts in 'critical' developments in the social sciences (Birnbaum, 1971; Hymes, 1972; Calhoun, 1995; Singh, 1996; Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Earlier, Fowler et al. (1979) had already set out the 'critical linguistics model'.

as represented in conversation, news reports, parliamentary debates, corporate discourse and scholarly text and talk (van Dijk, 1987; 1991; 1993a; Martin Rojo and van Dijk, 1997), and the expression of anti-semitic and nationalist views in a variety of discourse genres, from press reports to TV talk shows and political discourse (see e.g. Wodak, 1991; 1996; Wodak et al., 1999; van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999).

CDA is then a reflexive and engaged form of social theory, which is wary of its potential implications for social and political formations (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). Toolan (1997: 86) argues that there is 'not merely the need but the possibility of intervention, that is to say, prescription'. CDA scholars have already originated some important changes with regard to education, gender discrimination, medical discourse, etc (see Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 280). Recently, Fairclough (2001) has argued that significant changes took place in the 1990s with regard to discourse and power. With the acceleration of globalizing tendencies, 'the primary terrain of domination is now global rather than national' (2001: 203). CDA scholars (also Fairclough, 2000a; 2000b; Language and New Capitalism website and discussion group), with their 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Scannell, 1998), have been quick in exposing the new problems. Therefore, in the last ten years, discourse studies have gained even more relevance as the importance of language grew in social and political processes (see Fairclough, 2000b; 2001).

We now move to the specific analytical programme(s) of CDA. What do critical analysts look for in the analysis of texts? How do they relate texts to extra-textual issues? I will focus separately on the three main dimensions of CDA: textual analysis, analysis of the processes of production and consumption of texts, and analysis of discursive contexts.

#### **a) The analysis of texts**

Teun van Dijk is one of the leading scholars in the area of discourse studies. His approach (e.g. 1988a; 1988b) to media discourse analysis is interdisciplinary and rooted mainly in linguistics, psychology and artificial intelligence. The most original aspect of his framework is possibly the use of analytical tools from psychology to examine the cognitive processes involved in news production and decoding.

van Dijk's (1988b) work is a comprehensive formulation of discourse analysis that entails three crucial elements: production, text, reception. Analytically and 'procedurally' van Dijk's work is undeniably important since he advances a framework that is very structured and detailed. His proposal is, essentially, to focus on the fundamental theme structures of each text, on the basis of a reduction of the information present in each text to central semantic aspects. Because identifying such structures is such an important part of van Dijk's model, I would designate it as 'cognitive-structural' (instead of 'socio-cognitive' as it is often called).

The centrepiece of van Dijk's (1988b) framework is the notion of macrostructure<sup>11</sup> (cf. Lemke's 1990 'thematic patterns'). A text's macrostructure is its thematic organization: the topics that compose it and the hierarchical relationship between them in the text (the prefix 'macro' refers to the overall level of description of a text, as opposed to the 'micro' level of individual words and sentences).

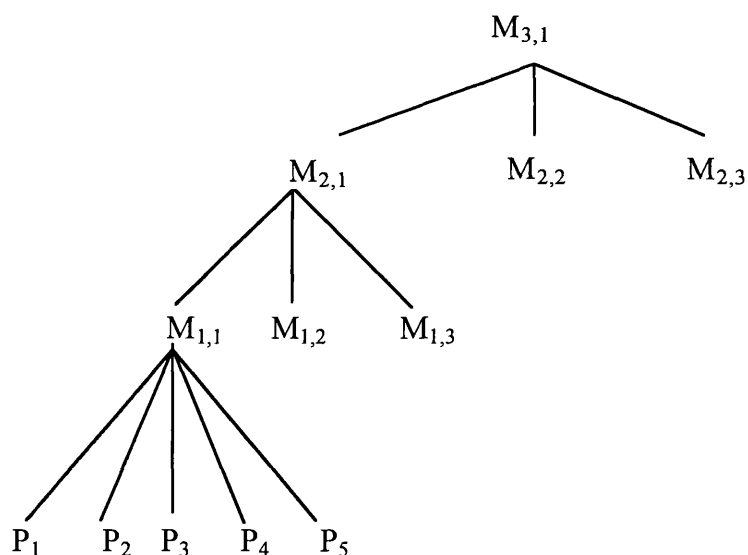


Fig. 1. van Dijk's (1988b: 33) schematic representation of the semantic macrostructure of a text.

- M – Macroproposition
- P – Proposition

Besides macrostructures, van Dijk refers to another type of structure of the text: schematas. Schematas are typical forms of organization of different types of text (e.g.

summary, episode, consequences, verbal reactions and comment for news story). We could say that while macrostructures consist in the overall content of the text, schematas or ‘superstructures’ consist in the overall form of the text<sup>12</sup>.

After the overall deconstruction of the text, van Dijk (1998b) turns to the micro (or local) level of propositions, their sequence and local coherence (conditional or functional relations between sentences or facts). As for the macro-level, van Dijk’s logic of analysis is internal to the text. What types of sentence organization achieve certain effects in the text? What relations of semantic dependence are there in the text? Such are the types of questions he is trying to answer. Discourse style and rhetoric are also part of van Dijk’s framework of analysis<sup>13</sup>. I will explain below the ‘critical’ dimension of this type of discourse analysis.

A focus on intertextuality in the media is the most distinctive trait of Norman Fairclough’s (1995b) critical discourse analysis. Halliday’s (1978; 1985) systemic-functional grammar and critical linguistics (Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979) are important influences in Fairclough’s work, as are disciplines like sociolinguistics, conversation analysis and semiotics. His framework is therefore an eclectic, yet creative, approach to the analysis of language in use in the media. Fairclough (1995b) aptly identifies three dimensions of communicative events – text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice, as represented in figure 2. With this conception, Fairclough looks at the text in its concrete social and cultural insertion.

The text is a central focus point of Fairclough’s discourse analysis. He is an open proselytiser of textual analysis and proposes an extended form of linguistic analysis including analysis of vocabulary and semantics, the grammar of sentences and smaller units, sound and writing systems, textual organization above the sentence, and aspects like the organization of turn-taking in interviews or the overall structure of a

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<sup>11</sup> *Macrostructures* is indeed the title of one of van Dijk’s books (1980).

<sup>12</sup> Bell (1991; 1998) has proposed frameworks of discourse structural analysis that are similar to van Dijk’s. The emphasis is also on semantics and topics, as well as on the ‘schematic’ structure.

<sup>13</sup> van Dijk associates rhetoric in news discourse to means used in news discourse to suggest factuality, truthfulness or credibility.

newspaper article (1995b: 57). Main and subordinate clauses, and local and global coherence are some of the other aspects he explores.

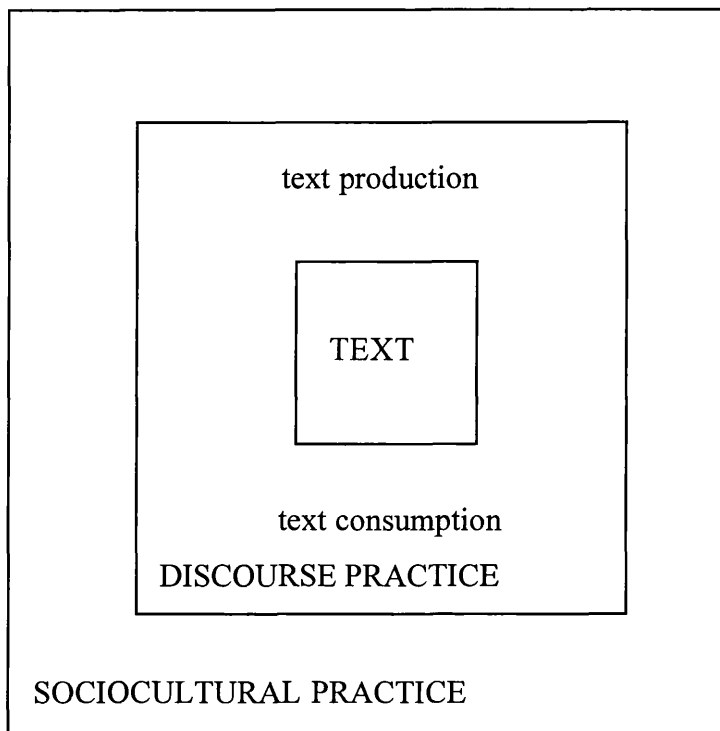


Fig. 2. Fairclough's (1995b: 59) framework for discourse analysis of a communicative event.

Concerning the representational dimension of texts (cf. 'presentational meaning', Lemke, 1998), one of the issues that Fairclough (1995b) is interested in is highlight in media discourse: is an issue foregrounded, backgrounded, presupposed or simply absent? This is a crucial and challenging aspect for, as Gill (2000: 180) remarks, in order to be sensitive to silences, the analyst must have 'a significant awareness of the social, political and cultural trends and contexts to which ... texts refer.' Fairclough (1995b; 1998) also gives attention to the representation of agency in media texts and its specific linguistic realizations. This can have important ideological implications, as the responsibility of certain agents can be omitted by the use of nominalizations, i.e. the transformation of actions or processes into noun-like terms (nominals) (see also Fairclough, 2000).

With regard to the discursive construction of identities and relationships, Fairclough focuses on the social and personal characterizations of social actors and the kind of relationships that are set up between them (cf. 'orientational meaning', Lemke, 1998).

In his work on the media, Fairclough (1995b) has especially referred to relationships between media staff (journalists, presenters) and audiences; between other participants in media discourse (say politicians or experts) and audiences; between media staff and these other ‘voices’. Analysis of these issues may cover oral delivery, body movement, interactional control features, conversationalization, vocabulary, mood, modality, etc<sup>14</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, intertextuality is at the core of Fairclough’s (1995b) analysis and makes a bridge between textual and (con)textual issues (further discussed below). The concept was introduced by the French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late sixties (e.g. Kristeva, 1980; cf. Barthes, 1975; 1977 and Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, 1981). Kristeva maintained that all signifying systems – say a poem, a painting, or a novel – are transformations of earlier signifying systems. A text is always related to other texts which it absorbs and transforms. Kristeva wanted to defy the notion of text as a self-sufficient, hermetic, totality, and the idea of ‘influences’ of the author.

While in van Dijk’s framework, the text seemed to exist as an independent totality (see Fairclough, 1995b: 30), in Fairclough’s work interconnections and cross-inseminations of texts are heeded at a variety of levels – representations of reality, style and genre, to mention just a few. Intertextuality can run across two axes: the axis of choice and the axis of chain relations. The first one refers to the selection of genres, discourses, modes and voices from what are socially available. The second concerns the way the original text is transformed and embedded in subsequent texts (1995b: 77)<sup>15</sup>. The question that Fairclough asks is: what genres, voices and discourses are drawn upon and how are they articulated together to form a text? Looking at direct and indirect speech, generic structure or ‘staging’, narrative analysis, conjunctions, and collocations are some of the forms of analysis of intertextuality.

We have thus seen that van Dijk and Fairclough make a rich cross-insemination of linguistic analysis and other forms of deconstruction of texts, a characteristic also present in other approaches to CDA. Thus, Wodak and colleagues (1999; Wodak et al.,

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<sup>14</sup> Fairclough looks at a variety of media, from television to radio and press, so some of these aspects of communication are not relevant for all the media (the first three in the list do not make sense in the case of the press, for instance).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Saussure’s (1917) syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations.

1999) at the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis have developed an alternative method of CDA combining linguistics with history, and often other disciplines for further triangulation. At the textual level, these scholars examine content, strategies and means of (linguistic) realization with a variety of methods, from rhetoric to linguistics. However, with the exception of Menz's (1989) brief work, Wodak and colleagues have made no systematic analyses of media discourse, focusing instead on political and the public's discourses. Their work is nonetheless very insightful and will be further discussed later on in this chapter.

### **b) Processes of production and consumption**

As mentioned before, CDA analysts claim to go beyond texts and look at the processes and conditions of their creation and consumption. Fairclough (1995b) designates what goes on at the level of production and consumption of texts as discourse practice. Intertextuality is the main focus – how do people draw upon other texts while producing or interpreting texts? Fairclough's main aim here is to identify the various discourses and genres which are articulated together in the text. Comparing a newspaper article with the report and press releases that were used as sources by the journalist may be one of the activities involved. In van Dijk's (1988b) theorization, the mind occupies a central place. Analysis of the production and reception of news texts is here centred on cognitive processes and therefore at the level of the journalist and reader. van Dijk suggests that the mental processing of press releases or policy documents by the news professional is influenced by the textual traits described above, such as the text's structure. Symmetrically, a reader's understanding of a news report hinges on, for instance, what the journalist chooses to put in the headline and the rhetorical devices s/he uses. Hence, certain racist views, for instance, could be reinforced by newsmakers by organizing the account of an inter-racial confrontation in a particular way. Although an important contribution to the cognitive psychology of newsmaking and interpreting, this might be an over-individualistic framework.

Researchers (van Dijk, 1988b; Bell, 1998; see also Richardson, 1998; Corner et al., 1990; Wodak, 1996) have also probed into the relation between texts and their

consumption. van Dijk (1988b) proposes an analysis symmetrically equivalent to that of text production. Now it is the mind of the reader/listener that is at the core of the analysis. van Dijk wants to know how discourse structures such as headlines and lexical choices influence mental representations. Unlike Hall (1980), van Dijk does not account for cases of interpretive resistance and variations in decoding amongst readers/public (see Boyd-Barrett's critique, 1994: 29-30). Notwithstanding the 'determinacy' of the text (Corner, 1991), there is a polysemic potential that is disregarded (also by Bell, 1998).

### **c) Contexts**

If we compare Fairclough with van Dijk we notice that the three-dimensional view of discourse analysis advocated by the former – analysis of context (sociocultural practice), analysis of processes of text production and interpretation (discourse practice), analysis of text (1995b: 211), corresponding to micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis – partially overlaps with the framework of the latter. The difference is that Fairclough integrates the sociocultural context in his conceptualization in a more explicit way than van Dijk. Fairclough discriminates three levels within 'sociocultural practice': situational context, institutional context, socio-cultural context (1995b). The analytical goal here is twofold: on the one hand, to identify the social conditions on the basis of the text, including economic and political aspects; on the other hand, to reflect on the potential or likely effects of the text. Fairclough therefore effectively constitutes discourse analysis as a link between text and context.

While discourse practice and sociocultural practice are related to communicative events, there is another dimension of analysis in Fairclough's framework: the analysis of the order of discourse (1989; 1992b; 1995b; 1998). Inspired by Foucault (1984), the concept of 'order of discourse', refers in Fairclough to 'a structured configuration of genres and discourses ... associated with a given social domain – for example, the order of discourse of a school' (1998: 145). In the case of the media order of discourse, Fairclough's research agenda can be summarized in the two following questions: how unitary, or how variable, are media discursive practices? and how stable, or changeable, are they? (1995b: 65) He points to a wide range of discourses and genres articulated in



the media, for instance the public and private orders of discourse, composing a quite heterogeneous image. Also, he demonstrates that the media order of discourse is a case of fluid and unstable relationships between institutions. Across Fairclough's work there is a more or less implicit intent to assess media texts as barometers of cultural change (1995b: 60), such as the trends towards conversationalization and marketization, on the one hand, and as stimulus to change, on the other.

Wodak et al. (1999; see also Wodak, 1996: 20-2) have a wide conception of context: linguistic co-text, extra-linguistic social variables and institutional settings, and intertextual aspects. Turning the study of intertextuality more chronological, Wodak and associates (Wodak et al., 1999; van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999) integrate historical background in their discourse analyses, including the original sources which texts draw on. In a study of the notices sent by Austrian authorities to immigrants rejecting family reunion applications, for instance, van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) refer to the laws which apparently justified those decisions. The types of transformation or recontextualization (Bernstein, 1996) that texts undergo are the object of attention.

While being a fertile and stimulating field, CDA is not universally or entirely applauded. Amongst its critics, some have claimed that it is flawed or ideologically committed (Tyrwhitt-Drake, 1999)<sup>16</sup>, while others have suggested that its methodological diversity should be overcome (Toolan, 1997). Widdowson (1995; 1998; see also Schegloff, 1997) and Stubbs (1997) have accused CDA of doing interpretation, not analysis, to which Fairclough (1996; also Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) has contended that the kind of interpretive work that CDA makes is closer to explanation than subjective understanding. Most of these criticisms do not diminish the theoretical and analytical value of CDA. Methodological pluralism, for instance, can be seen as a strength not a weakness, and ideological commitment, as discussed above, is an explicit agenda of CDA and does not equal analytical distortion.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Flowerdew, 1999 for a response; Widdowson, 1995; for a reply see Fairclough, 1996 and for a refutation Widdowson, 1996.

## 1.5. Frame analysis

Together with critical discourse analysis, frame analysis and narrative analysis are amongst the most influential and widespread approaches to analysis of media texts. Because they examine language in use and the ways meaning is constructed, I see the latter two as forms of analysis of discourse (for a similar perspective see Donati, 1992; Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998). Having recently been employed in studies of the media coverage of climate change (Trumbo, 1996; McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Meisner, 2000; Shanahan, 2000) in the US, where they are most popular, there is good reason to discuss these strands of analysis in this thesis.

### a) The concept of frame

Media studies have long embraced the notion of frame. This concept appeared in Tuchman's (1978) classical work on media sociology, as well as in Gitlin's (1980) analysis of the news coverage of Students for a Democratic Society, a leftist student movement in the USA. The concept of 'frame' has also been employed by a variety of other authors with quite different meanings, both inside and outside the media field, as illustrated in reviews by Putnam and Holmer (1992), Fisher (1997) and Scheufele (1999). Below, I will explore the various significations attached to the notion of frame, in order to clarify its use. Further on, I will focus on the analysis of frames in discourse, and re-assess the advantages and potential fragilities of the concept.

We should distinguish three main ways of looking at frame, within media studies and beyond. The first one emphasizes perception and views frames as 'schemas' or 'scripts'. In this sense, frames are viewed as mental cognitive structures that people use to make sense of the world and to organize information<sup>17</sup>. Studies of cognitive psychology (Neisser, 1976; Jackendoff, 1983; Fiske and Taylor, 1991) and of artificial intelligence (Minsky, 1981) have shown that objects or events are never perceived by working from their individual component parts to the whole, but by assigning an

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<sup>17</sup> Relatedly, Goffman (1974) referred to frames as interpretation grids or communicational and interactional patterns.

overall, familiar, structure to objects or events. For example, if you first see a person running and then one body lying on the ground by a knife, this immediately brings up a whole homicidal plot, where the first person is the murderer. People resort to frames or schemas that provide a recognizable meaning to help the individual make sense of a complex reality. Scattered information is grouped under a subsuming category. Schemas are said to help people simplify reality, to guide processing new information, to fill in missing details, and to remember schema-relevant facts (Manstead and Hewstone: 489-90). Graber (1988) and Gamson (1992), for instance, used the term frame in this sense with regard to media audiences and political issues.

The second conception of frame is linked to the structuration of discourse. Gamson et al. define frame as ‘a central organizing principle that holds together and gives coherence and meaning to a diverse array of symbols’ (1992: 384). Here frames are viewed as structures present in discourse. A frame is, in this sense, an underlying idea that directs the construction of texts. Equally, frames can supposedly be identified and used by receivers for decoding such texts. Elsewhere, Gamson and Modigliani suggest that a frame is ‘a central organizing idea ... for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue’ (1989: 3). Armed with this concept these authors have analysed media discourse on nuclear matters and identified the various core images that the media use to represent the issue (as detailed below). Similarly, researchers have suggested that a ‘conflict frame’ can often be found in the news (e.g. Reese and Buckalew, 1995). Some scholars even argue that the ‘conflict’, ‘human interest’, ‘economic consequences’, ‘morality’ and ‘responsibility’ frames ‘largely account for all the frames that have been found in the news’ (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000: 95; see also Neuman et al., 1992). Beyond the media field, Snow and Benford (1988, 1992; Benford, 1993) have given frame analysis a stronger political direction by employing the concept of frame to analyse the forms of conceptualization of issues by social movements<sup>18</sup>.

A related, albeit somewhat distinct, view of frames puts the emphasis on perspective. Litfin (1994) employs the term frame in this sense pointing to the

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<sup>18</sup>Yet these authors employ the concept of frame with other meanings as well. See also Gamson (1995).

dimensions of a problem that are considered or highlighted. The definition advanced by Entman (1993; see also 1991) builds also, it seems, on the notion of perspective<sup>19</sup>.

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 55)

While in the first sense frames exist at the mental level, in the second form they occur mainly at the textual level. Here framing essentially concerns the discursive construction of reality, although this is related with the ways we perceive situations or events. Language is the main means for defining reality and allows for the (social) sharing of (cognitive) frames.

A third sense of the term frame refers to 'higher level' cultural constructs. Frames are in this sense shared forms of understanding the world. They can be equated to culture – specific 'social representations' to which Moscovici (1984) made an important contribution. In this line, Fisher (1997) advances the concept of 'cultural frames' as 'socio-culturally and cognitively generated patterns which help people to understand their world by shaping other forms of deep structural discourse' (parag. 5.1). In a study on the popular press coverage of military gender and sexuality policies in the US and UK (1996), she found the following frames: 'some institutions/tasks are not for everybody', 'everyone deserves an equal chance', 'women/gays are important actors in society', and 'militarism harms society'.

I would note that these three levels of frames are profoundly interconnected. Frame-type mental structures are acquired in the process of socialization and their transmission occurs through discursive practices. In socialization, cultural frames are passed on. On the other hand, cultural frames can only exist in and through discourse. It is there that they are reproduced or challenged. The links and interdependencies are obvious (see discussion by Entman, 1993). We can of course note that the realm of the mind and the realm of discourse are ontologically different. This would distinguish the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. with Gitlin (1980): 'Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.' (p. 7)

first order of frames mentioned above from the latter two. The first one would exist in the brains of individuals, the last two in discourse. Nevertheless, while ontologically diverse these realms are not functionally separated<sup>20</sup>. I will not aim at examining the mental level and the processes that occur there, i.e. I will not intend to explain, for example, how people *mentally* relate new data on climate change to existing knowledge or worldviews. This is obviously a fundamental level since it is in people's minds and not in texts that agency originates, which includes the production of texts themselves. However, the mental realm is not the object of this thesis so I will make no claims in relation to it.

Instead of looking at the mind of the policy-maker or the activist as a primary ontological place, discourse analysis focuses on texts and practices where cognitive activity takes concrete shape (Hendry, 1998: 13). Ideas are produced, reproduced and transformed in discourse, as argued by Hajer (1995). Ideas are thus not to be conceived as entities with an autonomous existence in the present work; nor will they be treated as beliefs (as aptly examined by Diez, 1998, that would involve several epistemological and methodological problems). Hence, the study of frames is here rooted in the discursive universe (cf. Tannen, 1993).

## **b) Analysing frames in discourse**

Of the three uses of the concept of frame it is therefore the second one that is the most relevant for this thesis, and the one that we will focus on<sup>21</sup>. In their analysis of press representations of nuclear power, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) tried to identify the interpretive frames underlying discourse. They observed the following frames: 'progress', 'soft paths', 'public accountability', 'not cost effective', 'runaway', 'energy independence', and 'devil's bargain'. They called these frames 'media packages' in the sense that they would work as overall interpretive principles in relation to the issue. Each of these packages is supposed to be a distinct way of understanding nuclear energy and to mirror the main idea of the specific media texts.

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<sup>20</sup> Iyengar (1987) and Price et al. (1997), for example, have attempted to study the relation between news – textual – frames and mental processing, offering a link between the first and second type of frames.

<sup>21</sup> Yet, van Dijk (e.g. 1988b: 103, 105), a well-known *discourse analyst*, employs the term frame in the first sense (to refer to cognitive structures).

Based on Entman's (1993) definition presented above, Trumbo (1996) identified four frames in the US news coverage of climate change between 1985-1995 – 'analysis of problems', 'cause diagnosis', 'value judgements', and 'solutions' – which he associated to different social actors (scientists, policy-makers and interest groups) (see also Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

How useful is the concept of frame for discourse analysis? The notion of frame has the advantage of showing general differences in the understanding and/or formulation of issues. One of its downsides is excessive flexibility. Let us take the example of 'sustainable development'. Sustainable development has sometimes been called a masterframe (Eder, 1996<sup>22</sup>) or simply a frame (Jachtenfuchs, 1996<sup>23</sup>). We could ask how 'ecological modernization' (Hajer, 1995) relates to this frame. Ecological modernization is no doubt intrinsically connected (subsumed?) to sustainable development, but it is also itself a frame for analysis and action. On the other hand, 'precautionary action' in environmental issues is pointed by Hajer as one of the dimensions of ecological modernization while Litfin implies that precautionary action was a frame for policy-making on ozone. Should these frames be seen hierarchically? But then how do such frames relate to the idea of 'progress', for example?

As noted by Gamson et al. (1992) the level of abstraction implied by the notion of frame can vary a lot. Paraphrasing these authors, we can refer to the framing of specific events or stories – for instance, the accident at Three Mile Island. Or, we can speak of issue-frames – say nuclear power – in which events like the Three Mile Island accident appear. Or, we can speak of even larger scale frames that transcend a single issue, such as a cost-benefit frame that can serve for analysing many issues (Gamson et al., 1992: 385). This may create difficulties for research, since different analysts may argue for divergent levels of abstraction. In sum, the concept of frame is useful to provide reconstructions of concrete texts but difficult to articulate in an abstract way in order to provide an image of the discourses on a certain issue or domain of reality.

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<sup>22</sup> Eder writes mainly about 'environmentalism' as a masterframe but also refers to sustainable development and its structuring effect as such (id.: 206-7; note 9).

<sup>23</sup> Focusing on the specific area of climate change, Jachtenfuchs (1996) has analysed the 'interpretative' and 'action frames' of the European Union concerning the greenhouse effect between 1988 and 1995. Viewing a frame as 'an analytical tool to grasp the cognitive structure of problem definitions which are the basis for action' (p. 3), he suggests that a frame of 'classical environmental policy' has been to a large extent replaced by a frame of 'sustainable development'.

Another problem with the concept of ‘frame’ is that it simplifies excessively the discursive construction of reality. By focusing on core ideas – themselves ambiguous at times – frame analysis constrains textual richness to rigid categories, leaving aside multiple resources and strategies of making meaning. Hence, Trumbo (1996), for instance, does not account for the detailed *forms of representation* of climate change under his ‘analysis of problems’ frame. In relation to an issue as complex as climate change many different aspects can meaningfully be included or excluded, emphasised or minimised. Moreover, it is questionable whether it makes sense drawing a fixed line between Trumbo’s different frames. The process of framing ‘problems’ is intricately connected to normative matters (or ‘value judgements’) and also has prescriptive, action- or ‘solution’-related connotations. Each one of Trumbo’s frames is therefore intricately tied to the others.

Despite these problems, the notion of framing has a great deal of analytical potential as Reese et al. (2001) have recently made clear in a comprehensive overview of the study of framing in media discourse. We will pursue this discussion further on in the chapter and attempt to find ways to productively use the insights of frame analysis while overcoming its disadvantages.

## **1.6. Narrative analysis**

The study of narratives has mostly been carried out in the field of literary studies, but other disciplines, like linguistics and anthropology, have also made important contributions to this approach. Amongst the main references are works by Propp (1968), Labov (1972), Barthes (1975; 1988), Todorov (1977) and (Lévi-Strauss, 1972). More recently, the concept of narrative has been imported into sociology and a variety of social sciences (e.g. Mumby, 1993)<sup>24</sup>. It has also gained many adepts in media sociology and related areas (Schudson, 1982; Fisher, 1985; Mander, 1987; Carey and Fritzler, 1989; Jacobs, 1996; Berger, 1997; McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Vincent, 2000; Robertson, 2001).

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<sup>24</sup> Mishler’s (1995) review of models of narrative analysis shows the diversity of current research on narratives.

## a) The definition

Let us start with the basics. What is a narrative? Narrative theorists, especially under the influence of French structuralists, maintain that a narrative is composed of two main elements – the story and the discourse<sup>25</sup> (or plot and presentation) (Culler, 1997: 87). A narrative would be a story ‘told’ by the means of discourse, the latter being the representation of the story<sup>26</sup>.

There are some defining characteristics involved in the concept of story. A key aspect of stories is the chronological sequence (Ricoeur, 1988; Labov, 1972). Events are ordered in a temporal sequence (which however does not have to be linear). Secondly, there must be some logical coherence in the story. Events must be bound together by some organizing principle. Thus, commonly they are presented in terms of a setting, complication and resolution (Aristotle, 1962). Finally, a story implies a change in situations through the unfolding of a sequence of events. The reversal, or change of fortunes, was a key aspect of Aristotelian comedies and tragedies. The present understanding of narratives does not require such a radical modification – from bad into good or vice-versa. What is essential is that the ‘after’ is different from the ‘before’, but not necessarily better nor worse. Structuralist theory has also established that a story is expected to have the following components: the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus the existents (characters, items of setting). (Chatman, 1995: 478). We can infer from this that not all texts are narratives<sup>27</sup>.

Some authors have used the concept of narrative in a more general way than what was described to refer to all the texts that involve the unfolding of an action or events<sup>28</sup>. There are also ‘strict forms of analysis’ and ‘more impressionistic’ ones (Gunter, 2000: 90).

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<sup>25</sup> This is yet another use of the term discourse, standing for means of expression, not to be confused with previous ones.

<sup>26</sup> As noted by Culler (1997: 86-7) what readers encounter is the discourse of a text (the plot is something readers infer from that text).

<sup>27</sup> Franzosi (1998), for example, distinguishes narrative from non-narrative texts. A narrative text may contain narrative clauses and non-narrative clauses.



## b) The analysis

What are the specific characteristics of narrative analysis? How does it proceed? One of the defining traits of narrative analysis is the attention to the text as a whole and to meaning as the result of a specific structure. Therefore, it refuses to fracture such a structure into smaller parts (for instance into themes).

The methodological procedures of narrative analysis often include looking in a text for the elements previously mentioned, namely characters, setting, action, outcome. In the analysis of characters Propp's (1968) categorization in types like the 'villain', the 'hero' and the 'helper' is often useful. Todorov (1977) maintained that all stories begin with an 'equilibrium' or balance of forces, are disrupted by some event or action, starting a chain of events, and close with a new 'equilibrium' or status quo. The study of narratives can gain from looking for this kind of sequence.

The emphasis in narrative analysis on in-depth examination of texts means that, in practice, only a very limited number of texts can be considered in any given research project. It contrasts starkly with those techniques that emphasize systematic and quantitative analysis, such as classical content analysis. Issues of validity, reliability and replicability, so crucial for some methodologies, are left out of narrative analysis (as of most forms of discourse analysis).

Some researchers have taken up narrative analysis in a less 'orthodoxical' manner than what has been described. In a study of the US press, McComas and Shanahan (1999), for example, have examined the themes of a large sample of news articles (with a content analysis), and then related the temporal distribution of such themes to higher level narrative cycles that may have been present in the media construction of climate change: beginning of the story (with emphasis on dramatic dangers and consequences); complication (with attention to controversy among scientists and costs); resolution (general decrease of attention to all themes). Here, the narrative is not examined at the level of the individual news text but at the meta-level of the whole set of articles (see also Roe, 1994; cf. Hajer's, 1995, concept of 'story-line'). Below, we will put the

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<sup>28</sup> van Dijk (1988b: 50) distinguishes the understanding expressed in the previous paragraph, the one favoured by the 'story grammars', from the more general view of story as an action discourse, 'featuring terms such as goal, plan and result'.

concept of narrative to the text as an analytical tool, and devise means of integrating it in our programme of research.

Contributions to the study of discourse can be found in other bodies of literature, besides the ones discussed in this section. The field of cultural studies, and especially Hall (1980; 1997; Hall et al., 1978; 1980), provide some discerning clues, although such works fall short of empirical analysis. Drawing on Volosinov (1973) and Gramsci (1971), amongst others, Hall reformulated ideas on the role of discourse in the reproduction of dominant ideologies and suggested some conceptual tools for analysis, such as the notions of 'struggle over meaning' and of 'primary' or 'privileged definition' (as discussed in the previous section), and implications for the terms of argumentation. Bridging efforts between cultural studies and the approaches discussed in this section may be deemed useful (see Allan, 1998).

This section has discussed understandings of discourse and the theoretical claims of discourse studies. Moreover, it has critically reviewed three strands of analysis of media discourse: critical discourse analysis, frame analysis and narrative analysis. Having presented some of the theoretical standings of this thesis, such as the constitutive nature of discourse, I aimed also to open doors to the diverse methodological capacities of discourse analyses.

## **2. TESTING THE ANALYTICAL TOOLS OF VARIOUS STRANDS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS<sup>29</sup>**

Critical Discourse Analysis, frame analysis and narrative analyses, as discussed above, are the most prominent and widespread approaches to media discourse. These currents of study show that there is not a standard method for the examination of texts, but multiple ways to go about it<sup>30</sup>. The most distinctive characteristics of those

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<sup>29</sup> An earlier version of this section was presented as a paper at a conference on methodology in the social sciences (Carvalho, 2000b).

<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a common problem is that researchers do not provide a clear explanation of their analytical procedures (e.g. Litfin, 1994; Hajer, 1995).

strands of analysis are the conceptual tools they employ. van Dijk's notion of 'macro-structure' (e.g. 1980; 1988a; 1988b), the concepts of 'frame' (e.g. Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Entman, 1993), and 'narrative' (e.g. McComas and Shanahan, 1999) are the centrepieces of those approaches. Such concepts are expected to have an analytical power, a potential to be used as tools of dissection and examination of the text. They structure the work involved in analysing the text and its reconstitution in a simplified form. I propose that we focus on such analytical tools, evaluate their strengths and shortcomings, and explore the extent to which they reveal different dimensions of the discursive construction of reality.

The best way to assess these tools is to test them on concrete texts. We shall apply these analytical devices to an article published in the *Times* on 8 November 1989: 'UK plays key role in securing accord on 'greenhouse' gas', by Michael McCarthy and Robin Oakley<sup>31</sup>. This article, shown on the following page, appears in the first 'critical discourse moment' (see definition below) to be considered in chapter five. One of the key events of this 'moment' is a conference in Noordwijk (The Netherlands) called by the Dutch government to assess the possibility of a stabilization of GHG emissions.

## 2.1. Frame

As discussed above, the notion of frame as a main underlying idea or structure (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Neuman et al., 1992; Gamson et al., 1994; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000) is a mainstream form of understanding the concept in the analysis of media discourse. Can we find one such type of frame in the *Times* article? It seems difficult to identify a simple, powerful notion, such as 'progress' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), in this text. If we account for the predominant role of the headline and for some of the sentences (line 60, column 1 – l. 9, col. 2; l. 69, col. 2 – l. 6, col. 3) in the article (see Entman, 1993, on 'salience'), the idea of 'Britain's international leadership' stands out. However, the article also indicates that environmental organizations perceived the conference to be a failure, which contrasts with the impression of Britain leading the world to agreement.

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<sup>31</sup> I have done a similar exercise with articles of two Portuguese newspapers on climate change (Carvalho, 1999c).

# UK plays key role in securing accord on 'greenhouse' gas

By Michael McCarthy in Noordwijk, The Netherlands, and Robbin Oakley

1 The world's leading industrialized countries, including the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and Britain, yesterday pledged themselves for the first time to freeze "as soon as possible" emissions of carbon dioxide, the industrial gas principally responsible for the greenhouse effect.

10 European countries, including Britain, went even further, and at a conference here on climate change committed themselves to stabilizing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from coal-burning power stations and motor vehicles by the year 2000 "at the latest".

20 The agreement, fiercely criticized by environment pressure groups for not being tough enough, comes a day before Mrs Thatcher is to announce increased British spending on international efforts to combat environmental pollution in her keynote speech at the United Nations.

25 Although the key question of the baseline level at which a freeze should take place will not be considered for another year, the commitments given yesterday imply far-reaching changes, in Britain as elsewhere, both in public policy and in people's living habits.

40 Britain's transport policy, for example, which foresees huge rises in motor vehicle traffic with attendant exhaust emissions over the next three decades, is incompatible with yesterday's pledge, given on Britain's behalf by Mr David Trippier, Minister of State at the Department of the Environment. British energy policy will also need radical revision to accommodate it, with far more emphasis being given to energy conservation.

55 Resolving these differences will be the principal tasks of the new Cabinet committee which has been set up to deal with environmental matters.

60 Mr Trippier and the British delegation played a leading role in securing yesterday's accord, after real disagreements had earlier emerged for the first time between leading nations on how global warming should be tackled.

65 British mediation helped to effect a compromise between

countries such as The Netherlands and France, which wanted an immediate binding agreement on stabilization of carbon dioxide emissions by 2000 at the present levels, and countries such as the US, the Soviet Union and Japan, who were hostile to the idea.

The 69-nation conference reached the first unanimous agreement on the need for, and nature of, a world treaty to protect the atmosphere. Ministers also agreed unanimously on exploring the possibility of setting up a world atmosphere fund, to help developing countries change their energy policies, and to pursue a target for replanting the world's forests

**Bonn (Reuter) — West Germany plans an immediate ban on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), chemicals that attack the ozone layer. The Environment Ministry yesterday laid out a draft law for an immediate ban on the production, sale and use of CFCs in aerosols and packaging. It also proposed banning CFCs in refrigerators, foams, cleaning materials, and in other industrial processes from January 1992.**

with 12 million hectares (29.6 million acres) a year at the beginning of the next century.

But Greenpeace labelled the conference "a disaster". Mr Andrew Kerr said: "This was the last chance in the 1980s to make a start in limiting global warming before we entered the final decade of the millennium. But the conference has failed to commit itself to any specific action by any specific date."

Mr Stewart Boyle, of the Association for the Conservation of Energy, said: "There won't be a single tonne of carbon dioxide saved as a result of this conference. It has committed nations to do nothing specific."

But after the possibility had loomed of a disastrous split declaration, many national environment ministers and UN officials thought it provided a genuine push to international efforts to combat global warming.

However, Mr Trippier said:

"It has not all been plain sailing, but I am very pleased that Britain has played a central role in advancing the international political consensus on climate change."

The agreement certainly provides a positive political background for Mrs Thatcher when she addresses the UN General Assembly today.

In a wide-ranging address, the Prime Minister will demonstrate that she is matching actions to her words on the environment by announcing substantial new measures that the Government intends to take in Britain and a stepping-up of British contributions to international schemes.

The Prime Minister, who helped to bring environmental issues to the fore in Britain with her speech to the Royal Society 14 months ago, is keen to play a leading role in international efforts to preserve the planet. Whitehall sources say that she could have picked many other subjects on which to address the UN, but has chosen green issues.

She will argue that sustainable growth and environmental protection are compatible. Setting out the latest scientific evidence and detailing Britain's record as an example to others, she will underline the need to ensure that any initiatives taken to protect the environment are scientifically and economically sound.

More controversially, Mrs Thatcher is likely to emphasize the important contribution of nuclear power to an improved environment.

The Prime Minister has been arguing in other international gatherings, as she did at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the need for channelling international co-operation on environmental issues through the existing institutions of the UN rather than creating new ones. She is expected to develop the case for a framework convention on global climate change in the expectation that further elements can be "bolted on" as scientific knowledge increases.

Leading article, page 15

And there is another important theme in the text: the commitments of industrialized countries with regard to GHG emissions (e.g. l. 1 – 19 and 31 – 39, col. 1; l. 10 – 41, col.2).

Let us look at specific analytical tips advanced by scholars. Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 3) suggest looking for ‘framing devices’ which are said to ‘suggest how to think about the issue’ and for ‘reasoning devices’ ‘that justify what should be done about’ an issue. Such devices are described in following table.

Table 4: Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989) framing and reasoning devices.

<b>Framing devices</b>	<b>Reasoning devices</b>
(1) metaphors	(1) roots (i.e., a causal analysis)
(2) exemplars (i.e., historical examples from which lessons are drawn)	(2) consequences (i.e., a particular type of effect)
(3) catchphrases	(3) appeals to principle (i.e., a set of moral claims)
(4) depictions	
(5) visual images	

Searching the *Times* article for such ‘framing’ and ‘reasoning’ devices does not prove that ‘Britain’s international leadership’ is the structuring frame of the article. There are five expressions used metaphorically in the article: ‘disaster’ (Greenpeace à propos the conference), ‘loomed’ (possibility of a split declaration), ‘disastrous’ (split declaration), [‘It has not all been] plain sailing’ (Trippier about the negotiations), ‘bolted on’ (‘further elements’ to the climate negotiations). The majority of the metaphors allude to the failure, or potential failure, of the conference and not to Britain’s leadership. Moreover, except for some of the sentences that employ the expressions above, there are no ‘catchphrases’. As far as ‘exemplars’ are concerned, it is doubtful that the mention of Britain’s record on environmental matters in l. 38-46, col. 3 corresponds to Gamson and Modigliani’s understanding of historical ‘exemplar’. They do not define what ‘depictions’ are, and given the vague character of this word, I will leave it on the side of the analysis. Finally, the article does not have any visual images.

‘Reasoning devices’ of the kind mentioned by Gamson and Modigliani cannot be found in the article either, with the exception of the sentences in l. 31-39 and 55-59, col. 1 on the ‘consequences’ of the conference declaration. In conclusion, it does not

seem that 'Britain's international leadership' is an interpretive 'media package'. Moreover, could we consider 'Britain's international leadership' to be a frame for understanding climate change in an overall way? It certainly does not look very appropriate, since international politics is only one of the many dimensions of the issue (others being science, economics, domestic politics, etc).

Deciding what is the adequate level of abstraction (Gamson et al., 1992), as mentioned above, can be a problem in frame analysis. For instance, at a higher level of abstraction, the dominant idea/frame in the *Times* article could be that 'climate change can be solved by international agreements'. At a more specific level, of assessment of the Noordwijk conference, it could be simply 'success' (as opposed to 'failure', as suggested by the NGOs).

Recapitulating, if we follow Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) model for frame analysis in our empirical test on the *Times* article, we run into a number of difficulties. First, it does not appear appropriate to subsume the whole text under the idea of 'Britain's international leadership' (which is the closest we got to identifying a 'frame' in our analysis), given that other ideas are present in the text. Gamson and Modigliani do not say whether a text can have more than one frame but they do suggest that texts, or at least parts of texts, can be unframed. Second, it does not seem that 'Britain's international leadership' would be the type of interpretive frame that Gamson and Modigliani point to, given that it did not pass the test of 'framing and reasoning devices'. Third, such a frame would only refer to a dimension of the climate change issue (international politics), and it is not clear how one could decide on the proper level of abstraction in the analysis.

If we account for Donati's (1992) conception of frames, there is an added problem in our empirical exercise. Although 'Britain's international leadership' passes the test of the two 'rules of thumb' (ibid.: 146-7)<sup>32</sup> reasonably well, it does not conform to the two frame-types indicated by Donati (objects and action/event sequences)<sup>33</sup>. Alternatively, following Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) approach of identifying

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<sup>32</sup> The frame category is more general than the frame object, and the frame's name can replace parts of the text where the topic is mentioned without changing the meaning of the text.

<sup>33</sup> Suggesting that frames should correspond to the 'receiver's common-sense categories', instead of analytic categories, Donati maintains that there are two fundamental types of frames:

frames with ‘yes-no’ type answers to questions such as ‘Does the story suggest some level of government that has the ability to alleviate the problem?’, although feasible, would only take us as far as saying whether an ‘attribution of responsibility frame’ is present or absent in the text. This is not very elucidating.

As suggested above, many forms of frame analysis can be reductionist because they attempt to identify a central idea or principle and can therefore leave out significant, if minor, constructions of the issue. Although some more eclectic approaches to framing have been advanced (e.g. Entman, 1991; Pan and Kosicki, 1993<sup>34</sup>), frame analysis’ common tendency for overall labelling can lead to insufficient attention being paid to detail, to the concrete forms of meaning generation – at the level of words and sentences, for instance. Its programme consists in turning regular what is predominantly singular, or seeing structure where there is not necessarily a structure. This may be particularly grave in the analysis of complex, multi-dimensional, matters, like climate change<sup>35</sup>.

In order to overcome the problems associated with the notion of frame as structure, I propose taking up the notion of frame as *perspective* mentioned earlier (Entman, 1993; also Rein and Schon, 1991<sup>36</sup>). The notion that we always have to choose a particular standpoint to talk about complex, multi-dimensional realities seems particularly helpful to me. Framing in talking is like framing in photography. It involves a specific angle and it involves bringing in or leaving out certain aspects of a pictured reality. I will further elaborate on this later in the chapter.

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...those which highlight analogies with objects (especially mechanic objects, such as ‘Carefully crafted watch’), and those which highlight analogies with action/event sequences (also called ‘script’, such as ‘No gain without cost’). (ibid.: 152)

<sup>34</sup> Entman (1991) accounts for elements like importance judgements and agency. Pan and Kosicki (1993) suggest that there are four news framing devices: syntactical structures, script structures, thematic structures, and rhetorical structures.

<sup>35</sup> On the positive side, frame analysis has the advantage of being easily applicable to a large number of texts. By highlighting the main idea of each text, it also has the benefit of allowing for easy comparisons.

<sup>36</sup> Rein and Schon (1991: 263) define framing as follows:

Framing is ... a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality so as to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading and acting. A frame is a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined problematic situation can be made sense of and acted upon.

## 2.2. Narrative

We now turn to narrative analysis. How would it help analysing the *Times* article? What would it say about the text? Let us assume, as suggested in chapter two, that the main elements of a narrative are characters, setting, action, and outcome (Aristotle, 1962; Chatman, 1995)<sup>37</sup>. The main character in the *Times* article is Britain (the ‘hero’) either ‘directly’ or represented by its environment minister, David Trippier, and prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Britain sorts out the complications of the story and shapes up the outcome. Amongst the other countries mentioned in the article, the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan are awarded a more prominent role in the narrative than the Netherlands and France, given that the former are mentioned in the first paragraph of the article. Greenpeace and the Association for the Conservation of Energy (and their representatives) are secondary characters, whose role is a mere short commentary. The setting of the article is an intergovernmental conference on climate change in Noordwijk, the Netherlands. The core action of the story is the negotiation of colliding claims of different countries and Britain’s mediation of them. The outcome of the story is predominantly portrayed as a happy one where Britain secured accord for a positive decision that will benefit the environment.

Narrative analysis highlights the time sequence of a certain course of action (Ricoeur, 1988; Labov, 1972). It also emphasises relations between presuppositions or causes, and consequences (Aristotle, 1962). This approach can be quite useful for understanding certain discourses on complex or uncertain processes (Roe, 1994). In such cases, the author of the text tends, in face of complexity, to simplify the issue under consideration and, in face of uncertainty, to construct scenarios/stories. One of the disadvantages of narrative analysis is that it can neglect texts/parts of texts that do not entail the characteristics of a narrative. Also, unless it is done in significant depth, narrative analysis may tend to focus exclusively on the dominant narrative of a text.

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Although the definitions that both Entman and Rein and Schon propose for frame emphasize the notion of perspective, occasionally they also implicitly treat frames as structures.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Daley (1991) for use of the term ‘narrative’ in the sense of frame (‘a crime narrative’, ‘an environmental narrative’).



Often there are only faint traces of alternative narratives in texts. But they should not be ignored. In our example, the 1989 *Times* article, a second narrative is inscribed – the NGOs’ narrative. NGOs construct the conference as a more crucial event for the future of the planet than do governments. NGOs tell of a radically different outcome – the failure of countries to commit to concrete actions and the negative impact of their inaction on the environment. This alternative narrative is however awarded only a tiny space in the article, possibly for ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ purposes (as discussed in chapter two), which says something about the *Times* ideological standing. We should also note that, at the end of the article, there is a continuation of the first (government’s) narrative with a scenario of future action. Margaret Thatcher is here the central character and we are told what actions she will take in relation to the environment.

### **2.3. Macro-structure**

Within CDA, van Dijk’s work is the most widely published and his cognitive-structural model (e.g. 1988b) the most cited. I have chosen to test van Dijk’s notion of semantic macro-structure as a tool for textual deconstruction as it is the backbone of the model and has a distinctive nature within the context of discourse analysis. As we have seen, a macro-structure is the theme organization of the text (e.g. 1980; 1988a; 1988b). To arrive at this structure, the analyst needs to condense or reduce the text to its central topics. This is done with what van Dijk calls ‘macro-rules’, such as the deletion of redundant information or the synthesis of various propositions in a single, more generic, one (1988b: 32). If we adopt van Dijk’s analysis of theme structures in news texts, the *Times* article will be represented as represented in fig.3.

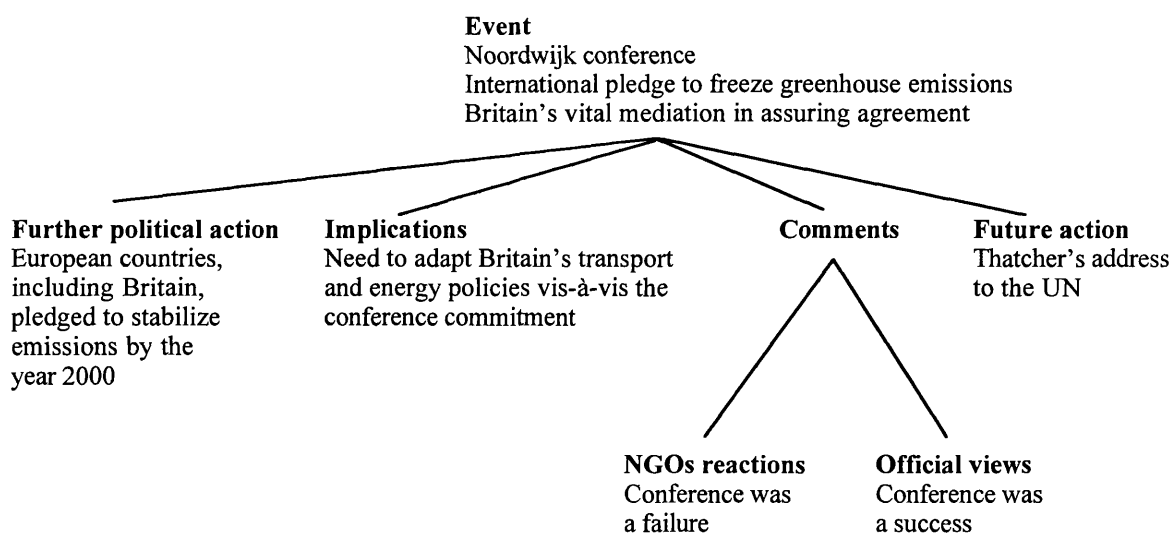
The type of analysis advanced by van Dijk emphasizes the structure of texts and the internal construction of meaning. It is a topic-driven technique with a great deal of concern for hierarchical relations between different parts of the text. To the extent that they describe the theme content of a text, macrostructures are like graphically worked category systems of classical content analysis (see Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1969; Bardin, 1977), as applied to single texts. Macrostructures constitute topics into the most important characteristic of news stories, but do not say anything about

perspectives, values or ideology in the text (see Fairclough's, 1995b, critiques of van Dijk's 'formulaic' analysis). If the purpose is to examine each text individually, and to look at the (internal) connections between different themes and aspects of the text, the notion of macro-structure serves it well. It can provide a very useful analysis at the micro-textual level. But for analysis *across* a number of texts it has a very limited use. It is difficult to apply to a large number of texts and it does not allow for easy comparisons among different texts. Of course van Dijk does not limit his work to the analysis of macrostructures. He also looks at schematas (or textual superstructures), which are typical forms of organization of different types of text. At the micro-structural level, he looks at style and rhetoric (see 1988b). However, the notion of macro-structure is the backbone of his analytical framework, and it is therefore justified to put it to trial.

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**UK plays key role in securing accord on 'greenhouse' gas**  
**Times, 08.11.89**

**THEMATIC MACRO-STRUCTURE**




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Fig. 3. Schematic representation of the semantic macrostructure of the *Times* article.

Each of the three concepts we have focused on has more than methodological implications: they are different epistemologies altogether. All are non-neutral lenses and consist of specific ways of seeing the world. They therefore take the researcher to

(partly) distinct conclusions. It is important to be aware of what is lost and what is gained with each research technique (cf. Yanow, 1995).

### **3. DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

The previous section has shown that different analytical tools provide quite different insights into the text. We have also seen that there are various problems in each approach, and that none is fully satisfactory to examine our news data. Building on the previous discussion of this issue, this section will attempt to show a way forward by proposing a new framework to the analysis of media discourse. I will start by presenting further reasons for developing such an approach.

#### **3.1. Rationale**

Do we really need another approach to discourse analysis of media texts? Could we not just retain and combine the positive aspects of the models discussed earlier? My answers are, respectively, yes and no. Besides the difficulties and limitations that we have already found in existing models, I have also identified some issues that remain unresolved or unsatisfactorily addressed by those approaches to discourse analysis, even if combined. They are discussed below.

##### **a) The time plane in discourse analysis of media texts**

If we take two texts, time relations between them can be of priority, simultaneity, or posteriority. It is the latter that matters most for discourse analysis and deserves detailed consideration. Simultaneous texts on the same issue are also interesting for examining differences in the representation of reality. Nevertheless, time has largely been unaccounted for in the existing literature on discourse analysis of media texts. Most forms of analysis do not express awareness of the time sequence of texts<sup>38</sup>, nor

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<sup>38</sup> Or, if they do, it is at a very general level of commonplaces.

do they clearly explain the implications of previous discursive positions on subsequent ones. I contend that time relations are a major factor in determining discursive constructions and therefore call for a time-sensitive discourse analysis.

The historical nature of discourse is one of its most fundamental characteristics. Texts always build on previous ones, taking up or challenging former discourses. Discourse analyst Norman Fairclough (1995a; 1995b) has conceptualized these relations as intertextuality. Intertextuality is an important contribution to the study of discourse but it does not, *per se*, give a full account of the time plane, or of the historicity of discourse (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). By looking at the moments of production and consumption of the text van Dijk (1988b) offers a biography of the text. But the relation between that text and others throughout a period of time is not explained. A biography of social and political issues in the media is missing. When it is taken up, research of change in media discourse has been mainly oriented to issues of style and genre (Fairclough, e.g. 1995b; Weymouth, 1998), rather than to change in the meaning of issues in the media.

Durant et al. (1998) and McComas and Shanahan (1999) represent some of the few attempts to understand the evolution of media discourses on a given subject over time. Focusing respectively on frames in biotechnology and climate change (meta)narratives (as derived from content analysis of texts in various periods), their analyses are predominantly quantitative. In consequence, their work offers little detailed analysis of the discursive means of meaning<sup>39</sup>.

The most significant contribution to the study of time in discourse processes has recently been advanced by Ruth Wodak and colleagues. Applied to the study of processes of discrimination (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999) and national identity (Wodak et al., 1999), their 'discourse-historical' approach attempts to account for the historical background of discursive events and explore changes in discourse throughout time (Wodak, 1999). However, media discourse has not yet been examined in detail in this way.

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<sup>39</sup> For frame analyses over long time periods, see also Fisher (1996) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989). Adam (2000) proposes interesting reflections on 'media timescapes'.

My contribution to this matter is the promotion of a historical-diachronic agenda of discourse analysis, together with a comparative-synchronic perspective, for application to news texts. I will explain this approach below in more detail.

### **b) Agents' (pre-)intervention in media(ted) discursive realities**

What journalists do is usually a discursive re-construction of reality. Rarely do they witness events or get to know reality in a way that does not involve the mediation of others. A variety of social actors serve as sources of information for media professionals, in a direct or indirect way (e.g. Ericson et al., 1989). As argued in chapters one and two, the media representation of social issues seems to be very much a function of the initiative of other social actors to organize their claims and to project attention to 'happenings' and problems (Solesbury, 1976; Hanigan, 1995; Spector and Kitsuse, 1973; 1977; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Anderson, 1997). Media's depictions of social problems will obviously depend largely on the preferences and options of media professionals, including the news values in operation (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Wolf, 1987), but necessarily builds on the ways other social actors construct climate change in their multifarious discourses. A good method of discourse analysis should account for these two levels of discursive intervention over a certain object – the sources' or social actors' intervention, and the journalists' intervention.

van Dijk's (e.g. 1988a; 1988b) approach is not satisfactory in this respect. He focuses on the journalist and does not deal with the previous discourses of other social actors<sup>40</sup>. Although Fairclough (e.g. 1995b) accounts for intertextuality and the progressive transformations of texts along discursive chains, the analysis of the strategies that social actors adopt to construct issues for the media is also missing in his work. In narrative analysis, there is space for examining the stories told by different social actors. Thus, in an analysis of various cases of environmental policy, Roe (1994) attempts to individuate those stories and their implications, as we have seen in chapter

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<sup>40</sup> Relatedly, Bell (1991) has emphasised the role of various categories of news professionals in the successive re-making of news language.

two. But in most of the works on media narratives or indeed on media frames this aspect is not elucidated<sup>41</sup>.

Further to the discussion of actors' communication strategies and the representation of agency in the media in chapter two, I propose a renewed attention be given to the role of actors' discursive strategies in media discourse. It is important to study the ways they and their standings are represented in the media, and to analyse their discursive strategies in the construction of reality. I suggest indirectly 'reading' such interventions from quotes and from reports of (non-linguistic) actions. Quotes-in-the-news and information-about-actions are obviously a product of the media's selectivity apparatus. However, provided that they are not made up by journalists or others, quotes still 'say' something. And a way of 'fighting' the effects of the media's filtering processes is triangulation of newspapers (and/or other media).

### **c) Extra- and supra-textual effects (or modes of operation) of discourse**

What consequences do texts have for the whole of a discursive field? How does discourse impact on and shape the evolution of social and political issues? A constitutive view of discourse has to encompass the analysis of discourse's concrete means of impact. While discourse analysts have concentrated attention on the text, many of discourse's modes of operation are extra- or supra-textual, i.e. they are realized beyond or independently of a given text.

Media discourse is an especially important arena for social and political action. Yet studies of media discourse have not spelt out the ways the media shape social realities extra- or supra-textually, as explicitly as they could have done. Frame and narrative analyses of the media, for example, tend to only focus on the text and not look at its impact on other texts or social realities. Some works on environmental policy-making have provided interesting insights into these issues. Hajer (1995) has referred to discursive mechanisms as processes through which discourse works. Litfin (1994) and Roe (1994) have also made useful contributions to understanding how discourse operates in political spheres. I will attempt to further elaborate on this.

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<sup>41</sup> While Gamson and Modigliani (1989) refer to 'sponsor activities' as 'determinants' of packages or frames, they do not satisfactorily explore framing by the media as a process of re-framing.

To address the issue of extra- and supra-textual modes of operation of discourse, I propose the category of *discursive effects*<sup>42</sup>. Discursive effects are processes that are linked to texts, but occur outside the text or ‘above’ it; they cannot be ‘found’ in one single text. Moreover, discursive effects are not the direct consequence of one actor’s discursive interventions but are often dependent on a variety of (discursive) causes and circumstances and show the constraining force of discourse. Examples of discursive effects are *discourse structuration*, *discourse institutionalization* and *closure*. *Discourse structuration* refers to the process of domination of the terms of the debate. This may be intended but does not only depend on an actor’s construction of an issue and its realization involves more than one text. *Discourse institutionalization* is the transformation of institutional structures and/or practices in a way that embodies a certain discourse<sup>43</sup>. Although the process of discourse institutionalisation may result from, and originate in certain texts, it usually also has an extra-textual<sup>44</sup> dimension. *Closure* is the resolution or termination of some form of controversy, for instance in a scientific or policy debate (see Engelhardt, Jr. and Caplan, 1987). It is a supra-textual process. The analysis of discursive effects will be integrated in the diachronic analysis proposed below.

Below, I will explain the procedures that will be adopted to examine the data presented in chapter three. I have attempted to integrate some answers to the questions and gaps that have just been discussed. Also, I have taken into consideration the advantages and shortcomings of the analytical tools that we have examined previously (frame, narrative and macro-structure). Furthermore, other contributions to discourse analysis have influenced my approach, mainly Fairclough’s work (especially 1995b)<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> The notion of discursive effects is not usually found in the literature on discourse analysis. Hajer (1995) uses the expression ‘discourse mechanisms’ to refer both to what I have designated as discursive strategies (see below) and effects, therefore not individuating agency in discourse, as I do. Moreover, his category of ‘discourse mechanisms’ is not very consistent, given the sheer variety of intra- and extra-textual (and even extra-discursive) aspects he includes in it, from ‘positioning’ to ‘sensory experience’.

<sup>43</sup> Hajer (1995) claims that discursive hegemony is attained through discourse structuration and discourse institutionalisation (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Wittrock et al., 1991).

<sup>44</sup> I prefer this term to ‘extra-discursive’ (cf. Foucault’s, 1984, notion of extradiscursive dependencies), given that I view institutions as part of – or a product of – discourses.

### 3.2. Analytical framework for media discourse

My analysis starts off with an open-ended reading of the material, i.e. not constrained by very specific questions or hypotheses. This can produce interesting results since it allows for the identification of the most significant traits of the data, without the filter-effect of a tight research programme. It is important to make use of critical thinking during the reading of the data. A ‘spirit of scepticism’ should be adopted, leading to the ‘suspension of belief in the taken for granted’ and ‘render[ing] the familiar strange’ (Gill, 2000). Some of the questions that may come to mind are: Why do some things get said and others do not? How are things said and what are the possible implications of that? The first reading of the data will help identify significant debates, controversies, and silences, and possibly suggest specifications (and amendments) of initial research goals and questions. I have done this open-ended reading in relation to all the articles in the first five years of my data (1985-1989) and from then on read a set of articles that were picked by a multi-stage and stratified random sampling process: articles were sampled within each newspaper and re-sampled in the peak periods of coverage. In addition to this, I paid close attention to the headlines and the first paragraphs (first two in case of doubt) of *all* the articles that constitute the corpus of this thesis between 1990 and 1997.

In projects that involve large amounts of data like the present one, the second step is to circumscribe the number of texts to be subjected to discourse analysis. Obviously, if the corpus of newspaper articles is over two thousand units (as in this thesis), it is not possible to analyse all the articles in detail. A formula for re-selection needs to be designed. I propose the combination of comprehensive (exhaustive) analysis in selected periods with analysis of ‘critical discourse moments’ (Chilton, 1987; Gamson, 1992; Fisher, 1996). On the one hand, there are periods that are determining in the construction of an issue and therefore call for an integral analysis. This is the case of the first few years of coverage of climate change in the press (1985-1989) when it was transformed from a low-attention issue into a significant political and public issue. On the other hand, after some time, discursive constructions of an issue start sedimenting

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<sup>45</sup> I integrate several aspects of Fairclough’s approach in the methodology I propose below and will refer to them later more specifically. Naturally, I also differ in relation to Fairclough in a variety of issues.



and the amount of novelty decreases, while discursive positions start being more and more recurrent. It, therefore, makes sense to suspend the article-by-article analysis and ‘jump’ to the next ‘critical discourse moment’.

I see critical discourse moments as periods that involve specific happenings which may challenge the ‘established’ discursive positions. There are various factors that may define these key moments: political activity, scientific findings, or other socially relevant events<sup>46</sup>. Questions to be asked about critical discourse moments include: Did arguments change? Did new/alternative views arise?

From here we turn to the detailed discourse analysis of texts. In the pages that follow, I will propose a step-by-step approach to the analysis of media texts. Such a method is especially oriented towards written media texts, i.e. newspaper or magazine articles. I will first focus on the unit of analysis, that is, each individual text, and then proceed to its wider context. The proposed analytical framework can be outlined as follows in table 5.

Table 5. Proposed framework for discourse analysis of media texts.

I. Textual analysis
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Morphological characteristics and structural organization</li> <li>2. Objects</li> <li>3. Actors</li> <li>4. Language and rhetoric</li> <li>5. Discursive strategies</li> <li>6. Ideological standpoints</li> </ol>
II. Contextual analysis
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Comparative-synchronic analysis</li> <li>2. Historical-diachronic analysis</li> </ol>

## I. Textual analysis

The dimensions of the text that matter the most in the construction of its overall meaning and should be analysed are detailed below.

### 1. Morphological characteristics and structural organization

I propose first looking at a few ‘surface’ (or morphological) elements of the text – the date of publication, the newspaper in which it was published, the section (e.g. home news, environment, business, etc), the page (page number) in which the article appeared, and the size of the article, as well as whether the article was an editorial or ‘leading article’. These indicators say something by themselves, as discussed in chapter two and three.

The structural organization of the text has a key role in the definition of what is at stake, as well as in the overall interpretation of an issue. Following van Dijk (e.g. 1988b), I will weigh the headline of the article differently from the body (the rest of the text). The headline marks the preferred reading of the whole article. A bigger weight will also be conferred to the first few paragraphs of the article which, in the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times*, tend to have the function of the lead. Differently from van Dijk, I do not think that a detailed exploration of the organization of the text – its macro-structure and superstructure – is much more revealing than just considering these aspects.

### 2. Objects

The second question to ask is: Which objects does the text construct? The notion of ‘objects’ is close to topics or themes. However, the term ‘object’ has the advantage of enhancing the idea that discourse *constitutes* rather than just ‘refers to’ the realities at

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<sup>46</sup> The construction of a chronology of climate change ‘events’, of a political, scientific and social nature, has been a useful guideline for identifying critical discourse moments.

stake. Objects of discourse are not always obvious, and clearly identifying them is an important step towards deconstructing and understanding the role of discourses. In the case of climate change, the broader objects to be constructed may be economics, government or nature. More specific ones may be, for instance, climate change impacts on agriculture. A related question to be asked at this stage of the analysis is: what events/specific issues are associated to the broader issue under consideration? This question is particularly relevant for complex issues like climate change, which have many dimensions, and therefore can be tackled from many angles and perspectives<sup>47</sup>. Mapping the links reporters (and other authors) make between specific events, such as the option for a new road programme, and climate change can be very illuminating vis-à-vis the political standing of a certain discourse<sup>48</sup>.

### 3. Actors

Who does the article mention? How are those actors represented?<sup>49</sup> Here we are interested in the individuals or institutions that are either quoted or referred to in the text<sup>50</sup>. The term ‘actors’ in my analysis means both social agents (someone who has the capacity of doing something) and characters in a (staged) story (which is ultimately what news reports are)<sup>51</sup>. Actors are then both subjects – they do things – and objects – they are talked about<sup>52</sup>. They may appear as isolated figures or in ‘discourse coalitions’ (Wittrock et al., 1991; Hajer, 1995).

Texts play a major role in building the image of social actors, as well as in defining their relations and identities (Halliday, 1978; 1985; Fairclough, 1995b). An essential aspect in the study of actors in texts is their perceived influence in shaping the overall meaning of the text. Whose perspective seems to dominate? I have referred elsewhere (Carvalho, 1999b) to this issue as the ‘framing power’ of social actors in relation to the media. Framing power may be defined as the capacity of one actor to convey her/his

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<sup>47</sup> In journalistic terms one can think of news pegs. What events or issues does a particular article ‘originate’ from? See Wilkins and Patterson (1990).

<sup>48</sup> The fact that an author does *not* make such links is just as meaningful.

<sup>49</sup> van Leeuwen (1996) provides a complex ‘sociosemantic inventory’ of ways to represent social actors.

<sup>50</sup> Compare with the notion of ‘source’. Some of those actors may have worked as sources for the author of the article, others have not.

<sup>51</sup> This understanding of actors differs from Fairclough’s ‘voices’, which refers to ‘those speaking or whose speech is represented’ (1995b: 80) in the media.

views and positions through the media, by having them re-presented by journalists either in the form of quotes or regular text. Having the predominant framing power in relation to a certain issue is an important form of social influence<sup>53</sup>. But we must bear in mind that such framing power is crucially yielded or denied by journalists (White, 1950; Donohue et al., 1972; Gans, 1979), who hold a major power of discursive construction of social, political or environmental issues<sup>54</sup>.

The analysis of the representation of actors in the media is closely related to the analysis of the representation of their discursive strategies (see point 5 below).

#### **4. Language and rhetoric**

The identification of key concepts and of their relationship to wider cultural and ideological frameworks is an important part of discourse analysis (e.g. Hajer, 1995; Jacobs and Manzi, 1996). Furthermore, the vocabulary used for representing a certain reality (e.g. verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and the writing style (e.g. formal/informal, technical, conversational) are important dimensions of the constitution of meanings. Linguistic analyses of media texts give attention to issues of pragmatics, semantics and syntax in discourse in a much more detailed manner (e.g. van Dijk, 1988b; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b). Such is not the focus of this thesis and the analysis of language will be limited to the aspects listed above (concepts, vocabulary and style).

Regarding rhetoric, I propose looking at metaphors, other figures of style and persuasive devices employed in the text (cf. van Dijk, 1988b). An emotionally charged discourse, with an appeal to readers' emotions, for instance, is often found in the press, and can have an important rhetorical role<sup>55</sup>. In the analysis of language and rhetoric we look, on the one hand, at the formulations advanced by social actors, and on the other hand, at the discourse of journalists.

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<sup>52</sup> Compare with narrative analysis.

<sup>53</sup> Framing power is a more flexible concept than Hall et al.'s (1978) notion of 'primary definition'.

<sup>54</sup> This is also related to issues of access to the media discussed in chapter two.

<sup>55</sup> Naturally, rhetorical analysis can be much more encompassing than I suggest here: for introductions see, for instance, Gill and Whedbee (1997) and Leach (2000).

## 5. Discursive strategies

Discursive strategies are forms of discursive manipulation of reality by social actors, including journalists, in order to achieve a certain effect or goal. Manipulation does not have here the sense of an illegitimate alteration of a certain reality. Rather, I use it to mean, simply, a (discursive) intervention. This intervention and the procured aim can be more or less conscious (cf. Wodak, 1999; Wodak et al., 1999; Wodak and van Leeuwen, 1999<sup>56</sup>; see also Chilton and Schäffner, 1997).

The notion of discursive strategies helps us perceive the link between ‘source strategies’ and media’s (textual) representations (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Anderson, 1997). Pointing to the enabling power of discourse, such a notion is also illuminating with regard to the processes of claims-making mentioned in chapters one and two, for which the media are a crucial arena, and which necessarily involve language uses aiming at ‘showing’, ‘proving’ or ‘calling attention’ to a given point or matter. Nevertheless, systematic inquiries into discursive strategies in the media are extremely scarce (see Menz, 1989, for the analysis of one Austrian newspaper), in what is an important research gap on media discourse.

I will refer below to some of the most significant discursive strategies. The main intervention the speaker/author makes is enacted in the selection of an angle of the (complex) reality s/he is talking about. This is an important part of the act of ‘framing’ a certain reality. I suggest thinking in terms of *framing* as an action or operation, rather than in terms of *frames* as (fixed) independent entities. Framing is to organize discourse according to a certain point of view or perspective. In the production of texts, framing involves *selection* and *composition* (cf. Entman, 1993). Selection is an exercise of inclusion and exclusion of facts, opinions, value judgements, etc. Composition is the arrangement of these elements in order to produce a certain meaning. Unlike Durham (1998) and other authors, I do not view framing as an

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<sup>56</sup> Wodak defines ‘strategies’ in discourse as ‘plans of actions that may vary in their degree of elaboration, may be located at different levels of mental organization, and may range from automatic to highly conscious’ (1999: 188)

optional intervention in discourse<sup>57</sup>. Instead, it is something inherent to the construction of texts. Framing is not something that you choose to do or not, but a necessary operation in talking about reality. Therefore, what is at stake in the analysis of framing as a discursive strategy is *how*, and not *whether*, an actor frames reality (for a similar use of the concept see Hansen, 2000).

Turning now to other discursive strategies, I would highlight *narrativization* and *positioning*, and, as examples of more specific strategies, *legitimation* and *politicization*. I look at narrative texts, and the stories in them, as the product of discursive manipulation of reality by specific actors. *Narrativization* involves constructing a sequence of (predicted) events and (anticipated) consequences<sup>58</sup>. I have suggested that we think of a narrative as involving an action, a conclusion or outcome, characters, and a setting or framework for the action. An implication of narratives and narrative analysis is the reinforcement of the role of action – in Ricoeur’s words ‘doing something’ is central to the narrative (1984: 56, cited by Franzosi, 1998: 523). So the importance of social actors and, more generally, human agency is heightened with this discursive strategy. Unlike framing, *narrativization* is not a necessary aspect of the discursive construction of an issue<sup>59</sup>. *Positioning* is a discursive strategy that involves constructing social actors into a certain relationship with others, that may, for instance, entitle them to do certain things (cf. Davies and Harré, 1990; Hajer, 1995). Positioning can also be viewed as a wider process of constitution of the identity of the subject through discourse<sup>60</sup>. Finally, *legitimation* consists in justifying and sanctioning a certain action or power, on the basis of normative or other reasons (see van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). *Politicization* is the attribution of a political nature or status to a certain reality, such as climate change. Some of these strategies have a reverse, such as de-legitimation and de-politicization.

Naturally, there is a very large number of potential discursive strategies, at different levels of specificity. For instance, while framing is a fundamental and necessary operation, building out responsibility (in the representation of climate change, for

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<sup>57</sup> In Durham’s article framing is seen as reduction(ist) practice undertaken by journalists to make sense of reality in a systematic attempt to identify a single meaning for events (that are often complex and multi-dimensional).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Roe (1994).

<sup>59</sup> As we have seen, there are narrative or non-narrative texts.

instance) is a much more specific and highly discretionary strategy. In the analysis of discourse strategies, I first try to discriminate the journalist's strategies from the strategies of other social actors. The discursive constructions advanced by each social actor can be re-presented in the media through their own quoted statements and/or the words of journalists (indirect speech). However, in some articles it is unclear who said or thinks what. As I suggested earlier, comparing the representation of the same issue/event in different newspapers helps in this analysis. Quoted ideas/positions in one article often appear as unattributed text in others. Secondly, I attempt to map discursive strategies in relation to social actors. Which actors use which discursive strategies? How are different actors involved in the discursive strategies of others (how are they constructed by others)? The link between actors and discursive strategies is a contribution to addressing the issue of agents' intervention on reality which, as mentioned before, is not addressed in a satisfactory way by most existing models of discourse analysis.

Both discourse strategies and discourse effects (see point II below) provide insights into how discourse works in the construction of meanings and in relation to social, political and cultural contexts. My methodological approach therefore addresses the point made previously about the operation of discourse.

## **6. Ideological standpoints**

The notion that ideologies are embedded with discourses is a central claim of discourse studies, especially 'critical' wings like CDA. In chapter two, it became clear that the concept of ideology is used in many – and often conflicting – senses. Relating ideologies to social and political values associated with proactive stances towards a certain reality, I argued for a mutually constitutive view of ideology and media(ted) discourses.

Ideological standpoints are possibly the most fundamental shaping influence of a text<sup>61</sup>. Yet discourse analysis does not always adequately (or fully) reveal them. In

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<sup>60</sup> Compare with Halliday's (1978) interpersonal function of language, and the relational function of discourse mentioned by Fairclough (1995b).

<sup>61</sup> This does not mean that there is a logical priority of ideologies over texts. Ideologies are produced by texts (as well as they 'orient' the production of texts).

frame and narrative analyses, ideological issues are either unaccounted for (e.g. Trumbo, 1996) or implied but not regularly spelled out (e.g. Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). In CDA, the focus of analysis tends to be too narrow: while Fairclough (1995b) looks for ideological mechanisms at the level of the implicit, of assumptions and presuppositions in the text, van Dijk claims that ‘semantic structures of discourse ... form the core ‘content’ of the expression of ideological opinions’ (1998c: 31; see also 1995)<sup>62</sup>.

I would argue that a broader view of the discursive realization of ideology is necessary. Ideology is an overarching aspect of the text. It is embedded in the selection and representation of objects and actors, and in the language and discursive strategies employed in a text. However, one should expect the ideological standpoints of an author not to be always explicit in the text, especially news texts. *Appearing natural* is at the core of the ideologically-shaped work of representing reality in the news media (see Allan, 1999). In the process of newsmaking discussed in chapter two, ‘the multi-accentual ‘potential for meaning’ of the chosen signs ... are filled in until the signs are ‘closed’, apparently uni-accentual’ (Hartley, 1982: 63). Identifying the discursive means of such ‘ideological closure’ (ibid.) often requires a good deal of interpretive work. Discourse analysis involves inferring ideological positions from issues such as the choice of subject, actors, and discursive strategies (themselves requiring a sensitive reading)<sup>63</sup>. Certainly, in some texts, normative, political and value claims are relatively clear (at least in some parts). But the analyst has to learn to identify ideological standpoints from relatively subtle mechanisms and devices. Looking at alternative constructions of the same reality (such as different media reports) is a helpful strategy. It is important to make ideologies manifest because they involve fundamental motivations and justifications for keeping or changing a certain status quo.

Besides methodological limitations, in drawing on CDA’s proposals for the study of ideology, we encounter difficulties related to the object of study. Most ideological analyses proposed by CDA scholars have been oriented to social antagonisms and inequalities (e.g. van Dijk, 1991; 1993a; Wodak, 1996; Wodak et al., 1999; van

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<sup>62</sup> As mentioned in chapter two, van Dijk’s understanding of ideology (1998b; 1998c), as of discourse, is inextricably linked to cognition.

<sup>63</sup> The analysis of both discursive strategies and ideological standpoints in media texts is then not independent from the analysis of the other elements enunciated above.



Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999; Fairclough, 2000b; Thetela, 2001). In van Dijk's (1998b; 1998c) theorization, for example, the objects of ideological analysis are representations of group characteristics; ingroup and outgroup descriptions, and Us/Them oppositions are considered essential (see also Oktar, 2001). Although an interesting direction of study, the adequacy of these kinds of formulations of ideology for analysis of discourses on climate change may prove limited. The problem of climate change is intensely tied to people (social actors and groups) but at the core of the problem are the relations between humans and nature, which do have an ideological quality but largely escape most CDA's understandings of ideology. We therefore need to widen the analytical scope of ideology in discourse. Dryzek's (1997) examination of the grounds and propositions of environmental discourses provides a useful contribution, as well as the work of Harré et al. (1999), and Myerson and Rydin (1996), amongst others.

To conclude this section on methodology involved in textual analysis I should say that I not only look for what is present in the text, but also for what is absent (see Fairclough, 1995b). Silence can be as performative as discourse. Texts are read 'politically', to use the terms of Carver and Hyvarinen (1997). 'Political reading' recognises that politics is not natural, but 'contingent, plural and conflictual' (ibid.: 6), and aims to maintain in the analysis the awareness of possible alternatives to the dominant position(s). What is obscured in the text? How does the inclusion and exclusion of facts serve the creation of a certain meaning?

## **II. Contextual analysis**

In a second stage of the analysis, I look beyond the text to the overall coverage of an event or issue in one newspaper. The first simple question is: how many articles are dedicated to each event/issue? The number of articles is a crucial indicator of the importance awarded by the newspaper to an issue. Two time-related dimensions of analysis will be considered in this stage – synchronic and diachronic. This will be achieved by two main means of inquiry, respectively, comparison and historical

analysis. Hence, I pursue a *comparative-synchronic analysis* and a *historical-diachronic analysis*.

## 1. Comparative-synchronic analysis

With the comparative-synchronic analysis, I will look at the various representations of an issue at the time of the writing of one specific article (my unit of analysis). More specifically, I will compare the first article with other representations of the issue: articles written in the same day by different authors, both in the same newspaper or others. The comparison of press depictions of reality involves attempting to reconstitute the original events (discursive or non-discursive). By cross-referencing the newspapers and, in some cases, checking original documents, such as reports or policy documents, we can form our own image of reality, which is hopefully more accurate and/or complete than each individual press representation. This is important because it allows for a better assessment of the intervention of journalists (or other authors of news texts) in that reality, and of their critical reading of the discursive strategies of social actors.

## 2. Historical-diachronic analysis

The historical-diachronic analysis takes place at two levels. At a first level, the historical approach involves being aware of the course of history, i.e. of the significance of events, and of their wider political, social and economic context. (cf. Wodak et al., 1999; van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). The historical conditions and context of the production of (media) texts is hence accounted for in discourse analysis<sup>64</sup>. At a second level, I will examine the temporal evolution of discourses. I will look at the sequence of discursive constructions of an issue and assess its significance. How did representations of reality impact on subsequent ones? How were they reproduced or contested?<sup>65</sup> Issue-development – the sequence of events and

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Fairclough's sociocultural practice (1995b).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Fairclough's chain relations (1995b).

constructions of the issue – is, in my view, a crucial aspect for understanding the present. I believe that the ‘biographical’ study of social and political matters can help us a great deal in making sense of the arrangements that govern us. The identification of discursive effects, as discussed above, is a helpful analytical procedure, and an important part of a historical-diachronic discourse analysis.

### **3.3. Empirical trial**

The proposed approach to discourse analysis will now be subjected to the same kind of test as the other analytical tools presented above. Let us see what it tells us about the *Times* article discussed in section 2.

#### **I. Textual Analysis**

##### **1. Morphological characteristics and structural organization**

We already know that the article in consideration was published in the *Times* on 08.11.89. It appeared in the Overseas News section on page 10, approximately the middle of the newspaper. That is not the most prominent location in a newspaper, but it is not the least important part either. The article has 837 words, a size that is well above the average length of the articles on climate change (541 words). This reflects the significant valuation the newspaper made of the specific event and issues that the article covers. The headline highlights the role of Britain in an international conference on greenhouse gases. The first few paragraphs emphasize the commitments of industrialized countries (l. 1-19, col. 1).

##### **2. Objects**

The main themes/objects of the article are the international politics of climate change and British diplomacy. Another important object is Thatcher’s personal role in the international politics of climate change. Domestic policies with relevance for GHG emissions are a marginal object in the article.

### 3. Actors

The actors represented in the *Times* article are the following, in the order they first appear in the text: UK, ‘world’s leading industrialized countries’, United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, European countries, ‘environment pressure groups’, Mrs Thatcher, Mr David Trippier, ‘new Cabinet committee’, British delegation, The Netherlands, France, Ministers, Greenpeace, Mr Andrew Kerr, Mr Stewart Boyle, Association for the Conservation of Energy, national environment ministers, UN officials, Whitehall sources. I have considered countries as actors because they, or their representatives, have agency in international politics.

The vast majority of these actors are official figures (the state itself, its government or diplomats). This is an indicator of the preferred sources and of the article’s main framing of the issue, along with the official line. In this article’s depiction of social actors, the following aspects are worth noting: the repetition of references to certain actors, such as David Trippier, environment minister, or Margaret Thatcher; the emphasis and the space awarded to representing them; and the fact that the article’s account of politics follows the views of these actors quite closely. All this constitutes these actors into the prime definers of the represented reality. Theirs is the predominant framing of the article<sup>66</sup>.

### 4. Language and rhetoric

Language choices and rhetorical constructions create in this article a very positive image of British diplomacy and of the international politics of climate change. The headline’s expressions ‘key role’ and ‘securing accord’ strongly promotes Britain and British politics. The next thing to note is the repeated use of the word ‘leading’. It is employed four times à propos ‘(industrialized) nations’ or British politicians, contributing to a depiction of Britain as the leader of the leaders. The importance of the agreement reached in Noordwijk is reinforced by repeatedly classifying it as the ‘first’ one of its kind (three times). And Britain (and other European countries) ‘went even further’, we are told. Metaphors like ‘It has not all been *plain sailing*’ and ‘the possibility had *loomed* of a *disastrous* split declaration’ enhance the role and status of

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<sup>66</sup> Note how this ties in with discursive strategies, as detailed below.

Britain. Many other linguistic and rhetorical aspects could be detailed here but that is not the main research strategy of my approach.

I should note that up to this point my approach is not very different from other models of discourse analysis of media texts, such as van Dijk's (1988a; 1988b). As I have already mentioned, he also accounts for lexical and rhetorical aspects of texts. Certain aspects of Fairclough's (1995b) work have also been used so far. It is from the next point onwards that the approach that I propose becomes distinct in relation to others.

## 5. Discursive strategies

The *Times* representation of the Noordwijk conference is a powerful legitimization of British diplomacy and of the international politics of climate change. Positioning Britain as the mediator and the rescuer of the conference aids the construction of an image of international leadership, as noted in the language and rhetoric section. The dominant framing of McCarthy and Oakley's<sup>67</sup> article is clearly the one advanced by David Trippier. He is quoted and his interpretation of the conference is aired several times. Trippier's strategy of framing the conference as a victory of British diplomacy was therefore very 'profitable'. The adherence of the journalists to the government's propaganda is easily read in l. 12-29, col. 3 possibly transcribed from a government press release or briefing (note the effect of lexical choices such as 'demonstrate', 'matching', 'bring...to the fore', 'preserve the planet'). There is both a descriptive and interpretive reinforcement of Thatcher's views and roles. The only potentially critical look into climate change politics comes in the reference to the implications of the international agreement in terms of national policies, such as transport policy. But in the context of the whole article this actually aids the strategy of sanctioning and promoting the government as a (governmental) solution to the problem is advanced immediately (l. 55-59, col. 1).

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<sup>67</sup> Michael McCarthy was appointed environment correspondent for the *Times* in the beginning of 1989. He was previously a general news reporter at the newspaper. Robin Oakley was political correspondent for the *Times*.

Non-governmental organisations – Greenpeace and the Association for the Conservation of Energy<sup>68</sup> – constructed the Noordwijk conference for the journalists as a failure, by dramatizing it and heightening its importance (conference as a ‘disaster’; conference as the ‘last chance’), and by pointing to the fact that there was no *specific* commitment in the conference. However, this strategy did not get much receptivity in the *Times*. A reference to NGOs’ reactions seems to be there only for ‘balance’, i.e. to avoid charges of bias, with no impact in the broader construction of the issue by the journalist.

On the whole, McCarthy and Oakley’s narrativization of the politics of climate change in terms of actors, actions and outcomes emphasizes the responsible role of industrialized countries in general and Britain in particular (the absence of references to the weight of such countries in the overall GHG emissions can be considered strategic).

## **6. Ideological standpoints**

Ideologically, this article is clearly on the side of the British Conservative government. As we have seen, the government’s perspective dominates almost the entire article. A nationalistic or patriotic ideology seems to prevail in the article. But the article also (implicitly) supports and reinforces the described international political order, or international distribution of power. The idea that climate change can be solved by international agreements is clearly present in this article. In Dryzek’s (1997) terms, we can then classify the discourse of this article as administrative rationalism, the assumption that environmental problems can be sorted by legal-political formulas. There is also a hint of an ideology of ecological modernization in Thatcher’s suggestion that ‘growth and environmental protection are compatible’ (l. 36-38, col. 3).

## **II. Contextual analysis**

### **1. Comparative-synchronic analysis**

On the day McCarthy and Oakley’s article appeared in the *Times*, 08.11.89, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* published one article each on the Noordwijk conference:

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<sup>68</sup> The latter is an association of energy conservation industries.

‘Greenhouse gas freeze blocked’ by Paul Brown (*Guardian*, page 24), and ‘Ministers back down on CO<sub>2</sub> levels’ by Richard North (*Independent*, page 16).

The *Times* article contrasts starkly with the *Guardian*’s. A simple comparison of the headlines points to the radically opposing understandings of the role of the UK in the Netherlands meeting. Both in the headline and in the body of the article, Paul Brown<sup>69</sup> presents the UK government as a blocking force, precluding the achievement of a desirable international agreement. Paul Brown is also attentive to the incoherences of the UK’s governmental policies, referring the roads programme, and its consequences for GHG emissions. Another contradiction that is discussed is international action: while Thatcher is expected to advertise Britain’s international role in environmental protection at the UN, Trippier opposes agreement on reducing GHG emissions. This double face of British environmental politics is further exposed with resort to Greenpeace’s interpretation:

... Mr Steve Elsworth, Greenpeace air pollution campaigner: ‘Britain is all talk and no action. It is an internationally co-ordinated public relations exercise with no solid content in it.’

The relation between politics and science is also put into a different perspective in this article. Brown’s remarks stand out against McCarthy and Oakley’s reference to Thatcher’s will ‘to ensure that any initiatives taken to protect the environment are scientifically ... sound’.

Environmental groups believe that because the big industrial nations control these committees<sup>70</sup> and are anxious to avoid curbs on industry and car use, they are using this scientific research as an excuse for taking no action.

In the *Independent*, Richard North’s<sup>71</sup> headline, ‘Ministers back down on CO<sub>2</sub> levels’, is also in contrast with the *Times* article. He highlights the fact that countries agreed on a less ambitious target than freezing emissions at 1988 levels by 2000, thus

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Brown was environment correspondent for the *Guardian*. Later, he authored a book entitled *Global Warming. Can Civilization Survive?* (London, Blandford, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> Committees of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, then chaired by Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union.

<sup>71</sup> Richard North was the first environment correspondent for the *Independent*. He later wrote *Life on a Modern Planet. A Manifesto for Progress* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995) exalting the virtues of multinationals, capitalism and globalisation.

effectively rejecting the Netherlands' proposal. North subtly promotes a conservative view of economic growth, which sees environmental regulation as a hindrance:

Yesterday's agreement said the freeze would 'be set at levels to be considered by the International Panel on Climate Change and the Second World Climate Conference of November 1990' ... This wording, which was brokered by David Trippier ... matters because it allows for continued raised emissions of carbon dioxide, which most rich countries believe are necessary to their economic growth.

This is an ideological viewpoint that is usually antagonistic towards international agreements or treaties, and suggests approval of the Ministers' act of 'backing down'. In the case of this article, the *Independent* is ideologically positioned to the right of the *Times*.

The analysis of the *Guardian's* and *Independent's* representations of the Noordwijk conference indicates that comparison – across newspapers, and across authors of articles – can be very useful because it shows that alternatives exist in the discursive construction of reality<sup>72</sup>.

## 2. Historical-diachronic analysis

The Noordwijk conference was the first attempt to achieve international regulation of the GHG emissions of industrialized countries. However, countries like the United States and the United Kingdom were not willing to support the leadership of the Netherlands' government. Britain had an international political agenda that was not compatible with Noordwijk, and a day after the conference Thatcher gave a speech at the United Nations that strongly emphasized the role of the whole international community, and of the United Nations, in addressing climate change.

Let us start by looking at some of the articles that were published before the Noordwijk conference, as they spell out the prospects and expectations for the negotiations, and give us a wider picture of each newspapers' discourse on climate change. On 28.10.89, the *Guardian* carries an article headlined 'Bush under fire on

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<sup>72</sup> Other methods of discourse analysis discussed above also entail a comparative work. However, in some cases, as we have seen, this is not facilitated by the tools of analysis (e.g. 'macro-structure'). And in all cases, the potential gains of comparative analysis are not as explicitly and minutely explored as I have suggested.



greenhouse effect: President accused of renegeing on campaign pledges', by Simon Tisdall. Tisdall points to the contradictions between Bush's stated intentions and real actions – while he claims to be the 'environment president', his policies do not match. The article conveys a strong image of in-fighting in the US administration over the greenhouse effect and the position to adopt at the Netherlands, and is quite critical of the US and of Bush's propaganda. This article helps understanding of the role that the US decided to play in Noordwijk, opposing concrete commitments in the same way as the United Kingdom.

Extended analysis to be presented in chapter five shows that, in the months preceding November 1989, the *Guardian* tended to promote environmental protection and often called for a precautionary approach to climate change. This means taking action even before full scientific proof of an evil is gathered, in order to avoid that evil. This standpoint naturally leads to a critical view of Bush's policies and of Britain's attempt to avoid specific commitments on greenhouse emissions.

On 07.11.89 the *Guardian* carried one article on the Noordwijk conference entitled 'Britain stalls on warming' by Paul Brown. The image of Britain blocking the Netherlands' call for limits on GHG emissions is prevalent in this article, as it is on the one from 08.11.89 ('Greenhouse gas freeze blocked'). Trippier's call for scientific evidence is contrasted with the position of Dr Mostafa Tolba, executive director of the UN environment programme, who 'warned the conference: 'It is almost a virtual certainty our planet faces unprecedented climate change. In the face of catastrophic possibilities, we cannot await empirical certainty. We know enough right now to begin action.'" Ideologically, this precautionary stance is profoundly different from Trippier's requirement of scientific proof, and it is clear on which side Paul Brown sits. Like the article from 08.11.89, this one also explores the inconsistencies of British policies on climate change.

The *Independent* carried another article on the Noordwijk conference, also written by Richard North, on 07.11.89. The focus of that article, headlined 'US plays for time in pollution war'<sup>73</sup>, is on the United States, which conveys the idea that this is the

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<sup>73</sup> The expression 'pollution war' is sensationalist and inaccurate.

leader country. Like in the article published on 08.11.89, Britain's role in the *Independent's* narrative is minimal. Previous coverage of climate change by the *Independent* indicates that this newspaper swings between the promotion of environmental values and an uncritical amplification of the government's construction of climate change. Occasionally, the *Independent* sounds sceptical towards environmental claims in general, and climate change in particular. The factor that explains these variations is authorship. Different journalists have different ideological perspectives in their analyses of climate change. Richard North tends to speak from a neo-liberal standpoint, which is in general opposed to regulations of economic activity. This contributes to a better understanding of his coverage of the Noordwijk conference.

The day before the start of the conference, 05.11.89, the *Sunday Times* published an article entitled 'The greenhouse effect: fact or fantasy?', by Richard Palmer<sup>74</sup>. The framing of the problem highlights scientific uncertainty around the greenhouse effect: 'Take 10 scientists and you will get 10 different answers [to questions about the future impacts of the greenhouse effect]'. In anticipation of attempts for regulations in the conference, Palmer's main argument is that there is no foundation for making 'big sacrifices' to address the problem. We are told that to reduce GHG emissions 'populations may well have to agree to lower standards of living or at least lower rates of economic growth.' This is presented as a matter of fact, as opposed to the scientific knowledge of the greenhouse effect, which is constructed as a matter of opinion<sup>75</sup>. The British government's position, opposing international commitments on the issue before the IPCC's reports, is seen as 'sensible'. Palmer finishes with an even more reactionary note, mistrustful of all science:

There is just one problem. Although many more scientific reports on the greenhouse effect will have been published by [June 1990], it is unlikely that the scientists will be any nearer agreement.

The first article appearing in the *Times* on the Noordwijk conference was headlined 'Britain in new dispute over global warming' (Michael McCarthy, 07.11.89, page 12).

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<sup>74</sup> Environment correspondent and later Home Affairs correspondent for the *Sunday Times*.

Although the conflictual position of Britain in the conference is hinted at in the headline, the article largely legitimises the British stance. David Trippier gets a very positive representation with his intervention in the Netherlands being described as a ‘leading role’. As we have seen, this type of representation would be taken further in the *Times* the following day. McCarthy’s article provides no information on the positions of the Netherlands and all the other countries that are in favour of the adoption of a limit for emissions, although such countries were the large majority at Noordwijk. This is a form of selection (meaning ‘exclusion’) of information to support the point being made. The article ends with an emphasis on the (imagined) negative consequences of the adoption of regulations of GHG emissions: ‘Industrialized nations agreeing on CO emission limits will need to undertake intensive energy efficiency campaigns and impose traffic restrictions.’ Note how this article implicitly builds on the scepticism and conservatism of Palmer’s prior article.

The quotes chosen by McCarthy show Trippier disqualifying the Dutch meeting as an adequate locus for decision-making.

‘This is not the meeting at which we should be invited to make specific binding international commitments on CO emissions.’ ‘That was for the fora of conventions’, he said, referring to the Framework Convention on the Atmosphere being drafted by the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change...

This strategy fits well into the plans of Margaret Thatcher and the government to constitute the United Nations as the appropriate site for decision-making on climate change, as the United Nations speech of Margaret Thatcher would soon later epitomize.

Further to synchronic comparison, diachronic analysis shows how ideological differences between newspapers in the representation of climate change are historically constituted. Analysis of the historical context of the Noordwijk conference contributes to a better understanding of the discourses of different social actors.

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<sup>75</sup> One should note that the relation between GHG reductions, quality of life, and economic growth are viewed by other analysts very differently from the *Times* depiction. Some consider that environmental protection is conducive to, not a hindrance of, economic growth and higher standards of living.

### 3.4. Writing up

The final stage of discourse analysis is writing through the interpretive account. This is a necessary part of any research programme, but it is one that tends to be left unaccounted for. Writing about discourses is producing another discourse, one that follows the conventions of the academic genre. So I think that it is important to ask questions about the writing process itself. How does one write about qualitative aspects of a large amount of data? What aspects of the data does the researcher select for the writing? Which image of the analysed discourse is constructed in the writing?

In extensive discourse analysis, it is virtually impossible to refer in detail to all the units of analysis. If you have (as does this thesis), a starting corpus of over two thousand articles, even if you reduce the discourse analysis to a few hundred articles (as I will with the focus on ‘critical discourse moments’), it is not viable to present all the textual work that is undertaken. Therefore, what I will provide in writing the following chapters is a summary of the traits of the data considered the most significant.

I have chosen to follow a chronological order in the writing. It has the advantage of respecting the real sequence of events and of publication of articles, and of facilitating the analysis of the historical character of discourses. Hence, my writing will schematically look like this: I will present the main aspects of the (chronologically) initial texts of my corpus – representation of objects, actors, discursive strategies and effects, and ideological standpoints. From there, I will mainly discuss whether the following texts reproduce the initial discourses, challenge them or produce new constructions of reality altogether.

In doing so, I will summarize the characteristics of texts, but also offer some text analysis in full detail. This tends to be done on a selection of articles that embody specific ideological stances, illustrate specific discursive strategies or effects, or represent certain discursive turns. Specific parts (typically sentences or paragraphs) of those articles will be quoted. The selected parts are the ones that appear most important in the construction of a certain meaning.

As implied above, many articles tend to follow similar lines and, therefore, there is a saturation of discursive representations of reality. My writing would be very

repetitive if I were to account for all the recurrent strategies and standpoints in the news. However, it is important to provide an image of the relative frequency of each of those types of discourse: this will be done by quantitative measures, whenever this is adequate. Hence, the number of articles promoting certain standpoints will occasionally be mentioned.

## CONCLUSIONS

Combining the theoretical critique started in chapter two with empirical work, this chapter has proposed a re-assessment of mainstream models of discourse analysis of media texts. We have focused on the conceptual tools that researchers employ as instruments of dissection and reconstitution of texts. We have seen that each analytical tool both shows and hides certain aspects of the text, and has implications on the images we build of discourses. In this chapter, I have also advanced an alternative approach for analysing media texts. It is a 'critical' form of discourse analysis, in the line of CDA, which integrates several influences and facets of analysis, and addresses issues such as time in discourse analysis, the discursive manipulation of reality by different social actors, and the modes of social operation of discourse. The scope of analysis in such an approach is both synchronic and diachronic. It privileges the analysis of continuity (and discontinuity) over the analysis of the episodic. Implicitly, my approach promotes the comprehensive analysis of the media discourse on particular issues over an extended period of time.

Like any other method, the one that I proposed generates some difficulties. Because of the preferred wide scope of analysis, the dimension of materials to be analysed can be vast. It is then unmanageable for a sole researcher to analyse each unit of analysis (typically a news article). The suggested solution is to analyse some periods exhaustively and then focus on 'critical discourse moments', which seems a more adequate answer than random sampling or an arbitrary form of choice of texts. The analysis of those 'moments' allows for the identification of discursive turns and/or continued lines of argumentation at particularly important times in the social construction of an issue.

The analysis of discourse, from discursive strategies to ideological standpoints, is essentially an interpretive work, which is probably not replicable in the exact terms by other individuals<sup>76</sup>. If the researcher is mainly preoccupied with issues of reliability and verifiability, then discourse analysis in general, and the approach that I proposed in particular, are not the right choices<sup>77</sup>. But if the goal is to understand how meanings – assigned through language to reality – are a crucial basis for social and political (inter)action, and to look at the ways in which those meanings are constituted, discourse analysis offers an important potential.

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<sup>76</sup> As argued by Flowerdew (1999), CDA is open to multiple readings. In spite of the attempt to distance herself from discourse-analytical readings, it is inevitable that the analyst/interpreter lets her own values through. As put by Fairclough (1992b: 199), '[a]nalysts are not above the social practice they analyse; they are inside it.' On the position of the researcher in discourse analysis see Burr (1995, ch. 10).

<sup>77</sup> Content analysis is possibly a better option for this researcher. See Fisher (1996) and Potter (1996; cit. by Gill, 2000) for a discussion of reliability issues in frame analysis and discourse analysis respectively.

## CHAPTER 5

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### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT INTO A POLITICAL ISSUE: 1985-1990

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#### INTRODUCTION

The final years of the 1980s were crucial for the definition of the enhanced greenhouse effect. The meanings that this issue came to have at political and public levels were discursively produced in these early years of debate. It was at the end of the decade that the greenhouse effect was constituted into a political matter and many of the political and institutional arrangements to address the problem were decided then. The present chapter aims to discuss and explain such discursive constructions. For that purpose it will engage in a detailed discourse analysis of the articles published by the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* on the topic. To enable us to understand the changes occurring in the late 1980s in the press representation of the greenhouse effect, the analysis starts as far back as 1985, with a characterisation of early reports on the problem. It was in 1985 that the first major international conference on climate took place, as described in chapter one. Particular attention will be paid later in this chapter to the diverse constructions that different social and political actors made of the issue and to how their views were taken up in press representations of the greenhouse effect.

I will attempt to explain change and continuity in the discourse of the press and of social actors on climate change and how this related to policies and other practices. Up to December 1988 all the articles published by the three newspapers were analysed. However, as explained in chapter four, not all articles will be cited in this chapter. After 1988 a certain recurrence of discursive standings is detectable and further analysis is therefore centred on two critical discourse moments – November 1989 and May 1990. The rationale for these choices is provided in the respective sections.

## **1. FIRST WAS THE VOID: 1985-1988**

Until late 1988, coverage of the greenhouse effect in the British press was extremely scarce. Important international events such as the 1985 Villach conference and James Hansen's testimony to the US Senate in 1986 which contributed to setting the American policy agenda on climate change, went unnoticed in the UK press. The silence of the UK press is not totally attributable to a lack of awareness of the issue in public debate. Even before 1988, there had been considerable activity around the issue in various spheres of society (e.g. Hart and Victor, 1993; Paterson, 1996). But the press did not seem to recognise the importance of the problem until there was an internal governmental drive to focus on it, as we will see below.

### **1.1. 1985-1987: A novel scientific metaphor: introducing the greenhouse effect**

Between 1985 and 1987 the main discursive object constituted by the press in relation to the greenhouse effect was scientific knowledge. All but one of the 21 articles carried by the *Guardian* and the *Times* put science at the centre of analysis, and presented the problem as a scientific issue. Reporters replicated mainstream scientific publications, explored the work of some scientists in detail and attempted to use arguments characteristic of science. The only exception is one article in the *Guardian* on 13.06.86, inaccurately headlined 'Senate sniffs ozone', by John Ardill, which referred to a 'wake up call' by a US senator to the greenhouse effect. In the *Times*, the first four articles on the greenhouse effect, published between 1985 and 1987, came under the 'Science report' section. The *Guardian* printed ten out of a total of 16 articles in a section entitled 'Futures', between 1985 and the beginning of 1988. This indicates the relative homogeneity of the construction of the issue throughout the three years.

Predictably, the main actors in press discourse in this period are scientists. Scientists are mentioned or quoted in all the 21 articles. Except for the *Guardian* article from 13.06.86, and some passing references in another article, no policy makers, NGOs, or business actors were addressed. The press thus positioned scientists as the exclusive definers of climate change in this phase. Trumbo (1996) found a similar



pattern in the American media in the 1980s. Although articles promoted an essentially scientific discourse, the headlines exhibited linguistic and rhetorical characteristics that are typically journalistic. Take for example ‘One view of the flourishing world, as seen from an extinct Hawaiian volcano’<sup>1</sup>, ‘Gloom over weather patterns’<sup>2</sup>, and ‘Jungle warfare’<sup>3</sup>. Metaphors and analogies are used to talk about scientific advances. The end product is a peculiar amalgam of scientific reasoning and common lore, with a hint of good humour.

In this section, we will engage in comparative and historical analyses of the *Guardian* and the *Times*, highlighting the specific discursive strategies that were used to represent climate change.

#### **a) Constructing an image of certainty**

From 1985 to 1987 the *Times* represented scientific knowledge as a consensual and reliable domain. Also proposing that kind of reading, albeit to a lesser degree, the *Guardian* occasionally contextualized certain claims in the wider scientific field and accounted for the tensions and divisions within the sciences of climate change. A number of discursive strategies were used, and these will be discussed briefly in this section.

- **Authorization.** The *Times* tended to adopt a discursive strategy of authorization (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999): authors of press articles sought to legitimate knowledge claims by resorting to the authority of individuals and institutions holding positions of recognized importance. The scientific journals *Science* and *Nature* were the sources of six articles. The names of researchers and their institutional affiliation were referred to in 20 articles. In the *Guardian*, too, many articles were based on studies originating in prominent research bodies. Appeal to authority actually involves a mutual process of legitimation. On the one hand, it backs up the press’s own option for amplifying certain claims. We have seen in chapter two how sourcing patterns dominated by hierarchy can be associated with the journalistic myth of objectivity

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Walgate, *Guardian*, 20.06.85.

<sup>2</sup> Pearce Wright, *Times*, 13.08.85.

(Becker, 1967; Hall et al., 1978; Iggers, 1998). On the other hand, such claims gain public and possibly political legitimation with their appearance in the media, and their sponsors (individual scientists and scientific bodies) gain some form of recognition.

- **Certainty-building.** Most articles in the *Times* tended to construct an image of certainty regarding scientific knowledge of the greenhouse effect. The use of terms such as ‘detailed and reliable records’<sup>4</sup>, the recurrent employment of the word ‘show’ in relation to records or results<sup>5</sup>, and of the word ‘will’ for talking about impacts forecasted by scientists<sup>6</sup>, amongst other possible examples, contributed to an image of a solid and trustable knowledge. The certainty-building strategy is sometimes traceable to scientists: ‘We know that something is going to happen’ Tom Wigley, from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) of the University of East Anglia was quoted as saying in a piece published on 30.12.87<sup>7</sup>. In the *Guardian*, half the articles also constructed the greenhouse effect as a real problem which should be taken seriously. Successive texts pointed to indicators of the problem such as drought in sub-Saharan Africa, increase in plant biomass or transformations in glaciers, thus creating an image of accumulating scientific knowledge and evidence which strengthened such claims.

- **Rationalization.** At a more general level, there was a strategy of rationalization of the debate on the greenhouse effect. The issue was presented as a tractable scientific problem (see Shackley and Wynne, 1996), requiring adequate research by academics which, logically, required increased support to science. Promised answers would emerge in due course. In light of the concept of ideology I have proposed in chapter two, involving ideas and values that either legitimate a certain status quo or motivate its alteration, the dominant standpoint here is what we could call techno-scientific rationalism (see Habermas, 1970). This kind of depiction of scientific knowledge enhanced the credibility of science and scientific institutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Simons, *Guardian*, 07.08.87.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Gloom over weather patterns’, Pearce Wright, *Times*, 13.08.85.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Gases pushing up ground-level temperatures’, Pearce Wright, *Times*, 21.01.86.

<sup>6</sup> ‘How greenhouse effect might help cyclones to grow’, John Newell, *Times*, 20.04.87.

<sup>7</sup> ‘It is going to turn out very nasty’, W. Burroughs and W. Greaves, *Times*, 30.12.87.

## b) Contextualizations of knowledge

In the *Guardian*, scientific knowledge did not always appear as homogeneous as it did in the *Times*. While the *Times* tended to focus on one dimension or interpretation of knowledge, the *Guardian* often stated the (seemingly) contradictory nature of different pieces of evidence or claims:

First you heard the bad news: the greenhouse effect will make life very unpleasant. ... Then the good news: things were not going to be so bad after all.<sup>8</sup>

One school of climatology... A second view...<sup>9</sup>

Acknowledging contradictions does not mean journalists were dismissing the greenhouse problem. On the contrary sometimes. For example, in the face of ambiguous facts, John Gribbin's discursive strategy was to make sense of contradictions in such a way as to turn them into indicators of the greenhouse effect, thus reinforcing the thesis. In one article, Gribbin, an author of popular science books on the greenhouse effect, construed the thickening polar icecaps as grounds not for refutation but for believing in global warming<sup>10</sup>. In another text, he argued that the then-present cold weather 'may be a direct result of the world getting warmer'<sup>11</sup>. However, the (apparent) paradoxes of scientific knowledge were an easy target for mockery and, indirectly, presented as a reason to mistrust science and scientists.

Climatologists, fresh from their triumphant claims that the recent cold weather is proof that the Earth is getting warmer, have now found a culprit for the ice ages – trees.<sup>12</sup>

There are aspects of intertextuality here, as the reference to Gribbin's article mentioned above is clear. The *Guardian* was also more nuanced than the *Times* in depictions of scientific certainty as shown in the quotes below.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Jungle warfare - Carbon dioxide levels have turned plant competition into a growing problem', Paul Simons, *Guardian*, 07.08.87.

<sup>9</sup> 'Absorbing reflections – Hot or cold, we might be getting warmer when it comes to counteracting changes in climate', Bill McGuire, *Guardian*, 14.08.87.

<sup>10</sup> 'The longer range forecast', John Gribbin, *Guardian*, 15.08.86.

<sup>11</sup> 'Weather – blowing hot and cold', *Guardian*, 21.01.87.

<sup>12</sup> Opening paragraph of 'Getting warm. Climatologists believe trees responsible for ice ages', unattributed, *Guardian*, 13.04.87.

These calculations need confirmation. ...

There must be other climatic factors at work to explain as large an increase as 0.7 degrees Centigrade in a decade...<sup>13</sup>

... the greenhouse theory ... still unproven...

Dr Kelly dismisses ... casts some doubt [on NASA's predictions and statements]...<sup>14</sup>

Predominantly, scientific uncertainty about climate change appeared in the *Guardian* 'less as a representation of ignorance or failures in science, than a controllable phenomenon open to rational prediction *within* science' (Zehr, 2000: 94), thus continuously empowering science as the oracle to which society must pay heed.

### c) (Under)estimating the risk

While early press representations of the greenhouse effect exhibited a strong degree of confidence in the forecasts of temperature rises, they did not explore their full consequences, i.e., the impacts of the greenhouse effect. Throughout 1985 and 1986, except for one mention of weather changes in an article headlined 'Gloom over weather patterns'<sup>15</sup>, the *Times* did not refer to any implications of the greenhouse effect. Similarly, most articles in the *Guardian* did not explore the impacts of the greenhouse effect. Still, in a few articles, there was a strategy of restrained emphasis on risk. Gribbin thus called attention to the impacts of climate change on agriculture in sub-Saharan African and the consequences for population, and the need for industry, agriculture and planning to account for the possibility of more severe winters in Britain<sup>16</sup>. Advice was geared towards adaptation rather than prevention of climate change.

Gribbin created a discursive distance between himself and other alarmist depictions of climate change when he wrote:

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<sup>13</sup> 'One view of the flourishing world, as seen from an extinct Hawaiian volcano', Robert Walgate, *Guardian*, 20.06.85.

<sup>14</sup> 'Senate sniffs ozone', John Ardill, *Guardian*, 13.08.86.

<sup>15</sup> Pearce Wright, *Times*, 13.08.85.

<sup>16</sup> 'Not just a spot of nasty weather. Focus on the long-term implications of the sub-Saharan drought', *Guardian*, 18.04.85; 'Weather – blowing hot and cold', *Guardian*, 21.01.87.

Many scare stories surrounding the predicted 'greenhouse effect' ... focus on the threat of rising sea levels and coastal inundation as the glaciers retreat and icecaps melt.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, neither the *Guardian* nor the *Times* presented the traits of catastrophism that Weingart et al. (2000) found in the German press. Nor was there very obvious exaggeration (Bell, 1994a; 1994b). It may well be the case, however, that such scare stories were carried by the British popular papers in the 1980s, rather than in these broadsheet papers.

Gribbin did re-frame the greenhouse effect by bringing in various time scales. 'In the long term, such a threat may be real', he noted. But not for the near future. The headline of the article – 'The longer range forecast' – also anchored readings of the greenhouse effect in the long term. Bell (1994a) has argued that the omission of time scope for forecasts is a form of overstatement of the problem as it may create the idea of imminence, a symmetrical equivalent to the news value of recency (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

The discursive construction of the greenhouse effect started taking on a new face in the *Times*, in October 1987, when journalists attempted to associate the severe storm of October 16 with the greenhouse effect<sup>18</sup>. The storm was responsible for 14 deaths across southern England and caused a large amount of material destruction. It is therefore no surprise that the *Times* was keen to make sense of the event with recourse to some more portentous explanation. Simultaneously, the storm allowed journalists to make sense of the greenhouse effect, by linking scientific theories to the here-and-now of observable weather events. Also, the so-called Great Storm met the news values of unexpectedness, facticity and relevance for readers (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 1978). The storm became a symbolic moment in the dramatization of the greenhouse effect.

A relevant aspect of this form of representation is that Britain becomes the referent for assessing changes in the atmosphere and in the climate. Reasoning about the greenhouse effect in national(istic) terms is appealing for the press, since the proximity factor, another important news value, makes the problem much more 'real'. If we add

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<sup>17</sup> 'The longer range forecast', John Gribbin, *Guardian*, 15.08.86.

to that specific calculations of the financial costs of extreme weather events such as that in the *Times* on 18.10.87, the effects of the greenhouse effect acquire a quite compelling meaning. News professionals sought further confirmation of their causal analysis from environmental scientists who desperately tried to avoid linking the greenhouse effect and the storms. These conflicts are perceptible in an article where the journalist ends up falling into an inconsistent position by promoting his speculative analysis and then being contradicted by the scientists' quotes later in the text<sup>19</sup>. While all three articles that the *Times* carried in 1987 about climate change reported it in relation to the extreme weather in Britain, the *Guardian* did not make the link between the storms and the greenhouse effect.

#### **d) Disregarding the causes**

Both the *Guardian* and the *Times* were rather vague about possible causes of the greenhouse effect in the first few years of coverage. 'Burning of fossil fuels' or 'coal and oil burning' were the typical causes mentioned. Several articles referred to the cause of the greenhouse effect as 'pollution' or as 'industrial pollution'. 'Pollution' is a familiar category with negative connotations (see Hajer, 1995). The term could be used by journalists as a catch-all explanation for this new environmental problem. In many articles, however, the causes of climate change were left unspecified.

There are several problems with this presentation of the issue. First, the term 'pollution' or even 'industrial pollution' is imprecise, and an inaccurate way to refer to the multiple sources of GHGs. Second, in the construction of the issue as 'industrial pollution' or as 'burning of fossil fuels', no link is made between specific social and economic practices such as transport, agriculture, or domestic and commercial uses of energy, and GHGs. Therefore, important agents are excluded from the construction of the problem, namely governments and the public.

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<sup>18</sup> 'Is Britain's weather getting worse? Spotlight on the question being asked after the killer hurricane that caught everybody by surprise', Tim Rayment, Charles Langley and Hugh Clayton, *Times*, 18.10.87; 'Pollution may be the cause: Britain's storms', Robert Mathews, *Times*, 23.10.87.

<sup>19</sup> 'Pollution may be the cause: Britain's storms', Robert Mathews, *Times*, 23.10.87.

### e) Not assigning responsibility

Political responsibility for the greenhouse effect was completely unaccounted for in the *Times* until 1988. There was no politicisation of the greenhouse effect, no debate of the possible roles of the government in relation to the problem. In the *Guardian*, the landscape was similar. The framing of the greenhouse effect in almost all articles excluded consideration of individual or governmental responsibilities in the causation of the problem. Potential solutions to the problem were not debated at all in the *Times*. There was no consideration of approaches to solve the problem - an important political position per se. Wilkins and Patterson (1991) found very similar framings in the American press.

In contrast with the *Times*, a significant proportion of articles in the *Guardian* had solutions to the greenhouse effect as the most salient discursive object. Authors tended to endorse techno-managerial options, such as massive deviation of sea water, the installation of reflectors in rooftops around the world, or gigantic tree planting schemes<sup>20</sup>. Another article underscored the accidental benefits of land fertilizers: added phosphorous increases the flora of rivers, which absorbs more carbon dioxide<sup>21</sup>. Although almost anecdotal, these views reinforced the notion that science and technology can provide solutions for the greenhouse problem. Throughout the early period (1985-1988), there was only one (short) article raising the idea of a more radical change, related to consumption and lifestyles: 'Eating our way out of the greenhouse effect'<sup>22</sup> argued that a change to a vegetarian diet would solve the problem. Less land would be needed for agriculture; more could therefore be forested to absorb pollution.

The emphasis on techno-managerial solutions is typically associated with what is commonly described as a Promethean ideological standpoint. Inspired by the Greek Titan Prometheus who stole the fire from Zeus and gave it to humans, the term Promethean refers here to a set of ideas about relations between human and nature. The

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<sup>20</sup> 'World's rising tides wait for no man. US scientists say average sea level rising', Anthony Tucker, *Guardian*, 01.04.86; 'Absorbing reflections - Hot or cold, we might be getting warmer when it comes to counteracting changes in climate', Bill McGuire, *Guardian*, 14.08.87; 'Trees hold carbon key', Andrew Veitch and Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 13.02.88.

<sup>21</sup> 'How the chemicals that keep the planet fed could also keep the planet cool. Focus on how fertilizer pollution may be helping to reduce the greenhouse effect', Robert Walgate, *Guardian*, 01.11.85.

<sup>22</sup> Unattributed, *Guardian*, 01.05.87.

modern Prometheus exploits nature without fear of retribution (Beckerman, 1974; 1995; Simon, 1981; Dryzek, 1997).

The idea that human interference was seriously destabilising the climate was occasionally challenged in the *Guardian*. The 'sceptical' position can be clearly traced to specific authors, most notably Anthony Tucker, science correspondent. Reporting on an article published by *Science*<sup>23</sup>, Tucker assures his readers that 'whatever we do' a runaway greenhouse effect will not happen and the planet will not dry out. A similar proposition is found in a non-attributed article headlined 'Getting warm. Climatologists believe trees responsible for ice ages', published on 13.04.87, which suggests that we not only can but also should return carbon to the atmosphere, since trees take it from there. These actions will thereby bring good to the world, such as 'tropical vegetation' to England.

#### **f) Journalists' standpoints and scientists' strategies**

Diachronic analysis shows that authors (journalists and other contributors) of newspaper articles tended to convey consistent messages. Writing from distinct discursive standpoints, they were coherent in terms of the ideological construction of society's relations with nature, and used scientific research to support broader arguments about human development and progress. While authors such as Pearce Wright (*Times*), Robert Walgate (*Guardian*) and John Gribbin (*Guardian*) invariably promoted an image of scientific consensus regarding the claim that the greenhouse effect was taking place and had serious implications, Anthony Tucker (*Guardian*) repeatedly used science to downplay the problem and advanced a discourse that saw no limits to growth.

There are indications in news articles that scientists tried to forward their knowledge claims in the media. The pre-publication of scientific findings in the press<sup>24</sup>, for instance, is a tactical form of self-promotion. The rhetorical devices and discursive resources that served the media's goal of persuasion by the creation of drama also,

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<sup>23</sup> 'Spectre of the 'greenhouse effect' fades. US scientists discounting theory of catastrophic global temperature rise', *Guardian*, 06.01.87.

<sup>24</sup> 'Not just a spot of nasty weather', John Gribbin, *Guardian*, 18.04.85.



therefore, served scientists' purposes of heightening attention and expectation in relation to their research. Nevertheless, despite the centrality of scientists in this phase, the limited extent of press coverage and the *Times*' almost exclusive sourcing from mainstream scientific journals kept the public projection of claims on climate change to a minimum. At times, it is also clear in news texts that scientists were relatively restrained in their statements. Given the level of uncertainty and indeterminacy involved in climate research, especially at this early stage, individual scientists tried to find a balance between their promotional and political agendas, and the need to avoid accusations of sensationalism. This was not easy, given the attempts of the press to push further the image of certainty.

Whatever the scientists' strategies, it is important to remain aware of the newspapers' filtering role. Only some researchers and research institutions were awarded space. The Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia (UEA) was the most frequently mentioned scientific institution. Being cited in eight out of 21 articles (1985-8) points to a significant capacity of discursive structuration of the debate. In other words, in the analysis of the greenhouse effect, journalists and feature writers felt the need either to report on CRU's findings or to back up claims with reference to the Unit.

## **1.2. 1988: The first forms of politicisation of the problem**

Between January and September 1988, the *Guardian* published 13 articles on the greenhouse effect, the *Times* carried ten, and the *Independent* just two. The characterisation that the *Guardian* made of the problem is important in terms of its constitution into a political issue. The *Times* also started the politicisation of the greenhouse effect but in a different way by promoting its 'governmentalization'.

### **a) The *Guardian* leads the change**

The first sign of political interest in scientific knowledge of the greenhouse effect was reported in March 1988 with a hearing held by the House of Commons Select

Committee on the Environment. Only the *Guardian* carried the story. Researchers from CRU were said to have told the committee that ‘the World should know in five to 20 years whether the ‘greenhouse effect’ is changing the climate in ways that could spell disaster next century’<sup>25</sup>. In itself, the statement is not very striking. Yet, it was possible to transform this into the ambiguous headline ‘Ecology disaster may be predicted within 20 years’ for the report by John Ardill (03.03.88). The article refers a variety of impacts which are quite alarming, such as a sea level rise of between 20 and 165 centimetres. But it is not clear whether scientists used these specific figures in their presentations to the Select Committee.

It is noticeable that scientists adopted a dual strategy at this time. On the one hand, they advocated a cautious approach, emphasising the need for more research and better knowledge of the phenomenon (see Zehr, 2000). On the other hand, they sought to convey the seriousness of climate change and the urgent need for a response by governments.

At the international level, politicisation of climate change first occurred at the Toronto conference ‘The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security’ (June 27-30, 1988), attended by scientists, policy-makers and diplomats. In the *Guardian*, Tim Radford wrote a dramatic report under the headline ‘Changing climate ‘will alter face of the world’’ (28.06.88). The article heightens climate change both scientifically and politically. It constitutes the Chairman of the ‘international advisory group on ‘greenhouse gases’’, Professor Kenneth Hare, into the main actor. On the political front, the leading role is awarded to Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway, who called for a global convention on climate during the Toronto meeting.

While the climate change forecasts discussed in the conference appear in a conditional mode in the body-text of the article (‘could’, ‘would’), the term ‘will’ was chosen for the headline conferring added certainty and persuasiveness to such predictions. The juxtaposition of different time-scales in the article creates a teleological view of environmental change: ‘The world’s climate could change within the next 50 years in a way unrivalled since the glacial temperatures ended abruptly 10,000 years ago.’ 10,000 years is a geological time-scale, 50 years or ‘the past two

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<sup>25</sup> It is not clear whether ‘spell disaster’ was an expression used by the scientists, but one would guess that it was not.

decades' (further on in the article) are measures of individual time (see Harré et al., 1999). The 'immediate' or 'urgent' character of action required to ameliorate climate change becomes obvious in this line of argumentation.

The following week, the *Guardian* dedicated a very long article (over 1800 words) to the Toronto conference: 'The coming of the big heat – The fears surrounding the greenhouse effect revealed at last week's conference in Toronto.'<sup>26</sup> 'Hello and welcome to the beginning of the end of the world news', is how Radford ironically opened the article. The article evolves into scenarios of the future state of the world under the greenhouse effect, each presented without conditionality. 'The Maldives *will* disappear. So *will* a lot of other coral islands.' (my emphasis). The strategy of mobilizing concern deployed in Radford's previous article is furthered here: 'the warming is now inevitable'; 'any delay in decision making ... will make things worse'; 'Just supposing all that extra warmth was felt only in ten hot days? 'It would kill everything,' [a scientist] said.' Urgency-generation and emphasis on danger are also expressed in the headline, especially by the words 'coming' and 'fear'.

Radford did introduce a critical view of the value of the scientific claims when he stated that '[t]he conference warnings were delivered with bleak certainty... [which] turned out to be a matter of personal conviction rather than proof.' The unknowns facing climate change research were highlighted: 'We have large, large uncertainties'; '[m]ost scientists ... admit they just don't know for certain ...'. Nonetheless, Radford argued that wider reflection must lead to arguments for a precautionary approach (O'Riordan and Cameron, 1994; O'Riordan and Jordan, 1995; Wynne and Mayer, 1993), in favour of preserving the environment we have.

The article also illustrates the strength of scientists' rhetorical devices to frame knowledge for policy-makers and for the media. Some of their words were:

- 'It's time to cut the waffle.'
- '[H]e [a scientist] hadn't brought delegates there to chase a will o' the wisp.'
- 'The world is staring into a dirty crystal ball. If it waits five years to clean it up a bit, the message might be uglier.'

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<sup>26</sup> Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 05.07.88.

Scientists and journalist appear equally determined both to dramatize climate change and emphasize scientific uncertainties. While these may seem antagonistic strategies, they serve important goals for both the scientific and journalistic communities. Dramatization serves the purpose of attention-grabbing. Emphasis on the lack of knowledge reinforces the power of science as the only institution that can provide answers and therefore justifies funding claims for further research (Zehr, 2000). The latter strategy also conveys an image of balance, of the non-simplification of science, and enhances the intellectual credibility of the journalists and their readers.

While the risks associated to climate change had been largely excluded from the press in the period 1985-8, they are now foregrounded. The media needed the issue to acquire political value in order to present it to the public as a threat. From 1988, we can also identify a change in ideological standpoints of the *Guardian*. The Promethean views that were recurrent, albeit not exclusively, in previous years now disappear. The newspaper will, from now on, almost always discuss climate change within a precautionary, sustainable development framework.

## **b) The role of scenarios**

From mid-1988 onwards, forecasts of climate change effects appear frequently in the *Guardian*. The first impacts study to be mentioned<sup>27</sup> presents rising sea levels and cyclones as the main threats to low lying countries. Subsequent features focus on eastern Europe, Bangladesh and the UK<sup>28</sup>. Scenarios represent a step forward in the consolidation of knowledge claims. The greenhouse effect is no longer problematised when one is forecasting its consequences. Given geographical specificity, it is related to everyday activities and experiences such as agriculture, sea defences or the seasons of the year. Scenarios are also a very important form of narrativisation of the greenhouse effect. They tell of what is going to happen in the future, what the outcome of a certain

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<sup>27</sup> 'Third World Report: greenhouse effect threatens tiny islands – Rising seas', David Adamson, *Guardian*, 15.07.88.

<sup>28</sup> 'Greenhouse heat 'threatens Poles'', Tim Radford, 31.08.88; 'Man-made basket case of a country: The causes of the floods in Bangladesh and other unnatural disasters', Walter Schwarz, 07.09.88; 'Sweep of a new bloom - The mixed blessings the greenhouse effect may bring', Richard Gould, 19.07.88; 'Farmers facing a hazy future', Mark Hollingsworth and Richard Norton-Taylor, 08.09.88; and 'Smog danger to hotter Britain', John Ardill, 16.09.88.

course of action is going to be. Scenarios have been a central part of the construction of the problem of climate change - scientifically, politically and journalistically.

### c) The representation of the *Times*

Like the *Guardian*, the *Times* constituted the greenhouse effect as an important risk in articles such as 'Pollution heats up the Earth' by Robert Mathews and 'In Glass Houses' (unattributed)<sup>29</sup>. The risk narrative allows somewhat sensationalist language: '... the Earth's atmosphere is being choked by pollution...', for example, in the opening paragraph of Mathews' piece. Scientists were still positioned as the main actors and the primary definers (Hall et al., 1978) of climate change in the *Times* until the Autumn of 1988. They were evoked in the first paragraph of six out of nine articles.

The *Times* carried one article on the Toronto conference, headlined 'Climate fear brings world pollution curbs nearer'<sup>30</sup>. The text conveys an image of great risk but then invokes CRU's research to say that '[i]n contrast to the doom-laden warnings of some scientists, the British experts believe it is possible to adapt to the climatic changes.' The term 'doom-laden' and the discursive opposition of the views of 'some scientists' with those of 'experts' expresses a discrediting strategy of the former. The article constitutes a turn in the approach of the *Times* to science and scientists thus far. The fact that the UEA scientists also call for strong measures to reduce emissions is given very little space in the article.

Throughout 1988 the *Times* defined the greenhouse effect as a scientific<sup>31</sup> and/or governmental issue. The environment was kept under control of authorized institutions, as the paper attacked environmental NGOs. For example, in the leading article 'In Glass Houses' (02.07.88), the *Times* attempted to de-legitimize 'ecology movements' and 'greens' as definers of the greenhouse effect by accusing them of having 'concentrated on the emotive' and 'dramatic' aspects of climate change. The

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<sup>29</sup> 05.04.88 and 02.07.88 respectively.

<sup>30</sup> 'Climate fear brings world pollution curbs nearer', Robert Mathews and Pearce Wright, *Times*, 28.06.88.

<sup>31</sup> This excludes 'doom'-type scientific views (28.06.88). It is 'hard-headed scientists' (02.07.88) that should be listened to.

article called instead for official recognition of the reality of the problem, and for intervention with the option of developing more nuclear power. This was an early expression of the use of climate change to promote a specific political programme – investment in the nuclear energy industry – that would assume a greater prominence later in the year, as we will see.

## **2. AUTUMN 1988: THE BIG METAMORPHOSIS OR THE GREENING OF THE GOVERNMENT**

A great discursive turn in political and media constructions of the greenhouse effect took place in the autumn of 1988. The signal was given by the widely proclaimed ‘conversion’ of Margaret Thatcher, third time Prime Minister of a Conservative government, to the environmental cause. Mrs. Thatcher had been markedly opposed to, or silent about environmental issues. ‘For nine years, green politics [had] made Mrs Thatcher see red’ as John Ardill put it<sup>32</sup>. Then, an apparent U-turn took place. It happened through a speech she gave to the Royal Society on September, 27, 1988. To the surprise of the scientists and all those who heard about it later in the media, Thatcher declared: ‘It is possible that... we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of ‘the planet itself.’ Ozone and global warming were pronounced as the most urgent and severe problems (Paterson, 1996; various press articles).

The Prime Minister’s sudden move towards the environmental cause may be read in multiple, overlapping ways. First, there is the chance that she may have become genuinely concerned with the state of the natural environment, especially after the substantial technical reading she supposedly did during the summer. She also sought the advice of distinguished figures, such as Sir Crispin Tickell, Britain’s permanent representative to the UN and an important advocate for the environment (McCormick, 1991; Paterson, 1996)<sup>33</sup>. Second, Thatcher may have perceived that the environment

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<sup>32</sup> ‘The Government glimpse of a green light ahead: The implications of Mrs Thatcher’s new environmental stand’, John Ardill, *Guardian*, 29.09.88.

<sup>33</sup> In her memories, Thatcher (1995) states that she developed an interest for the environment a year earlier.

was becoming more salient for sections of the general public. Anderson (1997) claims that popularity of the 'Save the Seals' campaign launched by the *Daily Mail* in the summer of 1988 played a role in Thatcher's 'green transformation'. Third, the Prime Minister may have wanted to ensure that her political opponents did not use the environment to 'attack capitalism, growth and industry' (Thatcher, 1995: 640) by attempting to claim the issue for the Conservatives (Gaber, 1998). Fourthly, Thatcher may have seen the (somewhat) new problems of ozone depletion and the greenhouse effect as an opportunity to clean up the widespread international image of Britain as the 'Dirty Man of Europe.' Sensing, after the Toronto conference, that these issues would inevitably gain importance in international politics, Thatcher may have realized that anticipation could bring Britain influence in international relations. And finally, it is always possible that she may have decided that the global dimension of climate change could shift attention away from the national and local environmental problems at home.

Whatever the motivations, the fact remains that several changes stemmed from Thatcher's public expression of concern. Her speech to the Royal Society had a powerful performative role. By saying that the environment was now on the agenda, she effectively ordered commitment to the amelioration of climate change and investment of attention in it<sup>34</sup>. As Nigel Haigh, an analyst of environmental politics, put it in an article published in the *Independent*:

Up till now being an environmentalist in Britain has been like being a Christian in Rome when his religion was proscribed. Now, Mrs Thatcher has said, in effect, 'alright, you can come out of your caves.' ... Now environmentalism was official.<sup>35</sup>

The press followed this change of heart quite dutifully and there was an upsurge in the number of articles on the topic in all three broadsheet papers. In the three remaining months of 1988, the *Guardian* published 20 articles; the *Times* 20, and the *Independent* 22 articles. The distribution of articles over that time period is also significant. More than half the *Independent* articles appeared in the month immediately

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<sup>34</sup> The following excerpt indicates some of these effects.

The Prime Minister's U-turn on environmental matters has caused a flurry of activity among Civil Service functionaries and research council administrators as well as catching her own ministers on the hop. ('Lost at sea', A. Southward, *Guardian*, 25.10.88).

<sup>35</sup> 'Thatcher speech brings call for cash', Richard North, *Independent*, 29.09.88.

after the speech (14), whereas there were five published in the *Guardian* and ten in the *Times*. The *Independent*'s coverage seems, therefore, to have been the one that was most shaped by the government's agenda. Let us now pursue with a separate analysis of each newspaper.

## **2.1. *Independent***

Before October, the *Independent* had published only two articles on the greenhouse effect in 1988. The newspaper completely disregarded the issue until it was clearly high in the political agenda. Given the importance of the Toronto conference, for example, the choice of the *Independent* to remain silent is a clear indication that, editorially, climate change was not considered important. The lack of coverage denotes lack of interest or even scepticism in relation to the problem. Then, suddenly (i.e. after Thatcher's speech), the *Independent* discovers the greenhouse effect and dedicates very substantial attention to it thereafter.

### **a) Fabricating the threat after the official conversion**

The strongest scientific claim reported in the *Independent* came from the Met Office in an article published on 17.10.88<sup>36</sup>. A temperature increase of 5.2°C was predicted in the following 50-100 years. Note that these predictions are much higher than those of most scientists at the time. The strength of the claim was reinforced by information about the method used to make such forecasts which is a relatively rare feature of science news reporting. The journalist asserted that they were the 'most detailed' undertaken by the Met Office, and commented that they were a 'striking and dramatic new advance' (in the words of a 'senior research figure'). The attention-grabbing headline appeared on the front page of the newspaper, in a clear strategy of dramatization of the greenhouse effect.

This article was part of a special report on the greenhouse effect run by the *Independent* on 17.10.88 consisting of seven articles. All the others were written by

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<sup>36</sup> 'Met Office predicts global-scale floods', Mary Fagan, *Independent*, 17.10.88.



Nicholas Schoon and Tom Wilkie. What explains the appearance of this special report? Was it the Met Office's forecasts? Maybe - but the Met forecasts did not receive any coverage in the *Guardian* or *Times*. The general discursive strategy in the *Independent*'s report was to emphasise the intractability of climate change as expressed, for example, in the following headline: 'The Greenhouse Effect. Fossil fuels pose tough dilemmas. Gas emissions and wealth go together. Can states forgo one without the other?'. The article's answer was no. Other articles highlighted the difficulties involved in combating the greenhouse effect because the technology was too expensive. There was a somewhat conformist and cataclysmic view in this construction of the issue.

#### **b) Scientific knowledge: the state of the art or the art of stating?**

The representation of science in the *Independent* in this period illustrates the importance of the role of the journalist as well as scientific sources in re-framing knowledge (cf. Litfin, 1994). Schoon and Wilkie referred to a 'broad consensus' among scientists concerning the effects of carbon dioxide concentrations on temperatures<sup>37</sup>. This did not exclude the existence of 'mysteries' around the greenhouse effect. Despite acknowledging the existence of anthropogenic climate change, Richard North's main strategy was to emphasize the depth of scientific ignorance (24.10.88). This is visible in the headline to his article: 'Scientists 'still no nearer solution to greenhouse effect''; and in the first paragraph 'Scientists are no nearer being able to predict the outcome of the 'greenhouse effect' than they were a year ago, according to the Department of the Environment'. North's language is quite imprecise: while the title refers to solutions, the opening paragraph and the rest of the article are about the impacts of the greenhouse effect. Nevertheless, there is actually an extensive description of the potential impacts of climate change, the most detailed to be published by the paper up to this point.

The most noteworthy feature of North's article is its source – the Department of the Environment (DoE). While the news is supposedly about 'scientists', no scientist

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<sup>37</sup> 'The Greenhouse Effect: The gases heating up the earth', N. Schoon and T. Wilkie, *Independent*, 17.10.88.

is quoted or mentioned. It is instead a political institution who interprets the state of scientific knowledge for the press. It is not clear in the article what situation gave rise to this article – news conference?; press release?; interview with DoE’s officials? Whatever the circumstances, this case illustrates the non-linear nature of science reporting. Often science requires political saliency to become valuable as news in the eyes of journalists. The succession of public pronouncements by different institutions on the greenhouse effect and its implications should not be overlooked. The fact that the Met Office’s forecasts of a 5°C rise was followed by a sceptical public statement from the DoE is meaningful. The latter clearly advanced a view of scientific knowledge as uncertain and insufficient, thus casting doubt on the value of the Met Office’s forecasts<sup>38</sup>.

Science policy was an important dimension of the representation of science in the press in 1988. The first article on the greenhouse effect published by the *Independent* in this year focuses on the ‘lack of a coherent national research programme’ on the issue<sup>39</sup>. The author is the Labour spokesman on science, Jeremy Bray, so the article clearly is a political critique of the Conservative government of the time. The next article on climate change contradicts Bray’s piece. While Bray had claimed that the National Environment Research Council (NERC) was cutting its research on plankton<sup>40</sup> (which is important to understand the absorption of carbon dioxide), Mary Fagan announces the increase of the money for such research<sup>41</sup>. On the other hand, the headline –‘£1.7 m bounced for research on ‘greenhouse effect’ (08.10.88), contrasts starkly with another: ‘Cash shortage hits study of greenhouse effect’<sup>42</sup> (17.10.88). The articles are separated by just nine days and are written by the same reporter, Mary Fagan, technology correspondent. Careful reading suggests that the journalist is actually talking about the same scientific institutions, the same scientists, the same project even, in both articles. What explains this contradiction? Did the journalist misinterpret the information she was given? Did the scientists involved not like the

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<sup>38</sup> More doubts on the reality of the greenhouse effect are raised in an article by Bill Burroughs (‘Technology: Satellites give a clouded picture’, 14.11.88). His argument is that there is insufficient knowledge about the role of clouds in the weather when temperature rises occur, and that therefore judgement about the greenhouse effect should be reserved.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Technology Viewpoint: An urgent need for more research’, Jeremy Bray, *Independent*, 12.01.88.

<sup>40</sup> This is also mentioned in the *Guardian* by A. Southward in ‘Lost at sea’, 25.10.88.

<sup>41</sup> ‘£1.7 m bounced for research on ‘greenhouse effect’, Mary Fagan, *Independent*, 08.10.88.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Cash shortage hits study of greenhouse effect’, Mary Fagan, *Independent*, 17.10.88.

first article and demand a new one? Behind these two stories there is probably a complex process of negotiation between journalist and sources. But cuts in research funding of the NERC are the theme of a further article, headlined ‘Greenhouse’ research cut’ by Tom Wilkie, published on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1988, which emphasises the damaging implications for ‘vital’ climate change studies.

### **c) Solutions or policy-oriented knowledge**

Another branch of science and another type of science-related actor in the stories of the *Independent* is research searching to reduce greenhouse emissions. This work was often personified by engineers, although physicists and non-specific ‘scientists’ also appeared committed to it. On the solutions front, reporters Nicholas Schoon and Tom Wilkie seemed pessimistic writing under the headline: ‘Hi-tech fixes could double electricity bills’ (17.10.88). The technology for ‘clean’ production of electricity from coal existed, we are told, but it was too expensive. Several alternatives were being investigated, it was said, but they all seemed to have major faults. Later, however, Tom Wilkie and Richard North argued that the way further was investment in energy efficiency, rather than nuclear power<sup>43</sup>.

Nicholas Schoon reported on the views of ‘experts’ to counteract Thatcher’s and Ridley’s<sup>44</sup> strong promotion of nuclear energy as a means of decreasing GHG emissions<sup>45</sup>. The suggested alternatives were natural gas, renewable energies and energy conservation. The type of knowledge invoked here as to what is most effective in reducing emissions is at the boundary of science and industry, with significant implications for policy-making and regulation. That explains why an academic, an energy consultant, and a representative of a business association were constituted into ‘discursive allies’ in this article. The generalisation of opinions under the heading of ‘experts’ contributes to their neutralisation (Deetz, 1992) and objectivation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Hi-tech fixes could double electricity bills’, Nicholas Schoon and Tom Wilkie, *Independent*, 17.10.88; ‘Nuclear-free idea lights up Thatcher in-tray’, Tom Wilke and Richard North, *Independent*, 27.10.88.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Ridley was Secretary of State for the environment.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Experts see better ways to counter global warming’, Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 07.11.88.

## 2.2. *Guardian*

Analysis of the *Guardian*'s representation indicates that, from the end of 1988, the definition of the problem is no longer the exclusive responsibility or capacity of scientists, as various types of actors advance different claims in relation to it. In an equivalent manner, politics is no longer a territory inhabited only by politicians and maybe pressure groups: scientists and science journalists start making claims about regulations and even more structural changes in society. Social actors diversify their discursive targets and strategies.

### a) Politicians turn science-brokers

One of the most significant developments in the biography of knowledge of the greenhouse effect is the discursive use of science by non-scientists, particularly politicians and activists. As the greenhouse effect enters the political arena, political actors constitute themselves into interpreters of scientific claims and resort to different studies to promote different arguments and agendas. Politicians become science-brokers.

At the national level, backed by studies and reports, the government strongly seized the greenhouse effect to advance a nuclear energy programme. Political opposition to the government counterattacked. Paddy Ashdown, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, acted as a knowledge-broker in arguing that the nuclear 'road' has 'no foundation, in economic, environmental or even practical terms'<sup>46</sup>, according to a report by the US Rocky Mountain Institute. Ashdown cited the report in a Commons debate and this was referred to in the *Guardian*<sup>47</sup>. Ashdown's article in this newspaper was based on the same scientific evidence to denounce the government's cynicism and the dangers of choosing the nuclear option.

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<sup>46</sup> 'Agenda: Clear as a light bulb – Paddy Ashdown sees red at the Tories' green arguments', Paddy Ashdown, *Guardian*, 07.11.88.

<sup>47</sup> 'The Day in Politics: Greenhouse effect problem given government 'priority'', Susan Tirbutt, *Guardian*, 28.10.88.

At the international level, the foreign minister, Sir Geoffrey Howe embraced climate change as an issue for the political sphere by denying the capabilities of scientific institutions to deal with it alone. The greenhouse effect must also be the domain of politicians. He was reported as saying in a speech to the UN Assembly<sup>48</sup>:

We are totally dependent on climate. Damage it beyond repair and the earth becomes a lifeless desert, spinning in space. We cannot leave a problem of this magnitude to technical bodies.

The environmental pressure groups' response was led by Friends of the Earth, who were the first to appear in the press, associated with scientific claims by having sponsored a study by CRU on impacts of climate change<sup>49</sup>. CRU predicted temperature rises of 1.5-5.5°C between 2030-2050, a quite high estimate. For the first time climate change science becomes a rhetorical weapon for environmental activism.

## **b) Scientists turn policy-brokers and policy activists**

Equally relevant is the self-constitution of scientists into political roles. Either isolated or organised, sometimes with environmental groups, scientists start making statements and taking stances on the political significance of the greenhouse effect. On 13.10.88 the *Guardian* reported on the call for action from '[s]cientists, food and agricultural experts and environment groups ..., consumer advocates, church groups and a smattering of politicians' at an international conference<sup>50</sup>. This was considered '[a]n unprecedented appeal for global rejection of fossil fuel technologies, First World consumerism, and even the Third World's green revolution in agriculture'. In a coalition with politicians and (very) different social actors, scientists appeared as judges of the models of development pursued by the North (a critique of 'non-sustainable options'); taking normative positions on responsibility (the North 'must bear the burden of change'); and promoting political agendas (tax penalties and incentives, cancellation of Third World debt, investment on energy efficiency). These claims all have a

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<sup>48</sup> 'Howe urges action on greenhouse effect', Jane Rosen, *Guardian*, 29.09.88.

<sup>49</sup> 'Greenhouse temperature changes may threaten northern conifers', Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 06.12.88.

<sup>50</sup> 'Call for action over greenhouse effect: International group launches grassroots campaign', Michael White, *Guardian*, 13.10.88.

profoundly ideological nature. For example, a statement issued by the participants in the conference, which gave rise to the Global Greenhouse Network, stressed:

... the need for ‘fundamental changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns’ in the North and what it called ‘structural changes in socio-economic relationships worldwide.’

This stance involves an important critique of the Western models of development, and the boundaries between the scientist and the advocate become blurred. At the same time, the language of science changes along with the participation of scientists in non-scientific discourses. The use of figures of speech, such as metaphors, is an important dimension of the persuasion strategies of scientists when communicating science to the public.

The boundaries between science reporting and politics reporting also became blurred at this stage in the *Guardian's* coverage of climate change. A sign of this is that Tim Radford, science correspondent for the *Guardian*, started writing about the two issues. For example, under the headline ‘The edge of darkness’<sup>51</sup>, the first paragraph reads: ‘Nuclear power, declared Nicholas Ridley at the weekend, is good for us. Is it? And can it really help to save the atmosphere, and hence the world?’ Radford denounces as ‘hot air’ the announcements by Thatcher and Ridley that nuclear power is a good option to address the greenhouse effect. Narrativisation, through the use of (scientific) scenarios, is an important discursive strategy in the construction of risk. Note also the ‘save the world’ discourse, sprinkled with plenty of irony.

Later, Radford expanded his political critique with an article headlined ‘The dread and the green’: ‘Electricity privatisation and mounting concern about environmental issues make today’s new parliamentary session a vital one for the nuclear industry – Margaret Thatcher and Nicholas Ridley throw down the gauntlet to their critics over the greenhouse effect’<sup>52</sup>. The article suggests that talking about science is becoming an argumentative game that involves specific political views. Radford started by using the ‘adversary’s’ logic (i.e. the government’s) to analyse the choice of nuclear energy, and thereby strengthen his further points: ‘Put like that, the nuclear option seems

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<sup>51</sup> 02.11.88.

<sup>52</sup> *Guardian*, 22.11.88. The ‘gauntlet’ was a challenge launched by environmental organisations to the government on environmental policies.

inescapable.’ He then presented an American study as evidence of his counter-claim and deconstructed the complex issues involved in the nuclear option. From here, the reader was invoked:

After that, build your own nightmare. Frighten yourself with the spectre of nuclear reactors built on concrete poured by builders controlled by the Mafia, or commandeered by hard-line fundamentalist religious or ideological groups, or sabotaged by guerrillas.

The article finishes with a mixture of arguments for why nuclear energy is not a good option, from ‘nonsense’ to ‘lack of staff’. Scientific reasoning is mixed with other forms of assessing the problem in this strategy of contestation.

### **2.3. *Times***

In 1988, we find antagonistic strategies in play in the *Times*. While the paper created a sense of crisis by dramatizing the greenhouse effect, it also advanced a ‘call for proof’ and even a sceptical discourse about the problem.

#### **a) Intensifying the sense of risk**

A substantive proportion of the coverage given by the *Times* to the greenhouse effect in late 1988 contributed to heightening the sense of danger. This tended to be the task of specific authors, most clearly Pearce Wright, science correspondent. As he had done in previous years, Wright consistently reported on research that confirmed the existence of the greenhouse effect and added more dramatic dimensions to it. Examples are the generation of nitrous oxide (a GHG) by organic materials in decomposition, the association of CFCs with the greenhouse effect, and the danger to agriculture, forests and coastal areas<sup>53</sup>. Robert Matthews also contributed to the same sense of urgency by reporting that scientists considered that severe climate change was much closer than earlier thought due to non-linear aspects of the weather<sup>54</sup>. Other *Times* writers such as Peter Davenport and John Young actualised the threat in ‘Can we stop Britain

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<sup>53</sup> ‘Unearthing one disturbing new implication’, *Times*, 11.11.88; ‘Northern hemisphere facing ozone layer crisis’, *Times*, 29.11.88; ‘Greenhouse’ damage report’, *Times*, 06.12.88.

drowning. Flood warning', published on 21.10.88. The headline implies that the country is already drowning, a claim which was reinforced by several examples in the rest of the article. A 'flood threat' seems to resonate strongly with UK readers, and it was quite often used in the construction of the greenhouse effect. The frequent use of terms like 'catastrophe' or 'catastrophic' in the *Times* is an important component of this strategy of dramatization and mobilization of attention.

## **b) Scientific proof and growing scepticism**

Several articles in the *Times* embodied a discourse that put the emphasis on the 'need to know' before acting. Such was the case of 'Taking the heat off the planet. The greenhouse effect' by Jane Bird, published on 23.10.88, and of 'Britain joins global project. The greenhouse effect' by Robert Matthews five days later.

... in the context of this year's scare story, the Greenhouse Effect, knowledge is essential for action. ... Only when we have the information will it be possible for governments to know what levels of fossil fuel burning are safe. Obviously the government will not see fit to pour more money into this area until it is convinced of the urgency.<sup>55</sup>

Without a better understanding of the contribution individual gases make to the overall 'greenhouse effect', which could cause a potentially catastrophic global warming, scientists run the risk of designing counter-measures that fail to tackle the real culprits.<sup>56</sup>

While this discourse strengthens the scientists' claim for more funding, it also serves as justification for governmental inaction in relation to the greenhouse effect. At the same time, while the *Times* published stories marked by a sense of risk and urgency, the paper also made room for a sceptical discourse that emphasised the lack of evidence and exaggeration of the problem. This points to the existence of conflicting values in the paper.

The dramatic construction of the problem by certain social actors does not always have the intended effect in terms of press coverage.

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<sup>54</sup> 'Upheaval to climate 'imminent'', *Times*, 14.11.88.

<sup>55</sup> 'Taking the heat...'

<sup>56</sup> 'Britain joins...'



We were moving, said Willi Brandt ... now president of the North-South Commission, toward a catastrophe that 'our imaginations can link only with a nuclear war'. And his audience merely nodded in quiet, dismayed agreement. ...

Why, then, do such strident words not spark man to action? Because when challenged by the decision-makers (which is science-speak for politicians who will have to introduce unpopular legislation and industrialists who must finance eco-sane alternatives), the climatologists lack all proof. ... a demand that somewhere, someone else should soon, please, arrive at some certainties.<sup>57</sup>

This article is representative of a view that intends to be seen as moderate in the face of radicalism, calm rather than alarmist, logical rather than irrational; in sum a 'statesmanlike' editorial posture.

### **3. TRYING TO SHAPE THE DEBATE – DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL ACTORS (1988)**

From the analysis of the press articles, what discursive strategies can we associate with each kind of social actor? How were different discursive strategies contested? How did they mould the press discourse?

#### **3.1. The scientists' agendas: seeking social, political and financial gains**

Analysis of news articles indicates that, throughout 1988, scientists attempted to use the press to promote those disciplines relevant to the study of climate change. On the one hand, scientists may have perceived political and media interest in the issue as an important opportunity for claiming more investment in science, at a time when the government had been cutting funding of environmental sciences. The greenhouse 'threat' constituted optimal grounds for a claim for more research and thus more money. On the other hand, the scenario of an uncertain, possibly tragic future that only scientists could 'read' and 'solve' was a chance to enhance the social and political power of science.

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<sup>57</sup> 'The final forecast?; The world's weather', Brian James, *Times*, 11.11.88.

Several articles offer hints of this search for empowerment. The following example illustrates a clear strategy of dramatization of potential impacts, by increasing the magnitude of possible physical environmental changes. The scientist quoted is Dr John Pethick, Institute of Estuarine Studies, University of Hull:

‘Time is not on our side. ... A sea-level rise of even one metre over the next 50 years could mean a disaster and much more pessimistic forecasts than that have been made. We need a major programme of research to enable us to come up with the answers in time.’<sup>58</sup>

À propos the constitution of a Global Greenhouse Network, Dr Mick Kelly, from CRU, is quoted as saying: ‘The first thing to do is put pressure on governments to take action. ... Research is starved for funds’<sup>59</sup>. And indeed, climate change research did get a substantial increase in funding in 1989<sup>60</sup>.

Some signs of division within the scientific community and a more critical analysis of the management of science are advanced in the *Guardian* by A. Southward.

... any increased cash is more likely to be absorbed by ‘re-labelling’ of existing projects to make them look topical ... The NERC appears to be using the crisis to replace biologists studying long-term ecological changes with mathematical modellers<sup>61</sup>.

As a decidedly interested party, Southward, a Senior Fellow of the Marine Biological Association, suggests the latter move will have negative outcomes.

### **3.2. Politicians and business: appropriations of the greenhouse threat to serve the expansion of the nuclear industry**

In this early phase of the public career of climate change it is clear that the issue was strongly intertwined with the wider Thatcherite agenda, especially the privatisation of the electricity industry, the destruction of the coal-mining industry and

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<sup>58</sup> In ‘Can we stop Britain drowning. Flood warning’, Peter Davenport and John Young, *Times*, 21.10.88.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Global network formed. Global Greenhouse Network’, Angela Long, *Times*, 23.10.88.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Green studies boost as science research gets another 95 million pounds’, Pearce Wright, *Times*, 08.02.89. More recently, in 2000, CRU has been changed to the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research on winning major research funds from three of the UK’s research councils.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Lost at sea’, A. Southward, *Guardian*, 25.10.88.

the promotion of nuclear energy. All these goals were deeply interconnected in the Conservative government's agenda of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

First, the intended privatisation of electricity companies required good performance on the Stock Exchange so as to attract shareholders. While energy efficiency would be a logical policy to combat greenhouse emissions, the associated prospect of a reduction in sales would have depressed share prices (Brown, 1996). The government needed to stifle any allusion to energy efficiency at this sensitive time during the sale of the industry. An alternative, 'climate-friendly' policy seemed to be to expand the production of energy through nuclear reactors.

Second, the replacement of coal, considered less economically efficient than other options for power generation, was, as well, important for the privatisation of the electricity industry. But Thatcher's project of dismantling the coal industry was also inscribed in another right wing ideological principle (see Hall and Jacques, 1983). The National Union of Mineworkers had humiliated the Conservative government in the early 1970s and been through a cataclysmic year-long strike in 1983-4 which severely damaged the reputation of the Conservative government (Cockerell, 1988). The Prime Minister and her colleagues were determined to break the industrial power of the miners union if they could. Both the government and the nuclear industry saw in the greenhouse effect a strong opportunity for backing the growth of nuclear power while, at the same time, destroying the market for coal<sup>62</sup>. Thatcher's Royal Society speech happened just over a week before the opening of the public inquiry about the planned construction of a new nuclear power station, at Hinkley Point, Somerset. The Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) quickly 'laundered' nuclear energy with the greenhouse effect<sup>63</sup>. Soon after, several governmental pronouncements on the matter can be found in the press, in parallel to an intense media campaign led by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL). While the latter attempted to seduce the public with images of a pastoral, idealistically 'clean' countryside (see Burgess, 1990), Thatcher reminded people of the origin of the problem – 'don't forget, the Greenhouse Effect is partly because you're taking a fantastic amount of electricity from coal' and she

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Weingart et al. (2000) about the adoption of a similar strategy by a group of German scientists.

<sup>63</sup> 'CEGB pledges 'clean' nuclear power', Pearce Wright, *Times*, 08.10.88. In the same line, the CEGB had already announced in April 1988 a significant financial investment on research on the greenhouse effect ('Greenhouse effect to be studied', Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 22.04.88).

guaranteed that the solution would be a nuclear option<sup>64</sup>. In turn, Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for the Environment, asserted:

‘There’s absolutely no doubt, if we want to resist the greenhouse effect we should concentrate on a massive increase in nuclear generating capacity.’<sup>65</sup>

The certainty of the need for nuclear was reinforced by an alleged lack of alternatives, as he went on to say: ‘The nuclear programme is the only serious way of reducing our carbon emissions.’ And ‘public concern’ could also be re-conceptualised to serve the nuclear agenda.

‘The public are very concerned about atmospheric pollution, acid rain and the greenhouse effect. The consequence of that concern is that we should move to a cleaner, safer form of generation.’

The strategy of discursive appropriation of global warming by the Government and by a powerful business lobby to legitimate investment in nuclear power was reproduced by the *Times* and also the *Independent*, but not the *Guardian*.

Although this was not the aim of either the government or BNFL, their strategy backfired for it amplified discussion of the climate change problem. The nuclear campaign also generated a wave of criticism which was taken up by an unusual coalition of actors involving scientists and other business interests. ‘Experts see better ways to counter global warming’, the public was told by the *Independent* in an article by Nicholas Schoon, published on 7.11.88. And those ‘experts’ not only denounced nuclear energy, playing a role in the communication of risk, but also pointed to other solutions for greenhouse emissions.

### **3.3. Different business, different strategy**

In this period, the energy efficiency industry also found an opportunity for empowerment in the greenhouse threat. The Association for the Conservation of Energy (ACE) was often quoted and was frequently influential in framing news on the

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Now it’s up to the people. Prime Minister talks about her chief concerns’, Robin Oakley, *Times*, 26.10.88; ‘Nuclear power is ‘greener’ says Thatcher. Interview in The Times today’, Robin Oakley, *Times*, 26.10.88.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Ridley urges massive nuclear programme’, unattributed, *Independent*, 31.10.88.

greenhouse effect. Their spokesperson was Andrew Warren whose name appeared regularly over ten years of coverage. ACE appeared, for example, in the *Independent* article cited above (07.11.88). The Association also acted as catalyst for some of the press coverage of cuts in research funding. Andrew Warren, its director, commented that cuts in funding for energy efficiency programmes were ‘a body blow against the battle to stop global warming.’<sup>66</sup> The same words appeared in the *Guardian*, where Patrick Donovan, industrial correspondent, opened the article as follows:

Government investment in fighting the greenhouse effect of pollution is in effect being halved over the next financial year ...[ACE] said ...<sup>67</sup>

This is a good, early example of the ‘ecologization’ of business discourse which later became identified as an aspect of ecological modernisation (cf. Eder, 1996), with the greenhouse issue assisting the promotion of yet another agenda. While BNFL made a discursive alliance with government, ACE participated in discourse coalitions with scientists and NGOs. The defence of the environment thus quickly became a cause espoused by very different actors with very different rhetorical and material interests. That global warming required action was not contested. Rather, it was asserted repeatedly by the government and various branches of business for reasons other than environmental protection per se. Despite the profound divisions between social actors, a new common-sense was being formed (Allan, 1999) that was to have consequences for perceptions of policies, knowledge and interests.

### **3.4. NGOs: discourses for (climate) change?**

Where are environmental pressure groups in the middle of all these ‘sponsors’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) of the greenhouse issue and how are they represented in the press? Friends of the Earth (FoE) gave moderate praise for Thatcher’s changed stance on the environment, combined with some scepticism about her specific policy proposals, in an article published by the *Times*<sup>68</sup>. Also worth highlighting is the ‘Green Gauntlet’ published by FoE, Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature

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<sup>66</sup> ‘Energy saving campaign to be cut’, *Independent*, 30.12.88.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Cash for pollution battle ‘halved’’, *Guardian*, 30.12.88.

(WWF)<sup>69</sup> ‘challenging the Government over its new-found enthusiasm for environmental issues’ by advancing a list of thirty measures to protect the environment.

A distinctive aspect of the press representation of environmental activism on climate change is that, from very early, NGOs appeared associated with (policy) solutions for the problem of greenhouse emissions, rather than with the (scientific) problem itself<sup>70</sup>, or its constitution as a political issue. Except for the coverage of a FoE-sponsored scientific study on climate impacts<sup>71</sup>, all the references to NGOs in the press, in this first period, concern alternative ways of responding to the climate change problem. Contrasting with many other environmental issues, in the case of climate change, environmental pressure groups are primarily associated publicly with the debate on policy solutions, instead of the constitution of a certain reality as a problem.

One explanation may certainly be found in the scientific complexity of climate change which reduces the possibility of NGO intervention (cf. Stairs and Taylor, 1992). Another reason may be the fact that in this period some NGOs, notably Greenpeace, were starting to put more emphasis on finding and demonstrating solutions for environmental problems rather than pointing to the problems and being the protagonists of an oppositional discourse (Rose, 1993; Melchett, 2000)<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, I would argue that because the press coverage of climate change was strongly hooked on governmental mobilisation, environmental organisations had to jump on the same bandwagon to be heard.

Another crucial issue was the (ideological) standing of NGOs on action plans and institutional transformations to address climate change. As early as September 1988, for FoE, as for the government, the way to advance the environmental cause was by putting emphasis on its economic significance. Jonathan Porritt, then Director of FoE, thus endorsed the government’s position:

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Down-to-earth agenda. Suggestions to Mrs Thatcher’, Jonathon Porritt, FoE’s director, 29.09.88.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Green’ challenge to Government’, Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 21.11.88; also the object of ‘Green trio challenges Thatcher’, John Ardill, *Guardian*, 21.11.88.

<sup>70</sup> For example, the presentation of evidence.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Greenhouse temperature changes may threaten northern conifers’, Tim Radford, *Guardian*, 06.12.88;

‘Greenhouse’ damage report’, Pearce Wright, *Times*, 06.12.88.

<sup>72</sup> Rose argues that this was the case from the beginning of the 90’s.

As Mrs Thatcher said, ‘the health of our economy and the health of our environment are totally dependent on each other’. If policy changes are introduced to achieve that synthesis, then a green revolution will indeed be in the making.<sup>73</sup>

From the very start of the public life of climate change, there was no ‘limits to growth’ (Dryzek, 1997) talk coming from NGOs, no economically pessimistic positions are advanced. Arguably, this compromise is the price for getting access to a conservative newspaper like the *Times*<sup>74</sup>. Elsewhere, as in the articles about the NGOs’ ‘green gauntlet’, it is unclear whether ‘adjustments’ in claims were done by NGOs or by newspapers. In the *Independent*, proposed changes are accommodated in a neo-liberal framework.

[The proposed measures] have been framed so as not to appear extreme, nor biased against the Government’s free market approach. ... Mr Porritt said the measures would result in increased costs for consumers, manufacturers and taxpayers, but they would not harm the national interest or the economy.<sup>75</sup>

The *Guardian* highlighted the benefit for ‘quality of life’ and gave space to a critique of unconditional growth.

Porritt ... warned that some ... measures would involve added costs and painful choices. ‘It involves people making decisions to improve their quality of life rather than continuing with the unthinking expansion of the past’.<sup>76</sup>

The structuring role of the dominant ideology of each newspaper is very clear in these quotations.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Down-to-earth agenda. Suggestions to Mrs Thatcher’, J. Porritt, *Times*, 29.09.88.

<sup>74</sup> We should note that printing an NGO-authored article may also serve for the *Times* to sustain an image of balance and objectivity.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Green’ challenge to Government’, Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 21.11.88.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Green trio challenges Thatcher’, John Ardill, *Guardian*, 21.11.88.

#### **4. PRESS IMAGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE MOMENTS**

From January 1989, various objects of discourse, discursive strategies and ideological standpoints started to appear repeatedly in press reports. Although there was a certain degree of transformation in/through discursive practices, a process of discursive sedimentation also occurred. The continuation of a consecutive analysis thus becomes less worthwhile. It is preferable to move into the next critical discourse moment. This section focuses on two periods in 1989 and 1990 that can be considered critical discourse moments in the construction of climate change. As mentioned in chapter four, such critical moments entail a potential for transformation in understandings of a problematique and constitute a test for resilient views. Therefore, it is then important to examine whether and how the politics of the greenhouse effect changed or remained static in these two moments and how the discourse(s) of the press evolved. The two moments to be discussed below are the Noordwijk conference and Mrs Thatcher's address to the United Nations - both in November 1989; and the publication of the IPCC's Report in May 1990.

##### **4.1. November 1989: Noordwijk conference and Thatcher's United Nations speech**

Two important events occurred in November 1989. On the 6-7th there was an international meeting in the Netherlands in which over 60 countries participated. The meeting had been called by the Dutch government to discuss a proposal to adopt limits to GHG emissions. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, Margaret Thatcher gave a speech to the United Nations General Assembly that promoted the global environment as the main priority for contemporary international politics.



### **a) 'Leading' or 'stalling'? Visions of Britain's role in the international politics of climate change**

As discussed in chapter four, the *Times* and the *Guardian* carried highly divergent representations of the Noordwijk conference. The *Times* largely followed the official line, sustaining and reinforcing the government's views. The *Guardian* produced a strong critique of the British government's role in the Holland negotiations and exposed the inconsistencies of governmental speech and action. The *Independent's* representation was not as supportive of Britain's position as the *Times'*, but much less critical than the *Guardian's*.

### **b) Seizing the (greenhouse) effect: Thatcher's UN address and its press representation**

Climate change, and the policies required to combat it, could raise questions about the core ideological values of Thatcherism, such as choice and freedom (to consume, to travel; the 'great car economy'); free market, individualism; 'anti-collectivism' and nationalism (see Hall, 1983; Hall and Jacques, 1983; Gamble, 1988; Hall, 1988; Jessop et al., 1988). It is thus essential to answer the following questions: How did Thatcher construct the climate change issue? How did she communicate the risks associated with climate change? How did she construct political responsibility to address it?

Thatcher's address to the United Nations in November 1989 has to be read in a wider context. Growing public support for environmental issues was demonstrated by the surprising success of the UK Green Party in the Euro-elections of June 1989 (Franklin and Rüdiger, 1992). In response, Thatcher started re-fashioning the image of the Conservative Party which had a bad record on environmental issues. As part of this strategy she promoted, for example, international meetings on the ozone layer<sup>77</sup>. In her UN speech, Thatcher chose to focus on environmental problems, particularly climate change, and attempted to build concern and mobilise international attention. What were the purposes of this appropriation of climate change? I argue that Thatcher

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<sup>77</sup> 'Thatcher calls conference on protecting ozone layer', Pearce Wright, *Times*, 24.11.88.

attempted to control the international definition of the climate change issue. Instead of ignoring the problem, Thatcher strongly grasped it and made several high-profile interventions, to set the agenda in sympathy with neo-liberal principles.

Analysis of her speech indicates the type of objectives that underpinned Thatcher's construction of climate change. First, Thatcher intended to promote Britain's and her own influence internationally, and increase the power of the UK government in shaping agendas in relation to environmental issues. Second, Thatcher wanted to shift responsibility for ameliorating climate change from the national to the international level. Moreover, she wanted to commit *all* countries and not just the industrialised economies to adopt policies on climate change (cf. the Noordwijk conference). Third, Thatcher wanted to base policy on science, pursuing a tradition of British environmental policy-making that called for scientific evidence prior to the adoption of any measures (Hajer, 1995). Fourth, it was Thatcher's purpose to constitute the United Nations as the appropriate site for addressing climate change and, in line with her neo-liberal stance, to avoid the creation of new institutions to regulate the issue, as France had suggested with the Hague declaration<sup>78</sup>.

In order to achieve these goals, Thatcher deployed a set of discursive strategies that that deserve detailed examination. My analysis will be based on the article on the following two pages, an edited version of the UN speech published by the *Guardian* on 09.11.89, under the headline 'Thatcher stresses global effort to protect planet' and the by-line 'Population growth warning. 'Safer' nuclear power championed. British centre for predicting climate change to be set up'. Quotes will also be taken from another article from the same issue<sup>79</sup>.

Thatcher starts off by constituting global environmental change into the main risk for humanity at the end of the eighties: l. 1-16, col. 1 in 'Thatcher stresses...'; also 'The challenge for our negotiators is as great as for any disarmament treaty' in Walker's article. Her rhetorical strategy may be described as 'securitization' (Wæver, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998). Securitization refers to the presentation of a risk as 'an existential threat to a designated referent object' (Strippel, 2000: 2). The referent object

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<sup>78</sup> See 'Greenhouse gas freeze blocked', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 08.11.89.

<sup>79</sup> 'Thatcher in call to save environment: PM tells UN of her good conduct guide for all nations', Martin Walker, *Guardian*, 09.11.89.

# Thatcher stresses global effort to protect planet

**O**F ALL the challenges faced by the world community in the past four years, one has grown clearer than any other in both urgency and importance — I refer to the threat to our global environment.

While the conventional, political dangers — the threat of global annihilation, the fact of regional war — appear to be receding, we have all recently become aware of another insidious danger.

It is the prospect of irremediable damage to the atmosphere, to the oceans, to earth itself.

The causes are to be found in nature itself — changes in the earth's orbit; changes in the amount of radiation given off by the sun; the consequential effects on the plankton in the ocean; volcanic processes.

We are seeing a vast increase in the amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere. The annual increase is three billion tonnes; and half the carbon emitted since the industrial revolution still remains in the atmosphere.

At the same time as this is happening we are seeing the destruction on a vast scale of tropical forests which are uniquely able to remove carbon dioxide from the air.

Every year an area of forest equal to the whole surface of the United Kingdom is destroyed. At present rates of clearance we shall, by the year 2000, have removed 65 per cent of forests in the humid tropical zones.

The consequences of this become clearer when one remembers that tropical forests fix more than 10 times as much carbon as do forests in the temperate zones.

This is an edited text of the Prime Minister's speech on the global environment to the United Nations General Assembly yesterday

That means first we must have continued economic growth in order to generate the wealth required to pay for the protection of the environment.

But it must be growth which does not plunder the planet today and leave our children to deal with the consequences tomorrow.

Second, we must resist the simplistic tendency to blame modern multinational industry for the damage which is being done to the environment.

It is industry which will develop safe alternative chemicals for refrigerators and air-conditioning. It is industry which will devise bio-degradable plastics. It is industry which will find the means to treat pollutants and make nuclear waste safe — and many companies already have massive research programmes.

The multinationals have to take the long view. There will be no profit or satisfaction for anyone if pollution continues to destroy our planet. We should always remember that free markets are a means to an end.

On the basis of sound science and sound economics, we need to build a strong framework for international action.

The most pressing task which faces us at the international level is to negotiate a framework convention on climate change — a sort of good conduct guide for all nations.

Fortunately, we have a model in the action already taken to protect the ozone layer. The Vienna Convention in 1985 and the Montreal Protocol in 1987 established landmarks in inter-

amount of waste it produces — and we aim to recycle 50 per cent of our household waste by the end of the century.

Secondly, we will be drawing up over the coming year our own environmental agenda for the decade ahead. This will cover energy, transport, agriculture, industry — everything which affects the environment.

With regard to energy, we already have a £2 billion programme of improvements to reduce acid rain emissions from our power stations. We shall be looking more closely at the role of non-fossil fuel sources, including nuclear, in generating energy. And our latest legislation requires companies which supply electricity positively to promote energy efficiency.

On transport, we shall look for ways to strengthen controls over vehicle emissions and to develop the lean-burn engine. We have already reduced the tax on lead-free petrol to encourage its use.

This is an example of using

market-based incentives to promote good environmental practice.

With regard to agriculture, we recognise that farmers not only produce food — which they do with great efficiency — they need to conserve the beauty of the priceless heritage of our countryside. We are therefore encouraging them to reduce the intensity of their methods and to conserve wildlife habitats.

We are planting new woods and forests — indeed there has been a 50 per cent increase in tree planting in Britain in the last 10 years.

We also aim to reduce chemical inputs to the soil and are bringing forward measures to deal with the complex problems of nitrates in water.

Third, we are increasing our investment in research into global environmental problems.

In addition, we are supporting our own scientists, and in particular the British Antarctic Survey's crucial contribution to

the world ocean circulation experiment.

We have also provided more money for the climate and environment satellite monitoring programmes of the European Space Agency.

Fourth, we help poorer countries cope with their environmental problems through our aid programme.

We shall give special help to manage and preserve the tropical forests. We are already assisting in 20 countries and have recently signed agreements with India and Brazil.

As a new pledge, I can announce today that we aim to commit a further £100 million bilaterally to tropical forestry activities over the next three years, mostly within the framework of the tropical forestry action plan.

Mr President, the environmental challenge which confronts the whole world demands an equivalent response from the whole world. Every country will be affected. No one can opt out.

Each country has to contribute, and those countries who are industrialised must contribute more to help those who are not.

Guardian, 09.11.89

55 We now know, too, that great damage is being done to the ozone layer by the production of halons and chlorofluoro-carbons.

60 More than anything, our environment is threatened by the sheer numbers of people and the plants and animals which go with them.

65 Put in its bluntest form: the main threat to our environment is more and more people, and their activities.

**The scope for global co-operation**

70 In some areas, the action required is primarily for individual nations or groups of them to take.

75 I am thinking of action to deal with pollution of rivers — and many of us now see the fish back in rivers from which they had disappeared.

80 I am thinking of action to improve agriculture methods — good husbandry which ploughs back nourishment into the soil rather than the cut-and-burn which has damaged and degraded so much land in some parts of the world.

85 I am thinking of the use of nuclear power which — despite the attitude of so-called greens — is the most environmentally safe form of energy.

90 But the problem of global climate change is one that affects us all and action will only be effective if it is taken at the international level.

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national law. They aimed to prevent rather than just cure a global environmental problem.

I believe we should aim to have a convention on global climate change ready by the time the World Conference on Environment and Development meets in 1992. That will be among the most important conferences the United Nations has ever held.

But a framework is not enough. It will need to be filled out with specific undertakings, or protocols in diplomatic language, on the different aspects of climate change.

The negotiations of some of those protocols will undoubtedly be difficult. And no issue will be more contentious than the need to control emissions of carbon dioxide, the major contributor — apart from water vapour — to the greenhouse effect.

We can't just do nothing. But the measures we take must be based on sound scientific analysis of the effect of the different gases and the ways in which these can be reduced. In the past there has been a tendency to solve one problem at the expense of making others worse.

The United Kingdom therefore proposes that we prolong the role of the inter-governmental panel on climate change after it submits its report next year, so that it can provide an authoritative scientific basis for the negotiation of this and other protocols.

We can then agree targets to

100 Before we act, we need the best possible scientific assessment; otherwise we risk making matters worse. We must use science to cast a light ahead, so that we can move step by step in the right direction.

105 The United Kingdom has taken on the task of co-ordinating such an assessment within the inter-governmental panel on climate change, an assessment which will be available to everyone by the time of the second world climate conference next year.

110 But that will take us only so far. The report will not be able to tell us where the hurricanes will strike, who will be flooded, or how often and severe the droughts will be.

115 That means we must expand our capacity to model and predict climate change. We can test our skills and methods by seeing whether they would have successfully predicted past climate change for which historical records exist.

120 Britain has some of the leading experts in this field and I am pleased to be able to tell you that the United Kingdom will be establishing a new centre for the prediction of climate change, which will lead the effort to improve our prophetic capacity.

135 It will also provide the advanced computing facilities scientists need. And it will be open to experts from all over the world, and especially from the developing countries.

140 But as well as the science, we need to get the economics right

reduce the greenhouse gases, and how much individual countries should contribute to their achievement. We think it important this should be done in a way which enables all our economies to continue to grow and develop.

The challenge for our negotiators on matters like this is as great as for any disarmament treaty.

Before leaving the area where international action is needed, I would make a plea for a further global convention, one to conserve the infinite variety of species — of planet and animal life — which inhabit our planet.

The tropical forests contain a half of the species in the world, so their disappearance is doubly damaging. We do know that we are losing them at a reckless rate — between three and 50 each day on some estimates — species which could perhaps be helping us to advance the frontiers of medical science.

We should act together to conserve their precious heritage.

**British contribution**

First, we shall be introducing over the coming months a comprehensive system of pollution control to deal with all kinds of industrial pollution whether to air, water or land.

We are encouraging British industry to develop new technologies to clean up the environment and minimise the

in Thatcher's discourse is 'life itself' as climate change takes on dramatic proportions with a survivalist discourse:

... humankind 'must not try to be lords of all we survey – we are the Lord's creatures, the trustees of this planet, charged with preserving life itself'. Stressing that she was now a grandmother, Mrs Thatcher said she was sobered to learn that she had been born into a world of 2 billion people, while her grandson shared the planet with 6 billion others. 'It is life itself that we must battle to preserve'...<sup>80</sup>

The excerpt illustrates how Thatcherism can 'draw a tremendous strength [from] playing upon emotions and fears' (Leadbeater, 1989: 405) as the rhetorical effect derived from this emotional style is quite significant. Thatcher appears to speak in the name of everyone, all the common individuals she claims to represent, and to be able to connect with popular experience (Hall, 1988: 6) while invoking the conservative theme of family. Moreover, with the appeal to the rights of 'our children', Thatcher builds for herself the image of a responsible, sensitive, and concerned policy-maker who is also a grandmother, bringing her closer to the public<sup>81</sup>.

The second main discursive move is the constitution of 'global' responsibility for the greenhouse effect (l. 92-96, col. 1 and 26-32, col. 5). The emphasis on world population and forest destruction as sources of problems is part of this tactics of de-centring environmental degradation from the sphere of industrial countries (l. 65-68, col. 1)<sup>82</sup>. Note how agency is discursively deleted with regard to greenhouse emissions: 'We are seeing a vast increase in the amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere'. Thatcher's strategy was to 'globalise' the greenhouse effect and re-locate responsibilities from specific agents in specific places to a generalised, globalised physical problem. An interesting reading of this strategy can be inspired by Roe's (1994) analysis of how the 'global' is used 'less to complement than to *reject* the appropriateness of analyzing atmospheric warming at the local, regional, and national levels' (p.116). Framing the greenhouse effect as a 'global' problem implies that only 'global intervention' can be effective, and has a prescriptive function. It also supports the passivity of policy-makers at the local, regional and national levels. The 'global'

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<sup>80</sup> Walker, *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> See Hall and Jacques (1983) on Thatcher's 'authoritarian populism'.

<sup>82</sup> Thatcher had already singled world population as 'the chief environmental hazard facing mankind' in 1988 (Nicholas Wood in 'Thatcher focuses on birth boom, *Times*, 01.12.88), suggesting it was the main cause of the greenhouse effect.

discourse actually justifies and excuses inaction. This discursive work may have served the British government well in the first years of the public career of climate change.

A third important strategy in Thatcher's text is the scientification<sup>83</sup> of the greenhouse effect. Rather than a political, economic and culturally-based problem, it is transformed into a purely scientific matter. Thatcher thus appeals to science-based decisions and highlights the need for 'sound scientific analysis' - an expression which implies the existence of 'unsound science', too. Science is equated with caution, with good practice - l. 97-100, col. 1; l. 127-135, col. 1<sup>84</sup> and l. 87-95, col. 2. This 'sensible' discourse, as opposed to 'unrealistic', impractical views of others such as NGOs, is an important dimension of the government's sustenance of its policies<sup>85</sup>. Lines 127-135, col. 1 also elevate the status of the UK to world leader in relation to global environmental change, serving another of Thatcher's goals.

Thatcher also emphasises sound economic practice. First and foremost, the guarantee of economic growth is required for the design of climate change policies: l. 142, col. 1 - l. 10, col. 2 and l. 100-104, col.1. Capitalist ideology is given a sustainable development spin (l. 11-15, col. 2). Investing trust in industry to solve environmental problems (l. 32-33, col. 2) reproduces and reinforces the Prime Minister's and her government's emblematic entrepreneurial culture and economically neo-liberal views (Hall and Jacques, 1983).

Thatcher's address to the United Nations raised the status of this organisation in the climate change debate. The de-legitimation of other arenas and de-authorisation of other countries' initiatives which the government had engaged in, for example at the Noordwijk conference, are part of the same plan. Such strategies embodied Thatcher's aim for control of the debate. Moreover, the emphasis on the UN was also a form of constructing the global as the right level to analyse the causes of climate change, and to develop policies for their amelioration. The speech was remarkably effective. In the following years, there was an institutionalisation of the discourse Thatcher had

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<sup>83</sup> This term has been employed by Triandafyllidou and Fotiou (1998).

<sup>84</sup> Notice the metaphor in this sentence.

<sup>85</sup> A few days before, at the Noordwijk conference, Trippier had insisted that the proposed target dates of 2000 and 2005 for a freeze on emissions of carbon dioxide and a 20% reduction should be dropped as unrealistic ('Greenhouse gas freeze blocked', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 08.11.89).

promoted with the creation of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, the UNFCCC, Conferences of the Parties, etc.

The UN speech shows how ‘Thatcherism articulates and condenses different, often contradictory, discourses within the same ideological formation.’ (Hall, 1988: 10; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; 1987). Combining antithetical traits like emotional-rational, alarmist-controlling, and liberal-authoritarian, Thatcher’s speech produces a new discursive synthesis and a programme of action that appears to solve all problems. Existing as a potential rebuke to her neo-liberal values, climate change’s challenges are harnessed into Thatcherism’s hegemonic project (Hall and Jacques, 1983; Hall, 1988; Gramsci, 1971). Authority is secured with the (partial) consent of the population<sup>86</sup>. The very forces that could constitute a threat are discursively turned into tools of legitimation and reinforcement of the existing order. The system of practices that originate greenhouse gases is left unaltered and its subjects unquestioned. Hence, this speech illustrates the skills of Mrs Thatcher (and her speech writers) in relating to new problems and, ultimately, in turning crisis to her political advantage. She appeared to ‘have history on [her] side’, to be ‘conterminous with the inevitable course of the future’ (Hall, 1988: 272,276).

To what extent did newspapers legitimate or challenge Thatcher’s construction of climate change at the UN? The *Guardian* clearly valorised Thatcher’s intervention with the two texts mentioned above. In a more critical response, Martin Walker also reported the negative reactions to Thatcher’s speech from Labour and Green parties, and commented on Thatcher’s intention of getting a prominent international role. On the same day, the *Guardian*’s leading article ‘Green mansions’ is a fierce critique of Thatcher’s intervention at the UN and a knowledgeable deconstruction of her propaganda. The *Guardian* contrasts her words with the ‘poisons in our own backyard’, points the absence of references to the ‘battles between Britain and Brussels over [environmental] programmes, [or] the EC initiatives that forced us to comply’, and appeals to a diachronic analysis by suggesting the reader compares ‘the high-sounding principles enunciated in New York’ with the ‘short-sighted environmental politics Britain employed’ in the Netherlands. Analyses like this one,

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<sup>86</sup> Thatcherism’s inability to become totally hegemonic was visible in various forms of resistance and contestation.

that look beyond the moment and across different political events and policies to assess the value of politicians' pledges are very important but relatively rare in the press coverage of environmental politics.

The day after Thatcher's speech, the *Times* front page carried a piece headlined 'Thatcher UN call for global green crusade. Monitoring centre planned for Britain' by Peter Stothard and Pearce Wright, which essentially reproduced Thatcher's words on the risks involved in global environmental change<sup>87</sup> and singled out the announcement of the new 'multi-million pound British centre to monitor climatic change.' Details of the Hadley Centre's future research were provided. By merely amplifying Thatcher's words and highlighting the centrepiece of her approach to climate change (the new research centre), the article served well the government's discourse.

On 10.11.89, the *Times* published an article by Tom Burke, director of the Green Alliance parliamentary lobbying group: 'A hole in the policy layer. Thatcher's UN speech'. This piece is very critical of Thatcher's intervention, which is said to be 'hollow' and 'short on policy'. The stance taken in the article is well summarised in the line 'growing gap between her posture and her performance'. Burke fiercely denounces the side-effects of Thatcher's pronouncement when he writes that '[b]y raising the rhetorical stakes again, Mrs Thatcher has simply drawn attention to the fact that her domestic inaction speaks louder than her international words'. Burke offers an analysis of the few successes and many failures in Thatcher's environmental policies, and calls attention to the inconsistencies:

... it was the Government's action in overturning, against all-party opposition, the House of Lords amendments to the electricity privatisation legislation, which would have introduced least-cost energy planning, that spoke loudest about its real views on energy efficiency.

Alert to the omissions of Thatcher's intervention, which are as revealing, if not more, than the things she did say, Burke remarks:

... it is what the speech did not address that is more interesting. What has happened to the commitment to sustainable development? How is international action to be paid for? If new funds and institutions are ruled out, does that mean

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<sup>87</sup> The *Times*' allegiance to Thatcher impeded here the demand of scientific proof the newspaper had previously made (see above in this chapter).



that we expect the existing mechanisms, unaltered and unreformed, to deliver now what they have so far signally failed to deliver?

Burke's article, with its critical eye on the government and its pro-environmental stance, is representative of a discourse that occupies a minority position in the *Times*. The presence of dissonant voices such as this helps prevent total ideological closure in the newspaper.

The *Independent* did not publish any article on Thatcher's UN speech, which is synonymous of attribution of little importance.

#### **4.2. May 1990: the IPCC report is released and Thatcher announces British emissions target**

Two central developments in the science and politics of climate change took place in May 1990: a summary of the first report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group I (WG1)<sup>88</sup> was made public and Thatcher announced the British target for GHG emissions. The IPCC had been formed in 1988. The 1990 First Assessment Report (1990a; 1990b; 1990c) was very important, scientifically and especially politically. This was a consensual diagnosis by a large group of scientists which could form the basis for political action on the issue. What kind of impact did the IPCC report have on press representations of climate change?

Thatcher's announcement of a commitment by the UK government in relation to GHG emissions had been expected for a long time and was the first real political step to be taken in this country in relation to the problem. In a studied move, Thatcher opened the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in Berkshire and announced her emissions target on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1990, the same day that the IPCC report was published. Thatcher's aim was to be seen as taking a positive step towards reducing GHGs, as the scientists emphasised the seriousness of the problem. How did the press assess the proposed target? Were other climate-relevant policies evaluated in press analyses?

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<sup>88</sup> WG1 is the one focusing on science.

a) *Times*

The predominant ‘anti-environmentalism’, reactionary discourse in the *Times* clearly shaped a large part of the coverage of climate change in this period which was marked by strategy of de-legitimation and dismissal. Thatcher was again constituted into the most prominent actor in climate change stories. In the *Times*’ representation the launch of the IPCC report faded in relation to her interventions at the opening of the new climate centre and her announcement of a target for Britain in relation to GHG emissions.

On 26.05.90, the day after Thatcher opened the climate research centre, the *Times* published six articles on the greenhouse effect. One article – ‘Thatcher issues warning on vanishing nature and nations. Global Warming’ – consisted of extracts of Thatcher’s speech. The two most important articles were predominantly shaped by her words<sup>89</sup>. In her speech, Thatcher offered journalists an interpretation of the IPCC study: ‘a report of historic significance.’ Again, she highlighted the dangers in climate change. Emphasis on the global and engagement of everyone and every country in finding a solution was also again a prominent discursive strategy in Thatcher’s construction of the issue. Simultaneously, she used the IPCC report to support her own policies: ‘We want to predict [the impacts mentioned by the report] more accurately. That’s why we are opening this centre today.’<sup>90</sup> The grounds were ready to make the announcement of a (conditional) target for Britain’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions:

... provided others are ready to take their full share, Britain is prepared to set itself the very demanding target of a reduction of up to 30 per cent in presently projected levels of carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005.

The promotional opportunity was gleefully seized with words such as ‘very demanding’ and stabilisation of emissions being presented as a reduction (of projected emissions).

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<sup>89</sup> ‘Thatcher sets ‘tough’ global warming target. ‘Giant international effort’ needed’ Michael Mccarthy, *Times*, 26.05.90; ‘Repairing lease’, editorial, *Times*, 26.05.90.

<sup>90</sup> The institutionalisation of knowledge (see Wilkins, 1993) helped keep the issue ‘under control’ and enhanced credibility.

‘Thatcher sets ‘tough’ global warming target’, Michael McCarthy wrote on the first page of the *Times*<sup>91</sup> (see next page). The sense of risk is heightened in this article by quotes from both Thatcher and Dr. John Houghton, Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office. In Thatcher’s design, this serves to justify political investment on science. The article also repeats Thatcher’s views on the role of population increase as part of the blame-shifting strategy already used at the UN. Negative reactions of opposition parties and NGOs are listed at the end of the article.

Three more articles appeared in the *Times* on 26.05.90<sup>92</sup>. Nick Nuttall presented evidence that ‘Technology exists to cut UK’s carbon emissions’ (headline). The central testimony was from Gerald Leach, a member of the Government’s Advisory Committee on Renewable Energy. Fitting a logic of market economics and enterprise gains, proposed measures appealed to consumer’s rationality, and involved the use of efficient light bulbs, better insulation, new television sets, etc. WWF was briefly cited pointing to the contribution of traffic increases on Britain’s roads for carbon dioxide emissions.

Michael McCarthy reported on the IPCC study in an article headlined ‘Scientists sound alarm over runaway global warming’. The main conclusion of the group was spelled out:

... global mean temperatures would rise by about one degree Centigrade by 2025, by three degrees before the end of the next century, and would carry on rising.

As put by the scientists, a distinction was made ‘between what was certain, what was calculated with confidence, what was predicted on the basis of current computer models, what was uncertain, and what was the group’s agreed judgement.’ However, in this article’s ‘linear’ framing we find no ‘spill over’ effect, no inter-discursive critique concerning Thatcher’s own construction of scientific certainty.

The only slightly critical piece came from David Sapsted – ‘Downing Street fails energy conservation test’. Andrew Warren, from ACE, and an American scientist were quoted about the poor records of Number 10’s use of energy. The mild critique of the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Technology exists to cut UK’s carbon emissions’, Nick Nuttall; ‘Scientists sound alarm over runaway global warming’, Mike McCarthy; ‘Downing Street fails energy conservation test’; David Sapsted, *Times*, 26.05.90.

'Giant international effort' needed

# Thatcher sets 'tough' global warming target

By MICHAEL MCCARTHY, ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

1 MRS Margaret Thatcher  
yesterday called for a  
"giant international effort"  
to save the Earth from the  
consequences of global  
warming, and committed  
Britain to curbing its  
emissions of carbon  
dioxide.

10 The Prime Minister  
pledged to stabilize UK  
emissions at the present  
levels by the year 2005,  
provided other nations did  
their share. She announced  
her target as the world's  
leading meteorologists said  
that industrial gases were  
on the point of heating the  
atmosphere more than  
ever in the history of the  
planet.

25 Painting a picture of forests  
and croplands dying, islands  
disappearing as sea levels rise,  
great migrations of environmental  
refugees and people  
crying out for water, Mrs  
Thatcher endorsed the report  
of the science working group  
of the UN's Intergovernmental  
Panel on Climate Change.

"If the panel's predictions are  
broadly right, the world could  
become hotter than at any  
time in the past 100,000  
years," she said as she opened  
the centre for climate prediction  
and research at the Meteorological  
Office headquarters in  
Bracknell, Berkshire.

Britain was prepared to set  
itself the "very demanding  
target" of stabilizing total UK  
emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> at present  
levels by the year 2005, as part  
of "a wide international effort,  
with a fair distribution of the  
burden". It would tackle its  
3 per cent share of world CO<sub>2</sub>  
emissions "provided others  
are ready to take their full  
share". There was speculation  
that she may have been referring  
to the United States, which  
has shown reluctance to act  
over global warming.

Mrs Thatcher said details of  
how the target was to be  
achieved would be spelt out in  
the environment White Paper  
to be published in the autumn,  
but she said it would mean  
"significant adjustments to  
our economies — more efficient  
power stations, cars which  
use less fuel, better insulated  
houses and better management  
of energy". She made no  
reference to restricting the  
growing number of vehicles.

40 The British target was  
immediately condemned as  
inadequate by environmental  
pressure groups. It falls far  
short of the 60 per cent  
immediate cut in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions  
the scientists said was  
necessary to stabilize greenhouse  
gases at present levels.

45 The chairman of the working  
group, Dr John Houghton,  
chief executive of Britain's  
Meteorological Office, said  
that if Mrs Thatcher's  
stabilization programme were  
repeated worldwide, it would  
not stop the rise in temperatures,  
although it would slow down  
the rate of increase. "It buys us  
time," he said, adding that he  
did think the announcement was  
a "significant effort".

50 Dr Houghton's report predicts  
that global mean temperatures  
will have risen by a full degree  
by 2025 if no action is taken,  
and by three degrees by the end  
of the next century. Such  
increases were outside the  
range of historic or prehistoric  
experience. "We are getting  
outside the range where we  
know about the ability of  
ecosystems or even human  
beings to adapt."

55 The Prime Minister said a  
one degree rise in temperature  
would lead forests to move  
100 kilometres north, and  
some ordinary farming crops  
might move as much as 200 to  
300 kilometres. Speaking of a  
conversation she had with the

president of the Maldives  
Islands in the Indian Ocean,  
Mrs Thatcher said: "None of  
his country is more than 6 ft  
above sea level and a significant  
rise in the sea level could mean  
one less member of the  
Commonwealth."

"Other low-lying countries  
like Bangladesh would be  
badly affected, and there  
would surely be a great  
migration of population away  
from areas of the world liable  
to flooding, and from areas of  
declining rainfall and therefore  
of spreading desert. Those  
people will be crying out not  
for oil wells but for water."

20 The threats to the atmosphere  
from industrial gas emissions  
would be compounded, Mrs  
Thatcher said, with the rapid  
increase expected in the  
world's population from two  
billion in 1925 to 10 billion by  
the middle of the next century.  
"Problems are bound to arise  
as a result. The world has  
never known anything like it."

The Prime Minister's speech  
was criticized by Mr Neil  
Kinnock, who said her stance  
would not solve the problem.  
The Labour leader doubted  
her commitment to invest  
enough money and resources.  
"If we don't make the  
investment now then the  
failure will cost us the Earth."

30 Mr Ian Flindell, the Green  
Party's spokesman on energy,  
said: "We are disappointed  
that she has not met even the  
United Nations target of a 60  
per cent reduction in emissions,  
which they say is needed  
now. We will still be behind  
our European partners which  
are setting targets to be met  
by the year 2000."

35 Mr Paddy Ashdown, the  
Liberal Democrats' leader,  
said the speech was a lecture  
on what the rest of us should  
do rather than a statement of  
what she would do. "She  
called for a massive  
international effort, but then  
minimized the contribution  
Britain should make."

40 Friends of the Earth said the  
stabilization of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions  
was totally inadequate. "If the  
world followed the target Mrs  
Thatcher has announced, we  
will fail to control global  
warming. The Prime Minister  
must go much further, much  
faster." Greenpeace described  
the speech as a "con": "She is  
trying to dress up something  
as environmentally beneficial  
when in fact she is talking  
about continued pollution as  
usual." The World Wide Fund  
for Nature said the commitment  
to "repair work" was nowhere  
near enough.

Global warming study, page 4  
Leading article, page 11  
Letters, page 11

government came in the following shape: 'Neither the Department of Energy nor Downing Street could say yesterday what was being done to improve the situation.'

As far as the ideological positions of the *Times* are concerned, the most telling articles were published in its *Sunday* edition of 27.05.90:

- 'Green hysteria sets red alarm bells ringing. Global Warming', David Sapsted;
- 'Global Fawning. Global Warming', Bryan Appleyard;
- 'Greenhousemongers', Leading Article, unattributed.

These articles clearly expressed the right wing views that are predominant in this newspaper. The main object of the articles was environmentalism, more specifically a set of voices and events that had been heard or seen in the previous days about environmental problems. All the articles were marked by a sarcastic tone.

'Green hysteria...' is an acrimonious comment on *One World Week*, an initiative by the BBC and other public broadcasting companies in Europe, comprising a set of programmes on the environment. The message of these television programmes is ridiculed as 'mysticism' or 'sentimental ululation.' 'Honest journalism' is opposed to 'religious dogma'. A Promethean perspective of human relations with nature dominates the article.

The two-page long 'Global Fawning' focuses on a fashion show promoted by Friends of the Earth, which aimed to raise environmental awareness. Like the previous one, this article portrays environmentalism as a new religion with hints of totalitarianism, made explicit in the expression 'green Stalinism' and in the lines such as:

Greenery is the age's absolute. ... a religion was born, a new pastoralism that damned us for our excesses and our greed ...

Other media's representations of climate change are also discredited:

After watching [the television shows on climate change] my feeling is that this is not so much an exercise in journalism as a crusade with all the trademarks of a religious movement...

The 'Greenhousemongers' article from 27.05.90 was followed by 'Greenhousemongers 2' (unattributed) on 03.06.90. The importance of these pieces

# Greenhouse mongers

1 THE WORLD is at risk of untold catastrophe from the certain arrival of global warming, Mrs Thatcher warned when she  
5 opened the government's £7m climate research centre at Bracknell on Friday. She continued in this apocalyptic vein by predicting great migrations of people away from low-lying countries, such as Bangladesh, which would be flooded by a rise in the oceans, and from areas turned into desert by declining rainfall. The prime minister picked this up from the United Nations report on the greenhouse effect, which she welcomed as "an authoritative  
10 early warning, an agreed assessment from some 300 of the world's leading scientists. They confirm that greenhouse gases are increasing substantially as a result of man's activities, and that this will warm all the Earth's surface with serious consequences for us all." This is the UN report which also predicts that global warming could bring severe winter storms to Britain, the flooding of our coastal defences and malaria in southern England.

25 When Mrs Thatcher has the bit between her teeth there is no stopping her. This is fine when she's biting on the right bit, such as the market economy or a strong defence.  
30 But when it is the wrong bit, or at least one requiring more sober inquiry and consideration, such as the poll tax, then she can be a menace. With the greenhouse effect, Mrs Thatcher has fallen for the latest scientific

faddism, and is pandering to the public's propensity to fall for the end-is-nigh predictions. As John Maddox, the editor of Nature magazine, wrote in The Times: "Brooding on the prospect of global calamity seems to have become a passion. Now that the risk of nuclear warfare has receded, the threat of a general increase in the temperature of the surface of the Earth looks likely to take its place." Aply assisted, he might have added, by the BBC's One World Week, in which normal journalistic judgment and inquiry was suspended in favour of environmentalist propaganda. There is no reason why the rest of us should do the same: it is time for a more hard-headed examination of the risks and costs.

There is no doubt that there is a natural greenhouse effect: sunlight which hits the Earth's surface is converted into infra-red radiation which cannot easily escape into space because of water vapour and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. If it were not for this natural effect then the planet would be locked in an Ice Age. There is also no doubt

that the atmosphere has changed since the Industrial Revolution: for example, there is now a lot more carbon dioxide thanks to increased burning of fossil fuels (especially coal and oil). The UN report rightly says that such emissions are substantially increasing greenhouse gases; on present trends carbon dioxide will have doubled by 2035. But it does not prove that this increase has so far raised temperatures; it merely predicts that it will in the future.

The historic data show no such link. There was a rise in average temperatures of about 0.6C between 1880 and 1940, followed by a decline until 1965; then for a decade temperatures were stable; and there has been a sudden warming since 1975. That is relevant to the crucial issue of whether any global warming is caused by the extra carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere by fossil fuels. After all, most of this century's warming took place before 1940, when fossil fuel burning was relatively low; and temperatures fell or stayed static in the three decades after the second

world war, even though the use of fossil fuels shot up worldwide. The UN report depends on computer simulations which predict an average rise in temperature of 3C before the end of the next century because of the increase in greenhouse gases. But other scientists believe these computer models to be poor predictors of climate.

Work by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in America has cast doubt on the accuracy of global circulation models used to predict global warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions. Better models are needed to take account of the increase in clouds created by any rise in temperature, because more clouds means more sunlight reflected back into space; nor do existing models necessarily give enough weight to the ability of the oceans to absorb heat and delay any rise in global warming. Instead of any consensus, as the UN and Mrs Thatcher would have us believe, scientists are deeply divided about how much global warming will result from an increase in greenhouse gases.

Syukuro Manabe, widely regarded as the dean of climate modellers, has told Science magazine that temperatures will rise by only 2C, not the 10C he once thought. The model of Robert Pease, professor emeritus of climatology at the University of California, predicts a rise of only 1.4C, a warming he says which "may actually make the Earth more habitable". So much for the UN report confirming the global-warming consequences of the greenhouse effect as a reality, and Mrs Thatcher's ready acceptance of it. A leading scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has described the conclusions of the report as "off the wall".

Allen Bromley, assistant to President Bush for science and technology, puts his reservations in a more considered way: "There is a consensus that if we continue to put greenhouse gases into the atmosphere at the rate of this century we eventually will get global warming. But we don't know the exact time and magnitude, and some gaping uncertainties that underlie these models have not yet been resolved." Yet the greenhouse mongers are urging governments to spend billions and billions of pounds to combat a danger whose threat, if any, has yet to be properly assessed. The appropriate policy response needs to be far more considered than the environment lobby would have us believe. We will spell out what it should be next week.

Sunday Times, 27.05.90

# Greenhouse mongers 2

1 LAST WEEK The Sunday Times argued  
that greenhouse mongers were urging gov-  
ernments to spend billions to combat the  
5 effects of global warming when there was  
still no conclusive evidence about the exis-  
tence or potential extent of the greenhouse  
effect. We pointed out there was no histor-  
ical correlation between the increase in  
10 greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide,  
in the atmosphere and the level of global  
temperatures; we were scornful of the  
catastrophes predicted in the United Na-  
tions report on global warming unless dras-  
tic and expensive action was taken to  
15 combat the greenhouse effect; and dis-  
paraging of Margaret Thatcher's ready  
acceptance of these predictions (the UN  
has not been a notable influence on any of  
her other policies, and her government has  
20 been none the worse for that). We prom-  
ised to provide a more considered assess-  
ment of the appropriate policy response  
this week.

25 It is important to get this issue right;  
otherwise, in a fit of excessive and emo-  
tional environmentalism, governments  
could squander billions that might be bet-  
ter spent elsewhere. For example, Michael  
30 Boskin, chairman of President Bush's  
council of economic advisers, has cal-  
culated that reducing the emission of  
greenhouse gases in the United States by

20% over the next 15 years would cost  
between \$100 billion and \$200 billion a  
year. "The stakes are very high economi-  
cally," says Mr Boskin. "It would mean a  
period of substantially higher unemploy-  
ment and lower economic growth as Amer-  
ica switched to much more expensive  
forms of energy." No wonder Mrs Thatcher,  
for all her enthusiasm for the UN re-  
port, talks only of stabilising carbon  
dioxide emissions by 2005 - a curiously  
inadequate response if she really believes  
its apocalyptic predictions.

The problem is how to formulate policy  
when the exact nature of the greenhouse  
effect is still uncertain, and the costs of  
cutting the emissions of greenhouse gases  
are so expensive. The sensible response  
would be to adopt certain principles and  
pursue them with vigour. Some things are  
worth doing whatever the threat from the  
greenhouse effect. For example, it makes  
environmental sense to reduce the sulphur  
emissions from coal-fired electricity gen-  
erating stations, either by using low sul-  
phur coal or by installing de-sulphurisation  
equipment, or by increasing the use of  
natural gas in power plants.

The environment would similarly bene-  
fit from a cut in car exhaust emissions.  
That could be accomplished by ending hid-  
den subsidies to car users, such as the

favourable tax treatment given to com-  
pany cars; by fixing a road tax on the basis  
of car size and use; and by charging motor-  
ists who drive into cities through some  
form of road pricing. In a free society the  
correct course is not to ban people from  
using cars, but to make sure that motorists  
pay the full environmental and social costs  
their cars impose on society.

There is a clear need to develop a set of  
mechanisms to make markets work better to  
reduce pollution, and to realise the inter-  
national scope of the problem. For example,  
it is likely that £1m spent reducing industrial  
emissions from a factory in China would cut  
such emissions by much more than £1m  
spent on doing the same to a factory in the  
West, since the Western factory is probably  
already much cleaner than its communist  
equivalents and the cost of further reduc-  
tions would be very high per unit of output.  
So if the British government mandates Brit-  
ish Steel to reduce emissions by a certain  
amount, or says it must spend a percentage  
of its revenues on creating a better environ-  
ment, there could be a greater benefit glob-  
ally by allowing the company to realise that  
reduction or spend the money anywhere it  
can, even if that involves it in cleaning up a  
Chinese plant. That would give the world  
the biggest reduction in, say, greenhouse gas  
emissions for the lowest cost.

No government can be taken seriously  
on the environment, however, until it  
develops decision-taking procedures  
which give environmental considerations  
their proper place. Traditional ministerial  
lines of responsibility were established  
long before the environment was on any-  
body's agenda, or well off enough to want  
to improve it. So, whatever pro-environ-  
ment rhetoric politicians spout, the environ-  
ment usually takes second place to other  
considerations. This is most clearly seen in  
European agricultural policy, which en-  
courages the growing of food that nobody  
in Europe wants, without regard to the  
environmental cost. The widespread use of  
chemicals has turned farmers into major  
water and land polluters; the subsidies of  
the Brussels common agricultural policy  
(CAP) allow them to produce food without  
a market. The CAP is, in effect, an absurd  
anti-environmental programme, creating  
environmental problems for no purpose.

The same is true of transport policies,  
which are often established without regard  
for their environmental consequences  
(such as the tax privileges that come with  
the company car). In energy policy, the  
voices that oppose the import of low sul-  
phur foreign coal or natural gas are always  
much louder than those that point to the  
environmental benefits of such a course.

Power stations account for a third of Brit-  
ain's carbon dioxide emissions; replacing  
coal-fired generation with natural gas  
would cut them by 40%. The extra cost  
would have to be met by consumers, but  
with higher prices would come more en-  
ergy conservation. The newly-privatised  
electricity companies could find it cheaper  
to encourage their consumers to conserve  
energy, for example by subsidising insula-  
tion, than paying the capital costs of a new  
power plant to meet extra demand. If  
house builders and homeowners were  
given the right incentives, the energy  
requirements of new homes could be  
halved and those of commercial building  
cut by 75%.

There is much that is worth doing,  
regardless of the real nature of the green-  
house effect. Nor should it be assumed that  
all the changes it brings in its wake would  
be catastrophic. Bangladesh may be in  
great danger from flooding in the next  
century; but the greenhouse effect could  
also bring huge benefits to farming in Can-  
ada and the Soviet Union, allowing them  
to support far greater populations. Mass  
migration is a common event in world  
history, and it might make more sense to  
live with some of the consequences of the  
greenhouse effect than to devote effort and  
resources to trying to thwart them.

derives from the fact that they were both editorials, essentially devoted to interpreting the politics of climate change, rather than reporting on events. That two editorials should have been written with the same headline indicates a higher status in the news agenda than a one-off article (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).

The *Times* uses the derogatory expression ‘greenhousemongers’ à propos all those who talk about the problem and who construct climate change as a danger for the future, including Mrs Thatcher: l. 26, col. 1 – l. 11, col. 2. Despite their usual adherence to Thatcher’s construction of the issue, the *Times*’ critique suggests a tension between their allegiance to the Conservative government, on the one hand, and aversion to (green) dissent with its challenge to commercial interests, on the other hand. Thatcher’s strategy of dramatization of global warming may therefore have generated unwanted effects.

Lines 1-28, col. 1 in ‘Greenhousemongers 2’, with interesting reflective statements, openly presents the standing of the *Times*. This ‘sensible’ discourse, and self-constitution into a rational-pragmatic position, is a common characteristic of the *Times*, as we have seen. The subject-position of those who reason in different terms is hence one of ‘emotional’, nonsense environmentalism. The strategy of appealing to economic interest is also an important part of the re-construction of the greenhouse effect. The two editorials also show how previous calls for scientific proof in the *Times* are replaced by a strategy of contestation of mainstream scientific claims. In some cases, this is done through resort to the legitimation of the authority of some scientists (27.05.90: e.g. l. 1-2, col. 5), and in other cases, it is not (03.06.09: l. 11-15, col. 1). The concluding sentence of the second text is a clear example of the valuation upon which the *Times* operates. So much for the value of human security, or the value of an entire country, even, as long as it is a distant poor one.

Although the larger portion of the articles appearing in the *Times* corresponded to the type of discourse outlined above, some space is awarded to alternative views. ‘Halfway to redemption’, an editorial published on 24.05.90, brings up transport as an arena for policy action ignored by the Conservative government, and advocates investment in public transport to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from private cars. Another



article<sup>93</sup> presents bigger cuts in GHG emissions as not only possible but also economically desirable, moderately criticizing the government for lack of political will to implement the necessary measures.

## **b) *Independent***

In May 1990, the *Independent* promoted a quite critical reading of Thatcher's policies on climate change. This may be due to the fact that most of the articles were authored by Nicholas Schoon, now environment reporter for the *Independent*, rather than Richard North. This change of personnel demonstrates the important role of the reporter in shaping a newspaper's representation of issues. It must also be noted that at the time of this analysis, Mrs Thatcher and her government were increasingly unpopular in many respects. This political sentiment may also help contextualise the wave of criticism she got from the *Independent*. In this period, ecological modernization gains force in the *Independent* as a new framework that articulates views and action plans, in other words a new ideology.

The *Independent*'s critical analysis of the UK's climate change policy had already started before Thatcher's intervention. On 24.05.90, Nicholas Schoon wrote an article entitled 'Plan to stabilise gas emission criticised', where a conflict is visible between David Trippier's<sup>94</sup> claim that policies to address climate change would cause 'pain and anguish', and the indication by environmentalists and independent experts that stabilisation should be fairly easy without drastic government intervention or hardship. Schoon and Colin Brown also reported in an article published the following day that 'Labour demand[ed] reversal of policies on transport' (headline), and demonstrated that reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> were possible.

On 26.05.90, the *Independent* carried five articles on climate change. The issue was given front page status with an article that set the tone for the rest of the coverage: 'Thatcher sounds alarm over global warming: Lack of tough measures to back the 'rhetoric' disappoints ecologists', by Nicholas Schoon.

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<sup>93</sup> '£120 billion energy savings possible in Britain in 15 years', Michael McCarthy, *Times*, 25.05.90.

<sup>94</sup> Environment minister.

# Thatcher sounds alarm over global warming

1 MARGARET THATCHER yesterday gave her starkest warning yet about the dangers of global warming caused by air pollution. But she did not announce any new policy to combat climate change and rises in sea levels, apart from a qualified commitment that Britain would stabilise its emissions of carbon dioxide – the most important “greenhouse” gas altering the climate – by 2005.

Britain would fulfil that commitment only if other, unspecified nations promised similar restraint. “There would be no point in improving our performance if others just go on as before,” she said.

20 Mrs Thatcher was speaking as 90 climatologists and meteorologists from around the world gathered near Windsor to finalise their UN-commissioned report on the science of global warming.

25 She said this final report from the Science Working Group of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was “of historic significance”.

30 “It’s not something arcane or remote from everyday concerns: what it predicts will affect our daily lives. Governments and international organisations in every part of the world are going to have

## Lack of tough measures to back the ‘rhetoric’ disappoints ecologists

By Nicholas Schoon, Environment Reporter

to sit up and take notice and respond. If the panel’s predictions are broadly right, then the world could become hotter than at any time in the last 100,000 years.”

The report says a cut of 60 per cent in emissions of carbon dioxide and most other greenhouse gases is needed to stabilise their concentration in the atmosphere. That is the only action which can stop the warming, and it would still take several decades to work.

If there was a worldwide stabilisation of emissions at current levels – as Mrs Thatcher is advocating for Britain – the planet will continue to warm through the next century.

Environmental organisations were deeply disappointed by the speech, made at the opening of the Meteorological Office’s new Climate Prediction Centre in

Bracknell, Berkshire. Mrs Thatcher’s speech was also strongly criticised by the opposition parties.

Some European nations, such as West Germany and the Netherlands, are already aiming for cuts in their CO2 emissions of up to 25 per cent by 2005. A European consensus is forming that cuts, rather than stabilisation, by the industrialised nations are needed in the next two decades to offset rising emissions from developing nations.

Dr Jeremy Leggett, science director of Greenpeace UK, said: “It’s the right rhetoric but the action is totally inadequate. Stabilisation won’t really make a dent in the problem. Mrs Thatcher could have announced a 25 per cent cut as a start.”

The Prime Minister said stabilising Britain’s CO2 emis-

sions by 2005 would be a “very demanding target” because they were forecast to rise by 30 per cent. How it would be done would be spelled out in the Environment White Paper this September.

It would mean “significant adjustments” to the economy – “more efficient power stations, cars which use less fuel, better insulated houses and better management of energy in general. All this is bound to take time. It is no good setting political targets for action which are just not realistic in practice.”

Her guarded commitment to stabilisation will be used as a negotiating position when Britain goes into important environmental and economic conferences later this year. Mrs Thatcher is hoping the Bush administration will commit itself to stabilisation also. The White House has been backing away from taking action this decade, fearing damage to the energy-hungry US economy.

The IPCC science report says that, given present trends, global average temperatures will rise by one degree centigrade by 2025 and 3C before the end of the next century. But the rise will be uneven: temperature increases in

southern Europe and the US are predicted to be higher than the general rise, accompanied by reduced rainfall and soil moisture. The sea level is forecast to rise by 20 centimetres by 2030 and 65 centimetres by the end of the century.

Analysis, page 3  
Leading article, page 18

*Independent*, 26.05.90

The headline accentuates the role of the Prime Minister in the construction of the issue. Yet, it does not support the policies she proposes. Instead, the article exposes the contradictions of Thatcher's definition of the problem and promotes the discourse of NGOs. Parts of Thatcher's speech are reproduced, namely her insistence on the obligations of 'others' (other countries), but it is the NGOs' views that weigh most heavily in the overall framing of the article.

In 'Experts say the world must be led by example' (page 3), Schoon presents Thatcher's policy as insufficient for addressing climate change. NGOs' interpretation and the strategy of refutation of political rhetoric is again dominant:

... what frustrated and depressed environmentalists yesterday was the gap between her understanding and her willingness to grasp effective remedies ... Repeating that the problem can only be solved by global action is not enough.

The critique of the government goes further with the statement that it would be possible to reduce emissions quite substantially if the government was willing to do it.

In the same vein as Schoon, Will Bennett and Colin Brown write that 'Pollution curbs [had been] condemned as inadequate' (page 3). Representatives of FoE, Greenpeace and Transport 2000 are quoted, dismissing Thatcher's policy. The spokesperson for the latter NGO mentioned Thatcher's large road-building programme and planned cuts in funds for public transport. These crucial issues were rarely addressed in press analyses, which makes the *Independent's* decision to refer to them more notorious. Also giving voice to business representatives and the Secretaries of State for Transport and Environment, Bennett and Brown are overall less critical of the government than Schoon. A third article appeared on page 3 that day – 'Scientists identify growing danger of global warming' – consisting of an extract of the executive summary of the report of the IPCC's WG1.

Under the headline 'Progress and the environment', the editorial espouses precautionary action on climate change, arguing that by the time irrefutable predictions of the consequences of the greenhouse effect are available, it may be too late to arrest the problem.

# Progress and the environment

1 IN SPITE of her current unpopularity, the  
Prime Minister has had a generally enviable  
record of catching the public mood and  
articulating popular anxieties. Yesterday she  
5 signalled her recognition of the fact that pop-  
ular values have shifted. Talk of greenhouse  
gas emissions, holes in the ozone layer and  
the possibility of devastating and irreversible  
climatic changes is no longer confined to  
10 those whom Orwell would have dismissed as  
"fruit juice drinkers and sandal wearers".  
There are votes to be won – honourably and  
legitimately – by addressing genuine anx-  
ieties and attempting to find solutions.

15 If apocalyptic words were sufficient to  
solve problems, the Prime Minister's speech  
at the opening of the Hadley Centre for Cli-  
matic Prediction and Research at the Meteoro-  
logical Office would already have had a sig-  
20 nificant impact on global warming. Mrs  
Thatcher took her cue from the alarming  
tone employed in the first report of the Sci-  
entific Working Group of the Inter-Govern-  
mental Panel on Climate Change.

25 The report confirmed the suspicion that  
greenhouse gases were increasing substan-  
tially as a result of man's activities and that  
this would warm the earth's surface with what  
Mrs Thatcher described as "serious effects  
30 for all of us". The Prime Minister warned of  
the danger of climatic changes taking place at  
a faster rate than anything the natural world  
had known and envisaged uncontrolled mass  
movements of populations and the destruc-  
35 tion of entire species. Crops would fail and  
forests would turn to deserts. The Maldives  
would disappear beneath the Indian Ocean  
and Bangladesh would be devastated as sea  
levels rose.

40 This is the stuff of which Hollywood disas-  
ter movies are made, and the time scales in-  
voiced are short, although, as yet, undeter-  
mined. Overwhelming catastrophes could  
occur within the life of many people who are  
45 already adult. What, then, is the appropriate  
short-term response? It is admirable that the  
Government is funding a centre for the study  
and prediction of climatic change. This is one  
of the areas in which the cliché – that more  
50 research is needed – is entirely apposite.  
The scale and distribution of the crisis con-  
fronting us is so far unclear.

The sooner the homework is done, the  
greater the prospect of finding acceptable so-

lutions. This is because the climatic changes  
are already under way and, as they gather  
momentum, they become more difficult to  
arrest. The effect of a specified reduction in  
the emission of gases today would be greater  
than the impact of a similar reduction made  
in, say, 10 years' time. The more we fuel the  
process, the more difficult it will become to  
ameliorate the consequences of what Mrs  
Thatcher once described as this great experi-  
ment we are playing with the planet.

It is generally agreed that it will take about  
15 years to produce detailed and irrefutable  
predictions about the exact consequences of  
global warming. By then the situation could  
have deteriorated catastrophically. Agricul-  
tural production could be disrupted and sea  
levels rising. In the meantime, it would,  
therefore, make sense to reduce the level of  
carbon dioxide emissions by taking actions  
which are of themselves socially and com-  
mercially prudent.

A concern for the environment tends to  
improve the quality of life and of investment,  
rather than acting as a drag on progress. It is  
good business to use energy more efficiently  
and to invest in new, energy-efficient and  
environment-friendly technology. It makes  
sense to seek to employ what used to be de-  
scribed disparagingly as "alternative" sources  
of energy, such as wind, tide and solar power.  
And, as a short-term measure, it is right to  
maximise the use of natural gas in power gen-  
eration, as well as seeking safer and cheaper  
methods of generating nuclear power. It is  
sensible to insulate houses properly and to  
drive cars which use less fuel, as the Prime  
Minister advocated.

But Mrs Thatcher's modest aim – to en-  
sure that by the year 2005, our emission of  
carbon dioxide is no greater than it is today  
– is an inadequate response to an accelerat-  
ing crisis. Her Government should be at-  
tempting to reduce emissions sharply over  
the next 15 years. The car is a major source of  
pollution, whereas rail transport is far less  
environmentally damaging. If the Prime Min-  
ister is serious about wishing to combat  
global warming, the most effective step she  
could take would be to instruct the Depart-  
ment of Transport to look again at the very  
artificial neutrality adopted by the Secretary  
of State, Cecil Parkinson, when deciding be-  
tween road and rail investment.

The editorial asserts that measures to reduce GHG emissions are also beneficial in economic terms, in a clear endorsement of the emerging environmental ideology of ecological modernization. Closely associated with sustainable development, ecological modernization proposes a restructuring of the capitalist political economy such that gains would be obtained both for the environment and the economy (e.g. Jänicke, 1985; Spaargaren and Mol, 1992; Hajer, 1995; 1996; Christoff, 1996; Dryzek, 1997).

‘Makes sense’, ‘it is right’, ‘it is sensible’ are evaluative expressions used in the editorial to frame environmental protection measures, which are also said to be ‘commercially prudent’ and ‘good business’. Precautionary action is thus implicitly qualified. It refers to win-win options. In this framework, environmental protection appears as a new consensus, or a new common-sense, both for policy-makers and business. It is no longer a philosophy of fringe social groups. This formulation is, in effect, more an economic model than a real expression of concern for environmental conservation. As the headline suggests, the main goal is ‘progress’: ‘A concern for the environment tends to improve the quality of life and of investment, rather than acting as a drag on progress.’ However, the editorial ends with a call for governmental support of public transport instead of private cars. This is a progressive stance for a newspaper that has often advanced neo-liberal economic views.

‘Lord make us green, but not just yet: Does the Prime Minister’s speech on global warming mean a change of course?’ is the expressive headline of an article by David Nicholson-Lord<sup>95</sup> appearing on the *Independent on Sunday* on 27.05.90. Nicholson-Lord starts off with a suggestive narrativization of the relation between science, politics (and indirectly the media):

A familiar ceremony of British politics reached an equally familiar climax last week. The script goes like this. For months ministers, civil servants, scientists and advisers toil honestly on some issue of the day. Action is unforthcoming, criticisms grow and controversy mounts. Drama is clearly required. At this point Maggie Steps In.

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<sup>95</sup> Nicholson-Lord was environment editor for the *Independent on Sunday*. He has written widely on environmental issues, including the book *The Greening the Cities* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987). He is also associated with several institutions in the environmental field.

The catalytic role of Thatcher in the story is clear. We have seen exactly this in section two above. The contradictions of Thatcher's policies and statements are exposed throughout the text, which advances an ecological modernization discourse.

Scientists' views shape up the next two articles. In the first, 'The greenhouse time bomb: Authors of UN report say new data shows they have underestimated dangers of global warming' (27.05.90), science correspondent Steve Connor strengthens the seriousness of climate change. The 'time bomb' metaphor is very evocative. The authors of the IPCC study are cited saying that they did not account for all long-term effects and now consider the problem to be even more alarming. The second article, by Jeremy Leggett, Greenpeace's director of science, is headlined 'The cut Thatcher does not want to make' with the by-line 'Greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced, not merely kept constant, say scientists. Jeremy Leggett on the weak response to their united call' (28.05.90). It exposes some of the links between the strategies of actors such as scientists, politicians, business and the media.

Based on his inside witnessing of the writing of the IPCC report, Leggett emphasizes the 'strong and smooth ... consensus' between scientists in relation to the greenhouse effect, in spite of the pressures of '[o]bservers from industry - a rogues' gallery of 13 vested interests from Exxon, Shell, BT, the international coal and chemical industries'<sup>96</sup>. Next, Leggett critiques Thatcher's attempt to control scientific news when he writes that 'the world of politics [attempted] to massage the science into line with perceived expediency', and discredits her 'skilful, science-based con'. The article also offers a critique of media coverage. BBC lunchtime news is said to have adhered to the government's propaganda, referring to 'a 30% cut without pointing out that the 'cut' is from notional figures'<sup>97</sup>.

Elsewhere Leggett (2000) suggests that allusions to a worst-case scenario were avoided in the final version of the IPCC 1990 report due to the scientists' perception that the media would sensationalize it excessively. Although many scientists believed in the possibility of a runaway greenhouse effect with amplifying feedbacks, they wanted to avoid media seizure of the issue. This is an important indication as to how

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<sup>96</sup> Note the metaphorical language. See Leggett (2000) for further detail on business action.

<sup>97</sup> In turn, the tabloid press adopted an apocalyptic tone with "save our world"-type headlines [plastered] across its front pages', further to Thatcher's pronouncements and the release of the IPCC report.

scientists adjust their claims in anticipation of unwanted media interpretations (cf. Shackley et al., 1999, on scientific adjustments due to policy expectations). In the *Independent* article, Leggett gives similar hints on scientists' information management strategies with regard to the media.

### c) *Guardian*

On the eve of Thatcher's opening of the Hadley Climate Research Centre and announcement of an emissions target for the UK, the *Guardian* published an article headlined 'PM to rally fight against warming'<sup>98</sup>. Paul Brown challenged Thatcher by saying that she was 'expected to signal a significant change in government policies to deal with [the greenhouse effect]'. The article built the grounds for a future critique of Thatcher, given the high expectations it generated. On the day of publication of the IPCC's report, the *Guardian* ran two pieces – 'Climate crisis report throws down gauntlet' (Paul Brown) and 'Environment: Heat and dust-ups' (Nigel Williams). Both articles referred the high level of uncertainty that characterised climate studies. Still, they called for high cuts in emissions, thus reinforcing the *Guardian's* support for a precautionary approach.

The *Guardian* published five articles on climate change on 26.05.90. The headline 'Climate pledge 'too little too late' summarized the argument advanced in this front page article by Paul Brown and Nigel Williams. In essence, this was a strong criticism of Thatcher's planned policy coming from a variety of social and political perspectives. Discursively allying the critics of Thatcher ('opposition MPs, scientists and environmental groups'), comparing policies across countries (Britain's target and Germany's proposal of cutting emissions by 25%, as well as those from Netherlands, France, Italy and Denmark), and contrasting scientists claims and government's options (IPCC's call for a 60% reduction in emissions and Thatcher's programme of stabilization) were some of the strategies of the article.

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<sup>98</sup> 'PM to rally fight against warming', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 24.5.90.

# Climate pledge 'too little too late'

Paul Brown and Nigel Williams

1 **M**RS Thatcher's plan  
to tackle global  
warming by pegging  
5 British carbon diox-  
ide emissions to 1990 levels, but  
not for another 15 years, was  
widely criticised yesterday by  
opposition MPs, scientists and  
environmental groups as being  
10 too little too late.

Her target, lower than those  
of all other West European  
nations, will isolate Britain in  
the European Community, al-  
though it goes further than the  
15 United States, the world's big-  
gest carbon dioxide producer,  
which refuses to admit that  
global warming is a fact at all.

20 Mrs Thatcher's speech, at the  
opening of the Hadley Centre  
for Climate Prediction and  
Research at the Met Office in  
Bracknell, Berkshire, endorsed  
25 the work of 200 of the world's  
leading climate scientists in  
producing a report predicting  
temperature and sea level rises  
during the next century.

30 She described it as of "histor-  
ic significance" and said it  
would affect all our lives. She  
said: "The problems don't lie in  
the future, they are here and  
35 now, and it is our children and

grandchildren who will be af-  
fected. The changes we are talk-  
ing about will occur at a faster  
rate than anything our natural  
world has known in the past.  
One of the effects could be a  
great migration of animal and  
plant life, and possibly the loss  
of some of them altogether.

"The calculation has been  
made that a one degree rise in  
temperature would over time  
lead forests to move 100 kilo-  
metres further north and some  
ordinary farming crops may  
move as much as 200 to 300 kilo-  
metres. Just imagine the effect  
on farming, on the Common  
Agricultural Policy, on the sort  
of crops you can grow in partic-  
ular areas, and on nature  
reserves. They might find them-  
selves in the wrong places if the  
flora and fauna which they are  
meant to protect migrate."

Mrs Thatcher's speech  
allowed room for further rises  
in carbon dioxide emissions for  
some years, avoiding difficult  
decisions before the next elec-  
tion that would affect car users  
or electricity privatisation.

Without action to prevent  
increases in greenhouse gases,  
emissions of carbon dioxide are  
expected to increase by 30 per  
cent by 2005.

Mrs Thatcher said: "Provided

others are ready to take their  
full share, Britain is prepared  
to set itself the demanding tar-  
get of a reduction of up to 30 per  
cent in presently projected  
levels of carbon dioxide emis-  
sions by the year 2005. This  
would mean returning emis-  
sions to their 1990 levels by that  
date."

This was in contrast to what  
scientists said was necessary in  
a report by the United Nations'  
inter-governmental panel on  
climate change. They wanted a  
cut of more than 60 per cent.

The West Germans have  
pledged themselves to cut emis-  
sions by 25 per cent by 2005, the  
Netherlands plan to peg emis-  
sions to existing levels by 1995  
and France, Italy and Denmark  
support a minimum of stabilisa-  
tion by 2000.

The United States has refused  
to allow mention of global  
warming in official documents,  
referring to it as climate  
change. Mrs Thatcher's pointed  
remark about others taking  
their full share was a direct re-  
ference to White House reluc-  
tance to set targets. Britain's  
action, even on a limited scale,  
further isolates Mr Bush.

Dr John Houghton, chief ex-  
ecutive of the Met Office, who  
was chairman of the committee

which drew up the report, said  
if everyone took the same steps  
as Britain, it would not stop  
global warming.

Jeremy Leggett, director of  
science at Greenpeace, an ob-  
server on the committee, said:  
"She has not done enough and  
as the report makes clear, un-  
less we make drastic cuts in  
emissions now we cannot se-  
cure the environmental secu-  
rity of generations to come."

Labour has pledged to cut  
emissions but Frank Dobson,  
the party's energy spokesman,  
said he could not give figures

because the party did not have  
access to the statistics. He said  
the Government had the infor-  
mation but "after a decade of  
squandering energy and harm-  
ing the environment, she's still  
not prepared to do anything."

The Green Party said whole-  
sale changes to the economy  
were needed, not adjustments.

Tessa Robertson of the World  
Wide Fund for Nature said Mrs  
Thatcher's commitment was  
nowhere near enough.

Environment repairs, page 2;  
Leader comment, page 22

Guardian, 26.05.90



On page 2, Paul Brown deconstructed the government's proposals by showing how they were connected to 'Electoral considerations and privatisation'<sup>99</sup> of the electricity sector. Besides criticising the government, the article takes a positive approach by suggesting alternatives for action. Page 2 was also home to extracts from the IPCC's WG1 report under the headline 'Reality of global warming is acknowledged'.

A feature headlined 'A mouse and a nightmare' (unattributed) is a severe critique of Thatcher's policy announcement that uses irony as a powerful rhetorical tool (l. 1-12, col. 1). This article can be viewed in the next page. The disparity between Thatcher's 'cogent and coherent appeal' about the need to address climate change and the 'timid' and 'disappointing' policy commitment is denounced. The Prime Minister's personal responsibility is emphasised in l. 39-42, col. 1 by reference to her own academic background as a chemist. Her policy announcement is derided as a 'sleight of hand' and a 'pallid response' which was 'oversold'. The article also draws attention to the other political considerations, including privatisation of the electricity industry, the costs of addressing the greenhouse effect, for the government and for industry, inflation, and aversion to increased regulation (l. 54-69)<sup>100</sup>.

The *Guardian's* coverage of the UK target for GHG emissions reduction was not limited to the 26th May. On the 30th, Nigel Fountain authored a feature that analyses the present crisis on the basis of lessons from the deep past. Under the headline 'Echoes of disaster for this island Earth Input', Fountain writes: 'The Prime Minister has got me thinking about two strange, tragic islands, after her speech last week about the greenhouse effect.' His piece is a pessimistic narrativisation comparing planet Earth with two resource-devastated islands, Haiti and the Easter Island, to warn about the dangers of a careless relationship to the environment.

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<sup>99</sup> Part of the headline.

<sup>100</sup> The final piece of 26.05.90 is a sarcastic critique of Thatcher's action headlined 'One world down the drain' by Simon Rae.

# A mouse and a nightmare

1 **M**R CHAIRMAN,  
2 *We shall continue to pollute the earth's atmo-*  
3 *sphere with the equivalent amount of today's*  
4 *greenhouse gases as far ahead as 2005. We pledge there*  
5 *will be no reduction in the British production of threaten-*  
6 *ing heat-producing fumes — carbon dioxide, methane*  
7 *and nitrous oxide — over the next 15 years. We are*  
8 *resolved that, so far as Britain is concerned, the global-*  
9 *warming threat will be even more serious a decade and a*  
10 *half ahead. . . .*

The words are different but, actually, no less true than the Prime Minister's claim yesterday that "provided others are ready to take their full share, Britain is prepared to set itself the very demanding target of a reduction of up to 30 per cent in presently projected levels of carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005." That statistical sleight of hand was followed by the more honest admission that it would only return emissions to their present 1990 levels. And all on the day that the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) meeting in Windsor published the world's first internationally agreed scientific assessment of global warming, calling for "an immediate reduction" of 60 per cent in current man-made emissions.

25 Mrs Thatcher's address yesterday to the Met Office's new climate research centre in Bracknell was, politely, somewhat oversold. Britain had already agreed to stabilise its output of carbon dioxide — the main greenhouse gas — but had refused until yesterday to say when or at what level. Mrs Thatcher's "major initiative" amounted to a conditional promise to keep Britain lagging five years behind the Italians, French and Danes; 10 years behind the Dutch; and an unmeasurable distance behind the West Germans, who want a 25 per cent reduction by 2005.

The timid commitment was all the more disappointing because the first four-fifths of the Prime Minister's speech was a cogent and coherent appeal to the world to take global warming more seriously. Mrs Thatcher knows her science. No other world leader is likely to have as firm a grasp on the scientific explanation of the greenhouse effect. She has had two separate briefings this week with Dr John Houghton, the Met Office head who chaired the IPCC group. She has embraced the scientists' conclusions on the dangerous increase in greenhouse gases — heralding climatic changes at a faster rate than the world has ever known, with possible drought, flood and the extinction of species in train. "It is not something arcane or remote from everyday concerns: what it predicts will affect our daily lives. Governments and international organisations in every part of the world are going to have to sit up and take notice and respond."

Why, then, such a pallid response from the UK? Mrs Thatcher is a politician as well as a chemist. She is committed to producing an environment white paper this autumn, but has to hold an election within two years. Before then, she has to privatise the electricity generating industry, which accounts for one quarter of all British greenhouse gases. Reducing carbon dioxide is going to be expensive for the industry — and for the Government if privatisation flops. Other policies needed to reduce the gases will require increased public expenditure, increased charges to enhance energy conservation, and increased regulation. The Prime Minister has her RPI to worry about, her inflation nightmare. So, instead, she has opted for something which allows her to do nothing until the election is over. That is too long to wait.

70 Precise predictions of the effects of global warming are impossible at present. There are too many uncertainties. But the message from the scientists yesterday was clear enough: the implications of inactivity are far more serious than the risks associated with what eventually may turn out to be unnecessary activity. The Prime Minister should respond to her scientific instincts, not her political guile.

On 01.06.90 the *Guardian* carried three feature articles headlined 'Climate: Following Mrs Thatcher's recognition of the threat of global warming, Environment *Guardian* asked for practical solutions that she might encourage'. The first was authored by Andrew Warren, from ACE, who exposed the mistakes of Thatcher's strategy. Addressing her personally, he wrote:

It was maladroit of you to announce a mini-target to combat global warming just as UN scientists recommended eventual 60% reductions on current levels, inevitably making your proposal seem woefully inadequate.

Warren also claimed that Mrs Thatcher knew of the possibility for much bigger reductions in the UK's emissions which could still be accommodated within economic growth. She must have read the ACE study carried out with the government's scientists, which made the case that large savings in emissions could be made through energy conservation measures.

The second article in the series was written by David Gee, FoE's director. Thatcher's 'target of stabilisation' is accused of sending 'misleading signals to industry, power generation companies, investors ... the public, [and] developing countries'. In a strategy similar to Warren's, Gee refuted governmental warnings about the 'pain' and costs involved in controlling emissions, since energy conservation 'can save, not cost, money'. Recommended policies include 'redirect electricity privatisation to put energy conservation centre stage' and 'make public transport an attractive alternative to the car.' Seemingly in support of the ailing coal industry and its workers, the *Guardian* also carried a piece by Malcolm Edwards, from British Coal, who proposed investment in carbon dioxide extraction and storage. Such an approach implicitly approves of the continuation of present energy-use styles and behaviours, which may have sat uncomfortably with prevailing views in the *Guardian* but again meets the need for 'balance'.

The type of articles mentioned above, with suggestions for measures to address a problem, is a powerful tool for analysis and criticism of the government's performance. It provides the public with the concrete information they need to assess governmental policies. The timing of publication of these texts indicates that the *Guardian* again highlighted the continuity in Conservative government policies, rather

then just focusing on high profile political (pseudo) events. This framing effectively discredited the government's new proposals.

#### **d) In summary**

In May 1990 the ideological differences between the *Times* and the *Guardian* in the representation of climate change politics were deepened. The *Times* deployed reactionary views, refuting any expression of the need for change. The *Guardian* chose a precautionary approach, and consistently challenged governmental policies, exposing contradictions and presenting alternative political options. Contrasting with some of its stances in other periods, the *Independent* undertook a critical examination of the government that was quite similar to the *Guardian*, although informed more strongly by the premise of economic growth.

In this period, Thatcher's policies had a very negative reception in the *Guardian* and *Independent*. Despite amplifying her views, the *Times* was fault-finding in a different direction: it criticised her adhesion to 'environmentalism'. This came at a time when the poll tax (Butler et al., 1994) and Thatcher's stances on Europe, together with her perceived dogmatism and arrogance, had started generating contestation within and outside the Conservative Party.

To some extent, Thatcher's decision to synchronize the opening of the Hadley Centre and her announcement of the UK emissions target with the public launch of the IPCC report proved a profitable strategy since Thatcher took up most of the limelight, media attention being preferentially focused on her. In terms of press coverage, the publication of the IPCC reports – one of the most important moments in the scientific history of climate change – was overshadowed by Thatcher's interventions on the issue on the same day. Nevertheless, this news management strategy also exposed the disparities between the scientists' views and Thatcher's commitment and created the discursive space for contestation in the *Guardian* and *Independent*<sup>101</sup>. The strategy of dramatization and moralization of global warming chosen by Thatcher may also have

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<sup>101</sup> A similar situation had already happened with Thatcher's strategy of heightening the risk at the UN (see article by Tom Burke, *Times*, 10.11.89).

led to sensationalistic coverage in popular media that backfired on the science community, as Leggett (2000) argues.

## **5. SAYING THE PROBLEM: JOURNALISTIC LANGUAGE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**

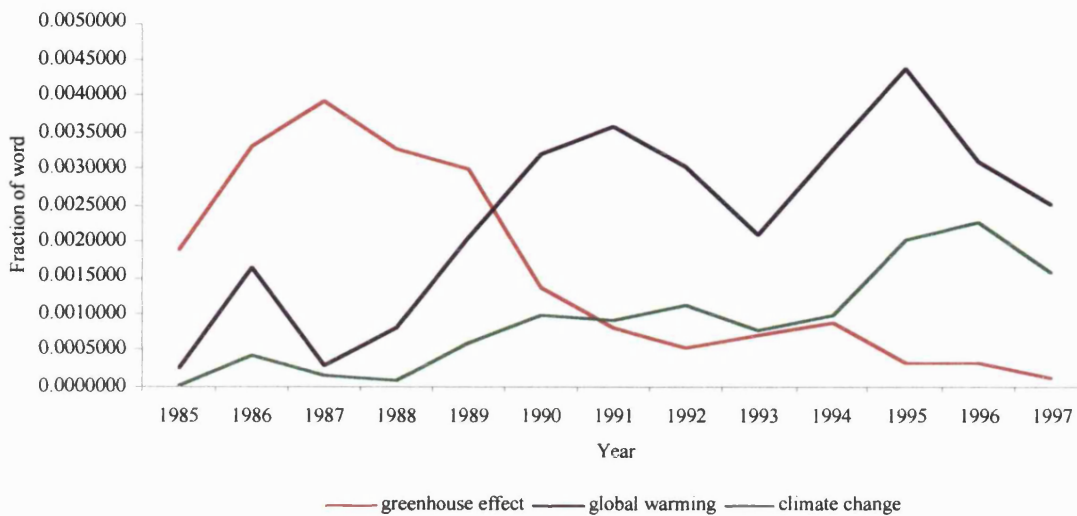
The significance of linguistic developments in the depiction of anthropogenic influence on global environmental and atmospheric systems has been well summarized by Paterson (1996: 155):

...these apparently semantic fights had their roots in different scientific and political understandings of the nature of the problem, and produced particular effects in the meanings which global warming took on politically.

Between 1985 and 1990, there are important changes in the terminology used to talk about the problem of the enhanced greenhouse effect and associated climate changes. As shown in headlines quoted in this chapter and in graph 3, from 1985 to 1989, 'greenhouse effect' was the most commonly employed expression. The number of references to 'global warming' grew substantially in 1989 and 'climate change' only became common in the 1990s. Lacey and Longman (1993) found very similar trends in their searches with the two first expressions in the *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Times* and *Today*.

The 'greenhouse effect' metaphor (see Harré et al., 1999) is, to a large extent, normalised in the journalistic discourse between 1985 and 1988. A symptom of this is the fact that the expression loses, in most texts, the inverted commas that were originally applied to it. Another interesting development is the fact that, in a special report that the *Independent* ran on 17.10.88, 'greenhouse effect' is turned into a section title under which six articles appear. The outcome is similar to what Hajer (1995) refers to as the routinisation of a cognitive category, in that the 'effect' is taken for granted, no longer problematised, and then starts shaping the way other issues, such as industrial emissions are analysed.

Graph 3- Proportional use of ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’ and ‘greenhouse effect’<sup>102</sup>



From 1988, the expression ‘global warming’ gains support. It often appears in the subtitle of articles, for example. This new linguistic representation of the problem draws on a wider construction of the environment at the time. As argued in chapter one, global environmental change became a social and political issue in the 1980s, spurred by problems such as the discovery of the ‘hole’ in the ozone in 1985 and denunciations of destruction of the Amazon rainforests. An incipient ‘global discourse’ started shaping people’s perception of the connectedness of problems across the globe (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The expression ‘global commons’, for example, powerfully evokes a narrative of common property and participation, and the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968) suggests the possibility of immense loss and catastrophe. Suggestions of a new ‘ethics of the global’ start to be raised (Meadows et al. 1992; Einsiedel and Coughlan, 1993; Roe, 1994; Hannigan, 1995).

The constitution of the global as the ‘appropriate’ site for examination and consideration of action on the greenhouse effect was also promoted by specific social actors, as we have seen. It was also linked to a certain scientific approach to the issue,

<sup>102</sup> The graph’s Y axis shows the proportional frequency of each of the expressions in relation to the amount of words used each year in articles about climate change. I found this measure to be more accurate than the relative frequency in relation to the number of articles, as the size of articles varies slightly from year to year.

namely Global Circulation Models (Shackley et al., 1998; Demeritt, 2001). By January 1990, 'global warming' was the most common designation of the problem. More recently, the US administration insisted on the replacement of 'global warming', which they perceived as too alarmist, with the apparently neutral term 'climate change' (Paterson, 1996: 154; Brown, 1996: 35). The latter terminology has come to dominate at the institutional and legal levels (e.g. IPCC; UNFCCC), as well as to be quite common in the media .

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter has addressed a variety of issues and topics. The conclusions to be drawn can be organised in four points.

### **Discursive changes and continuities**

Diachronic analysis showed that the media's discursive construction of the greenhouse effect went through major changes between 1985 and 1990. Initially, the issue was strictly built as a scientific matter. In line with the news values of clearness and unambiguity, science was streamlined in the media (Nelkin, 1987; 1991; Bucchi, 1998), with mutual rhetorical benefits for scientists and journalists. However, we did not find a tendency for reporting the problem in catastrophist terms, as did the German media, for example, since 1986 (Weingart et al., 2000), and levels of coverage remained very low until 1988. Editors may have been unwilling to take the risk of reporting a new type of story that might not prove important or be considered too alarming or radical (Harrabin, 2000). While newspapers were prone to producing some sense of crisis, corresponding to a standard news treatment of novel matters, they made sure that such possibility remained within controllable limits. More or less implicitly, the greenhouse effect was framed as a problem amenable to techno-scientific solutions. Social and political responsibility for the issue was excluded from the analysis. Greenhouse gases were scientified and decoupled from the practices responsible for their emission.

Profound discursive transformations took place in 1988. In the Toronto conference, political actors joined climate change scientists in mobilizing concern. More importantly, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher altered her discursive course of action to embrace the environment. With this kind of legitimation of the problem, the media took on a Cassandra role (Weingart, 1998), dramatizing the issue and creating a sense of urgency. The greenhouse effect was only narrativized as a threat after it entered the political arena. While scientists' promotional effort may have enhanced the perceived need for research programmes, the constitution of the greenhouse effect into a prominent political issue was essential in setting the media agenda and generating a substantial volume of news coverage.

Elsewhere, public projection of global environmental change has been explained by a coalescence of historical, social and political events, less to do with scientific knowledge than with the construction of the issue by a number of elites (Hart and Victor, 1993; Rosa and Dietz, 1998: 442). In the UK, the context of a general concern with the environment may have been influential in the amplification of the problem but the government's role was catalytic. The government pursued a strategy of recontextualization and legitimation of other political agendas within the greenhouse issue. Similarly, a variety of social actors appropriated the greenhouse effect from late 1988 and attempted to control its definition. Instead of extreme weather events leading to increased debate, the actualisation of the issue, from the media viewpoint, was provided by social actors. Despite some important ideological differences between the three newspapers, climate change continued to be understood within a capitalist logic of free market and growth. Debate on the practices and institutions that originate the problem only rarely took place.

### **Science's definitional power**

As shown in this chapter, the framing power of scientists was quite central in the earlier phases of climate change's public life. The discursive strategy of scientification of the problem pursued by the media reinforced an image of trust in and dependence of expert systems (Beck, 1992). The relationship between scientists and the media is by no means linear and processes of mutual dependency are part of it (e.g. Bucchi, 1998).



This chapter has indicated that scientists attempted to use the media as a form of commanding attention (Solesbury, 1976) and building concern about the problem. One of the main aims was probably to increase research funding (cf. Boehmer-Christiansen, 1994a; 1994b).

Scientific knowledge starts to be politicised in the media from 1988. In opposition to a previous image of consensus, science starts appearing (in the *Times*) as a divided and plural domain, subject to contestation and discrediting by scientists and journalists. From the autumn of 1988 competition between different social actors for the definition of the problem is clear. Most attention was given to central political figures who clearly tried to appropriate the greenhouse effect for their own purposes. As global warming gets built into the political agenda, science and scientists lose ground in the media (cf. Trumbo, 1996)<sup>103</sup>. The issue gains autonomy from science, being mapped into a number of different arenas, and politics comes to dominate media reports.

### **The politics of green(house) discourse**

The political construction of climate change in this period was characterised by a central contradiction: while the British government sought to avoid any policy changes to tackle the greenhouse effect (Collier, 1997), that same government constantly construed the problem as a major threat. Some of the reasons for the Prime Minister to have heightened the issue in her public interventions have been suggested in this chapter, such as promotion of nuclear power and international projection. Nevertheless, I argue that we should avoid seeing her statements as ‘rhetoric’, or false propaganda, and her policies as *the* actions, or real ‘facts’. Thatcher’s statements had an impact that goes beyond the mere momentary justification or publicity. On the one hand, her words did draw attention to the greenhouse effect and the levels of press coverage it generated are a clear indication of that. On the other hand, her discourse constituted a platform for critique by NGOs, research institutions and the press,

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<sup>103</sup> Trumbo found a similar pattern in the US media.

causing many perspectives and arguments to be aired that otherwise probably would not have been.

This chapter has shown there was an important discursive structuration (Hajer, 1995) of climate change by the government. This discursive effect takes place when actors are compelled to use the terms of a certain discourse in a certain domain. Most press articles on climate change were initiated in the sphere of government, and other social actors appear predominantly in a reactive role, such as the one of commentators. While the role of NGOs has been to draw attention to environmental issues, in the case of climate change they were rarely the initiators of coverage or the main proponents of argument. Their main form of participation in the debate was by offering alternative interpretations of the issue. While the *Guardian* and the *Independent* awarded a significant framing power to NGOs, the *Times* often attempted to discredit their discourse.

Being the focus of attention does not at all mean that the government gets uniform approval from the press. On the contrary, in the *Guardian* and at times in the *Independent*, the Conservative government underwent a progressive de-legitimation, either as a whole or through specific governmental figures. The picture was different in the *Times*, as we have seen. In spite of certain forms of contestation, Mrs Thatcher's public construction of the greenhouse effect illustrates her skills in handling the media (Cockerell, 1988) and in governing by public pronouncement (Johnson, 1991). The press did aid Thatcher's attempt to 'globalise governmentality' (Kuehls, 1996) by reproducing the 'global' frame she advanced. The arbitrary and non-essential nature of her construction of the greenhouse effect was thus naturalized and neutralized (Laclau and Mouffe, 1987; Deetz, 1992). Most critique was focused on the degree of policy regulation rather than on the nature of policy and underlying value choices. Still, the *Guardian* (and in a smaller extent the *Independent*) often raised alternatives and struggled against the closure of greenhouse policies.

### **Newspapers' stances**

The comparative-synchronic analysis done in this chapter showed significant differences between the three newspapers. The traits summarised below refer to the

discursive positions that are predominant (or most recurrent) in each newspaper. Such positions are the ones typically found in editorials or the equivalent 'leading articles', traditionally conveying the 'magisterial' and 'definitive corporate statement of a paper's opinions' (Seymour-Ure, 1998: 43). This does not exclude the fact that there are other – minority – views within each newspaper, especially in the *Times* and *Independent*. Instead of a unified message, we can identify several points of view in each paper, some consistent with the predominant discourse, others being 'collateral' in the overall representation of a problem.

There are crucial idiosyncrasies and ideological differences between the three broadsheet papers. In the *Times*, the government enjoyed a hegemonic position in the definition of climate change. This paper systematically reproduced governmental discourse and was in general supportive of the government's construction of climate change. The *Times* thus supports the *status quo*, although often in a masked way. The positions of the *Times* can be deduced more from absences than from presences – absence of criticism, absence of controversy, even absence of crucial information that could damage the image of the government. Proprietorial power certainly has a role in explaining these editorial lines, as Rupert Murdoch was closely associated to Thatcher and clearly used his newspapers to attack the government's political opponents (Wheeler, 1997: 78). Traditionally seen as the voice of the establishment, the *Times* served well as a means of amplifying the voice of the government (Anderson, 1997: 70).

In the later phases of the period examined in this chapter the *Times* promoted a sceptical reading of the sciences of climate change, with a systematic refusal to accept that a major environmental change was underway and that it had to be addressed, a position which led to the first criticisms of Margaret Thatcher. This contrasts starkly with early images of the science of climate change as solid and dependable. Conservative (or even reactionary) views appear to have been dominant even in scientific reporting in the *Times*.

The *Independent* had a split discourse. Political analysis was done from different ideological viewpoints. The main factor explaining those differences is the authorship of the articles. Richard North tended to subscribe to a neo-liberal discourse that rejects any governmental 'dirigisme'. Nicholas Schoon promoted a discourse that was much

closer to environmental organisations, for instance presenting in detail the ‘Green Gauntlet’ mentioned above, and demanding energy efficiency policies to address climate change.

The *Guardian* was the newspaper where protection of the environment was more consistently advocated. Although some Promethean views were aired in the early years, they were soon eradicated from this newspaper and the environment became a high value. With a tradition of editorial support for the Labour party, the *Guardian* was critical of Thatcher’s government, constantly denouncing its inertia and empty rhetoric<sup>104</sup>. The newspaper thus repeatedly calls for more and better action from the government on climate change. Given the degree of uncertainty surrounding climate change processes at that time, the *Guardian* promoted the adoption of a precautionary approach in political decision-making.

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<sup>104</sup> In February 1991, Paul Brown stated in an interview with Paul Maiteny: ‘we [the *Guardian*] will attack the government for being anti-green. ... we will point out the differences between the government’s green policy and the electricity privatisation. Hit them head on. ... that’s our job’ [in contrast with other newspapers].

## CHAPTER 6

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### FALLING BACK TO SILENCE: 1991-1996

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#### INTRODUCTION

The present chapter will cover the period 1991-96. As discussed in chapter three, there was a sharp decline of press coverage of the greenhouse effect in 1991. The first section of the chapter will discuss this development. Analysis will then focus on a set of critical discourse moments, as significant (or at least *potentially* significant) policy-related or scientific events took place throughout time. It will be important to examine how political action and inaction was sustained and/or challenged in the press, as climate change moved further into the domain of national and international regulation. In the scientific arena, there were crucial developments in the years addressed in this chapter. I will critically analyse their discursive re-constitution in newspapers.

#### 1. THE DECLINE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE MEDIA AGENDA

The number of articles in 1991 is, on average, 57% lower than in 1990<sup>1</sup>. While some of the factors discussed in chapter three may have contributed to this decline and a ripple effect from the American media may have happened, there are several other explanations for such a transformation in the British press. The decrease in media attention may be related to a lower political profile of the environment after 1990. The media may, to some extent at least, have followed the political agenda, as chapter five has shown they did in the first upward movement of climate change coverage. In 1991 there was a clear absence of political pronouncements on climate change, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> The volume of coverage started decreasing at the end of 1990: in December the *Times* and the *Independent* carried six articles each in contrast to a peak of 32 and 31 articles respectively in May 1990.

by high status politicians. This lack of leadership may have led the media to reduce its amount of coverage of the issue.

Although an international political agenda to address climate change was underway, several characteristics of the negotiations within the sessions of the International Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC)<sup>2</sup> were not conducive to an important media focus. The first INC session took place in February 1991, in Virginia, USA and away from the limelight of New York or Washington (see Leggett, 2000: 29-31). The other sessions happened in a variety of places around the world, which also worked against a sustained media coverage. Also, the fact that what was going on at these meetings was negotiation rather than and not decision-making may have led the media to de-valorise them. Moreover, the normalization or routinization of the debate on climate change through the INC sessions may have led to a diminished interest on the part of the media.

Economic recession, too may, have played a role in keeping environmental issues out of the media agenda. From 1991, the UK entered a period of economic setback which had a clear impact on newspaper finances. The decrease in advertising profits in the press led to thinner issues. The environment was obviously not one of the main priorities and hence often sacrificed, as Gaber (1998) found out in interviews with several British journalists (see also Chapman et al., 1997). Most news organisations actually sacked their environmental correspondents, who were considered unnecessary and unaffordable at a time of shifting priorities.

Attention cycles could also provide part of the explanation for the decrease in environmental coverage. Following Downs' issue-attention model (1972), the issue of climate change was destined to fall from public attention after an initial surge of interest and alarm. A phase of realization of the 'cost of significant progress' would be followed by the 'gradual decline of intense public interest'. However, polling data at the period does not confirm this thesis as concern for the environment was still high in 1991 (see Macnaghten and Urry, 1998: 78-86).

While Downs points to public interest as the cause of media coverage, Lacey and Longman (1993) regard the role of gatekeepers (see chapter two) as more important in

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<sup>2</sup> Established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1990.

defining cycles of media interest for an issue (see also Trumbo, 1996, on the relation between cycle phases and sources). Organizational reasons such as editorial boredom or news fatigue may have played a role in the decline of the environment in 1991. Hilgartner and Bosk's (1988) theorization may also be useful as the concepts of saturation and de-dramatization may help explain loss of media interest in the greenhouse effect. In all probability, all these factors combined during 1991. As we shall see, the outcome was to be five years where climate change struggled to maintain a presence in the public sphere.

## **2. RIO'S 1992 EARTH SUMMIT – THE OBJECTIVATION OF STATE POLITICS FOR THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

A large number of the discursive structures and standpoints found in previous periods in the representation of climate change in the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* were furthered in the coverage of the UNCED conference in 1992. Social actors, especially those in the political sphere, also broadly pursued earlier propositions. For this reason, the detailed press analysis of this period is presented as an appendix (n. 1) to the thesis. Nonetheless, a diachronic analysis points to a set of developments that are quite important and which I summarize below.

In this period, sustainable development became a pervasive ideological lens in discursive constructions of the greenhouse effect. Integrating and attempting to harmonize a wide range of environmental, economic and social principles; local and the global levels; present and future time-scales, sustainable development is an attractive framework for a variety of social actors. Further to the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), sustainable development thus became a new kind of consensus in official and other public arenas (Torgerson, 1995).

What exactly is involved in sustainable development is a matter of contention and different actors often espouse different versions of the same 'frame' (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou, 1998). But part of the appeal and the drawing force of sustainable development is its endorsement of economic growth. Redclift (1993) has argued that

sustainable development retains an essentially optimistic idea of progress, associated with evolutionary theories, scientific specialization and rapid economic growth (see also Adams, 1995). Hence, policies designed within this framework often promote consumerism and neglect to profile serious environmental protection (Meisner and Japp, 1998). At such a critical moment as the Rio summit, the press kept the assumptions and the promises of sustainable development largely unquestioned. By mostly excluding a thorough debate, newspapers presented the development programme, typical of modernity, as seemingly inevitable (Crunch, 1995).

The UNCED summit itself and the official debates therein constructed global environmental change much more narrowly than other discourses (Susskind, 1994). Most matters to do with developing countries, international equity, the impact of international aid, financial dependency, etc., intricately related to environmental problems, were left off the agenda. The press typically reproduced this limited construction and, thereby, naturalized and neutralized the international distribution of power that the conference represented.

Concerning climate change specifically, essential issues stood outside the discursive framing. The link between the problem and the practices that generate it remained untold by the media, as did as the transformations in practices required by citizens and governments. Matters to do with participation and decision-making regarding UNFCCC were not reported. Dalby (1996) found identical gaps in the *New York Times*. There was little talk about crucial issues of distribution of impacts and costs and more generally about international equity, and few displays of empathy for the priorities and needs of the people's of other regions of the globe. As Dalby (1996: 603) notes, there was much 'unsaid about UNCED'.

A construction of the world as a bi-polar reality of Rich and Poor, or North and South, was quite recurrent in the press at this time, with a reduction of the problem of climate change to a simplistic opposition between the 'West' and the rest of the world. This fits in with the journalistic assumption that clarity and conflict are good selling points (e.g. Gans, 1979; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). Strategies of de-legitimation and dismissal of the claims of developing countries, often positioned as extorting money from the North, were common. With a widespread reliance on official sources, the media politicised climate change in an ethnocentric fashion. Most of the press



representation of climate change politics around the time of Rio largely led to the objectivation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) of existing inter-governmental distributions of power. Such status quo was turned into something ‘natural’, ‘fixed’, ‘objective’.

The British government attempted to play a bridging role between the US and the European Community which gained it some positive press comment, but also some negative reports for the resulting weakening of commitments in UNFCCC. John Major, who had replaced Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of a Conservative government in 1991, resorted to time-management techniques that were similar to Thatcher’s, such as anticipation or synchronisation with prominent international events to achieve sympathetic press coverage. Taking advantage of the fortuitous reduction in GHG emissions that resulted from the conversion of privatised power stations from expensive coal to cheaper natural gas (the so-called ‘dash for gas’), the government changed the target year for bringing the British annual output of carbon dioxide back to the 1990 level from 2005 to 2000 (Collier, 1997). NGOs, viewed by some as the main agents for articulation of alternative development discourses in the contemporary world (Escobar, 1995), were awarded a relatively small framing power in this period (cf. Duffy, 1995). Rather, state ruling over the global environment was reinforced.

Despite having some of the faults discussed above, the *Guardian* often proposed alternative understandings of various objects of discourse. Reframing the economic stakes of climate change, for example, the *Guardian* promoted an economic analysis that emphasized the risk of economic losses involved in continuing present practices and not taking action to diminish emissions. It also promoted a different reading of the Rio summit’s achievements by seeing them from the perspective of other countries, like the Netherlands or the small island states. This strategy of shifting perspectives is very important for broadening the analytical focus. It is also in the *Guardian* that some expressions of a ‘survivalist’ ideology to environment and development occur (see Dryzek, 1997).

The *Independent* narrativized the USA as the reactionary force in the Rio negotiations leading to impasse and to other countries conceding to decisions which much weakened the UNFCCC convention. The refutation of the neo-liberal positions of the US in this period indicates that this kind of ideology is not always predominant

in this newspaper. However, the *Independent* was less critical of the British government's standing in the UNCED process. As in previous years, the *Times* grounded its analyses of the summit and climate change on official sources. It largely reproduced and sanctioned the government's propositions in this field, occasionally pursuing a strategy of glorification of British international politics and diplomacy. Along the lines of the news values of eliteness, attribution and personalization (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Bell, 1989), the *Times* strongly pursued a strategy of personalization of policy around the figure of John Major (and also Michael Howard, the environment minister). Rio appears in the media as a matter of political performance by the conventional powers (Dalby, 1996). An important transformation in the *Times*' representation of climate change is that previous strategies to dismiss concern for the environment and discredit NGOs (and other 'sponsors' of the issue) are no longer prominent. Once the greenhouse effect travelled from the sphere of dissent to the sphere of authority, having been institutionalised under the realm of state governance (INCs, UNCED, UNFCCC, etc), it became a worthy and legitimate object of discourse within the *Times*.

### **3. VAT ON DOMESTIC FUEL – ANOTHER RHETORICAL APPROPRIATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE?**

Press coverage of climate change hit the lowest point, quantitatively, in 1993. As noted by Lacey and Longman (1993) for 1991, this did not correspond to an improvement in the problem of GHG emissions; on the contrary, they kept increasing (IPCC, 1996a). The factors previously discussed, related to news processes and economic trends, are instead the explanation for a downward tendency that was only temporarily reversed by the Earth summit.

The most relevant political development that took place in 1993, in terms of national climate change politics, was the government's plan to impose VAT on domestic fuel and power and to create the Fuel Duty Tax, an escalatory system of taxation that would involve an annual increase of tax on transport fuels. Another important political matter was the debate on the carbon tax proposed by the European

Community (EC). I will concentrate on these two critical discourse moments. As environmental ideologies go, the programmes for VAT on fuel and the EC carbon tax approach climate change are a combination of ‘administrative rationalism’ with ‘economic rationalism’ (Dryzek, 1997). On the one hand, the state intervenes in an environmental problem (assuming that the plans for VAT on fuel were, as claimed by government representatives, a measure aimed primarily at climate change), intending to resolve it by a political-legal move. On the other hand, such move has an economic nature and is based on a market logic that consumers will adjust their behaviour in response to price signals. This section aims to assess the press representation of this type of policies. We will see that in this period, despite the very sparse press coverage, new meanings are appended to climate change.

Until 1993, in the UK, domestic gas and electricity had been zero rated for VAT purposes. The government’s plan was to introduce VAT on domestic fuel at a rate of 8% from April 1994 and 17.5% the following year<sup>3</sup>. In the 1993 Budget, a 10% increase in petrol prices was announced, together with the above-mentioned Fuel Duty Tax. Pricing was to be constituted into one of the main strategies for reduction of emissions in the UK Climate Change Programme (HM Government, 1994). This governmental move reflects the continuing commitment to neo-classical economics, as promoted by its main advisor, Professor David Pearce.

When Norman Lamont, Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced the measures in the House of Commons he attempted to justify them with the commitments for emissions reduction under the UNFCCC. He later repeated this argument in the Tory finance committee. Climate change hence served as a legitimating tool in several political spheres. However, the imagined ‘selling point’ of climate change did not succeed in mobilizing support for the tax. Its ‘beneficial’ aspects were ignored by some in the press, and discredited or considered insufficient by others.

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<sup>3</sup> The latter extension was defeated in Parliament in December 1994 and the tax later reduced to 5%.

### 3.1. *Guardian*: a difficult articulation of value standings

The extent of the coverage of this issue in the *Guardian* is in striking contrast with the other two newspapers'. While the *Guardian* carried six articles between the 13th and 20th of March in which the link between VAT on domestic fuel and greenhouse gas emissions was made, the *Times* and the *Independent* printed one each. However, taxation on petrol is only mentioned in one article in the *Guardian*, and the central object of another one in the *Independent*.

The *Guardian*'s coverage of the issue started a few days before political pronouncements on the issue with an article by Jill Papworth headlined 'Why you could get squeezed in a Budget power play' appearing in the City section of the newspaper on 13.03.93. The headline constrained the meaning of the political plans for VAT on domestic fuel to a *budget* matter. The dominant note was one of disbelief regarding the possibility of the government introducing such a tax, and its downsides were foregrounded. In anticipation, the *Guardian* thus de-legitimated the tax rise.

As the Chancellor did announce such a measure, together with a substantial rise in petrol prices, he attempted to legitimate them with reference to the UK's environmental responsibilities<sup>4</sup>. Contesting these 'green' moves, Paul Brown and Simon Beavis (business correspondent) constructed the policies as fund-raising mechanisms to cover the budget deficit. Notice the typical *Guardian* punning headline: 'Energy: Fuel tax plan leaves green lobby fuming' (17.03.93). 'Green lobby' is an arbitrary category that subsumes many different institutions and ideological commitments – and in any case only two of the five actors cited can be said to represent the environmental cause (Greenpeace and Green Party); the unifying aspect is here the lobbying action which is ascribed to this set of groups. The article conveys a strong image of unity in dissent – i.e. unity between very different organizations in opposing the government's plans. Brown and Beavis' argumentation strategy went as far as constructing an unlikely (implicit) association between the 'environmental lobby' and motoring associations. Paul Brown, an outspoken supporter of the

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<sup>4</sup> The only explicit discursive intervention of the Prime Minister on the topic mentioned in the press appears in an uncritical article headlined 'PM ready to impose energy efficiency' by Stephen Bates (25.03.93). Major reiterates the greenhouse argument for the tax rise: "We must show that we will act at home. The environmental buck stops in our backyard."

environmental cause, described motoring associations as ‘horrified’. A variety of negative reactions to the tax plan is expressed in the use of terms such as ‘scathing’, ‘failed’ (to convince), ‘excuse’ (about the environmental justification of VAT on fuel), and by the explicit focus on the money to be made by the state with the new tax (‘a lot of new revenue quickly to cover the budget deficit’). The number of words used in the text for different discursive purposes is in itself an indicator of the weight of the strategy of exposure and denunciation of the government enacted in the article. While indirect quotation of the Chancellor and the environment minister was done in 60 words, the criticisms voiced by a variety of social actors added up to 335 words. Arguments for opposition to the tax plan were very diverse, ranging from the limited impact of the tax in emissions reduction (Andrew Warren, ACE) to the increase of public resistance to the environmental cause due to a new tax (Paul Ekins, environmental economist), or the environmental justification being ‘entirely bogus’ (Chris Smith, Labour’s environment protection spokesman). The government was strongly discredited throughout the article.

Page 11 of the next day’s issue of the *Guardian* carried a piece entitled ‘Rio commitment leaves gap in energy accounts’ by John Vidal, environment editor of the *Guardian*. The analytical and ideological standpoint is completely different from the previous article. Vidal’s article presents the tax plan as a necessity, almost as an inevitability, not only justifying it in view of the Rio commitments for GHG reduction but also tacitly considering it insufficient. This meaning derives partly from the first paragraph:

The Chancellor’s decision to tax household energy use from next year stems partly from last June’s Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, at which nations bowed to scientific evidence that the world’s atmosphere was heating up with potentially disastrous consequences.

The word ‘stems’ (‘to have as origin’) turns the tax plan into a ‘natural’ policy development, justifies it and turns it acceptable. The standing of environmental groups (or ‘environmentalists’, whatever the meaning of the word) vis-à-vis the tax plan is presented in this article in terms that are strikingly antagonistic to the previous article:

Mr Lamont's tax measures were welcomed by many environmentalists yesterday as a first step towards energy efficiency.

The main discursive object of this article, as cristalized in the headline, is the gap between the commitments made through the UNFCCC and the concrete energy policies of the government and their potential for savings in emissions. Overall, the text sanctions the government's option for introducing VAT on domestic fuel, although conveying a critique of the foreseeable incapacity of the government to meet the targets for emissions reduction. The new plans for petrol taxation are mentioned in one line about the predicted cuts in emissions.

The decision to tax domestic fuel and the reactions of different social actors and the press illustrate the complex ethical and political nature of measures to address climate change. A multiplicity of matters are involved in such a tax. For instance, some equity issues, such as the right to affordable heating, come into play. Equity matters are typically emphasized by the *Guardian* which has a strong commitment to poverty alleviation, and a very high readership among social science professionals. Therefore, while the previous article had unconditionally refused the new tax plan, 'The bad side of a good move', a non-attributed leading article published also on 18.03.93, was discursively more sophisticated, spelling out the ambivalences of the policy plan for VAT on fuel.

The title construes the measure as a 'good' one while simultaneously highlighting its 'bad side' (however, the precedence of the latter meaning in the sentence makes it predominant). While Brown and Beavis' article had strongly conveyed the impression that Greenpeace opposed to the plan, we are told here that this organization welcomed the 'tax increases' (no distinction is made between domestic and transport fuels). The strange coincidence of stances of Greenpeace, the European Commission and fiscal reformers is explored in l. 1-5, col. 1. We can guess that this positioning strategy, opposing Greenpeace and the poor, might be highly damaging for the public image of this organization. We will come back to this. The (discursive) complexity of the tax plan was made clear in l. 47-53, col. 1. From here onwards the article emphasized the negative impact of the tax rise for the poor. The intensity of the language employed leaves no doubts about what is valued most (l. 63-84, col. 1). Nothing is said specifically about petrol taxation.

# The bad side of a good move

1 **W**HICH measure in Norman Lamont's Budget achieved the unlikely miracle of uniting fiscal reformers, the European Commission and Greenpeace against the poverty lobby? His controversial decision to levy VAT of 17½ per cent in stages on domestic gas and electricity. The move is expected to raise £3 billion a year in revenue. And it is exactly the sort of measure which puts every liberal-minded person's prejudices into a mincing machine.

10 Mr Lamont introduced it, rather cunningly, as if it were something forced on a reluctant Chancellor by the need to reduce carbon emissions in fulfillment of pledges made last June to the UN Convention on Climate Change at Rio. For this reason, Greenpeace yesterday welcomed the tax increases — even though they didn't go far enough and despite its preference for a carbon tax of the kind proposed by the EC but rejected by Britain. The EC praised Mr Lamont's taxes on energy and car usage as moving in the same direction as Community environment policies. The step also marks a big leap in the harmonisation of EC VAT rates.

30 Fiscal reformers liked the Budget because it marked a further stage in the transfer of taxation from income to spending (as long as one ignores the increase in national insurance contributions). And anyway, increased taxation was inevitable for a country which has been living beyond its means (as witness a prospective budget deficit of £50 billion) and paying its employed population much more than it has been earning for a number of years. Even now, at the end of the longest recession since the 1930s, average earnings are rising by almost five per cent — when all that is needed to maintain living standards is an increase of under one per cent. In the US, where unemployment is much lower, there has been hardly any increase in real earnings for a decade. Surely, argument blending with argument, the case for a tax increase is overwhelming?

50 Not quite. The trouble with putting VAT on energy is that it hits the poor dramatically more heavily than it hits the rich. As Fran Bennett points out on this page, the poorest fifth of households already spends more than twice as much of the weekly budget on fuel as the average household does. And, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the poorest households (with less than £60 a week of disposable income) spend 14 per cent of their income on fuel — compared with three per cent by the very richest (over £800 per week). So the poor are disproportionately, even viciously, hit by Mr Lamont's VAT decision. True, he has diluted instant criticism by pledging that means-tested benefits will rise to reflect the change; but he doesn't say by how much. And, as the IFS points out, those just above the means-tested benefit level, including millions of pensioners, will not be helped:

75 The Government's track record is not one to inspire trust among the poor. The Conservatives have effected a massive redistribution of income from rich to poor in the past decade without any obvious impact on economic growth. There are lives and much misery at stake here. Mr Lamont has to be better than his word here. He must be monitored rigorously to ensure that the poor are not kicked while they're down by a reform which otherwise has a lot going for it.

almost no scope for argument left. Signing the map is the sole relief from defeat; and, with his signature, all efforts and all pressures can turn against the Serbs. Karadzic must sign as well; and then he must be made to keep his word.

90 He, too, is in an increasing corner. President Milosevic of Serbia is feeling the heat. He had his own Budget yesterday. Some 70 per cent of funding goes merely to support his army. February inflation stood at 22,000 per cent. Manufacturing output is down 40 per cent year on year. The banking sector is collapsing. Sanctions always take longer to work than their proponents prophesy. But they can be cumulatively lethal. That is one reason why Milosevic's Foreign Minister has gone to the UN talks. The prospect of peace remains, perhaps closer. The moment of arrival for the 50,000 peace-keeping troops that Nato authorised yesterday may still come.

105 Yet, for once, "peace" will not be a line of forgetfulness drawn under the affair. It needs saying again and again that it can only be a bloody and dangerous new beginning. These forces will not, like poor General Morillon, be forced to plead to feed the starving or rescue the sick. They can and will insist on action and the removal of all heavy artillery. They can and will shoot back. But this also means that they can and will be shot at. Many will die: our boys in a distant foreign field. And the bill and the length of commitment will stretch on and on over years. This is the price of peace. When and if it is achieved, we must be ready to pay

*Guardian*, 18.03.93

Along the same lines, Melanie Philips<sup>5</sup> 'commentary', 'A Budget coloured by a green veneer of deepest cynicism and hypocrisy', from 19.03.93 is, as told by the headline, a powerful attack on the government's plan. Let us look at the sequence of words in the first paragraph:

Chaos is the politest way to describe it. Ever since that point in the Chancellor's Budget speech when he announced the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and was interrupted by a roar of rage and disbelief from the benches behind as well as in front of him, the Government has descended into incoherence. The disarray and confusion surely reflects that, not for the first time, it misjudged the reaction from the opposition that matters – on its own side.

Terms like 'chaos', 'rage', 'disbelief', 'descended', 'incoherence', 'disarray', 'confusion' build up an extremely negative idea of the government. And then comes the bluntest judgment: 'the Government intends to crucify the poor on the altar of its own financial incompetence'. This is followed by a description of the dissonances and contradictions of the discourse of different members of the government on this issue, as well as a severe critique of the consequences of their decisions. The images of Norman Lamont, the Chancellor, Michael Portillo, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and especially social security minister Ann Widdecombe and Prime Minister John Major were all slashed by Philips. The latter two are said to be totally inconsiderate of the poor and of the terrible impact of the tax plan over the capacity of the poor to afford heating.

Philips deconstructed the political understanding of poverty: in her words equated by the government with social security benefit. She openly took up the defence of the interests of the poor by explaining their needs, patterns of expenditure and practices to cope with hardship, in other words, with a strategy of promotion of identification. The article then turned to denouncing the way the government 'corrupted the environmentalist argument' to sustain its tax plan. Philips made an (intertextual) reference to another article by Vidal on the same day (who took up a line of argumentation similar to his other article's), maintaining that 'we have no coherent energy policy, let alone a carbon reduction policy'. Philips went further by bringing up the issue of the 'massive' road-building programme as an indication of the inadequate

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<sup>5</sup> Phillips has contributed with columns for various newspapers and authored several books on social



policies of the government to tackle the greenhouse effect. By framing the tax plan as a social ethics issue, this article strongly contended against the government. Philips did more than contesting the plan: she used the press as a discursive battlefield to strike the government as a whole.

The articulation of taxation and social equity continues was continued by Jill Papworth<sup>6</sup>. Putting a strong emphasis on the desperate situation of the poor, Papworth considered that the government's promise of increased benefits, after being pressured, did not satisfy, since '[t]housands in low-income groups, including pensioners receiving small occupational pensions fall just outside the income support threshold.'

As we have seen, NGOs appeared in the *Guardian* in connection with the issue of social justice involved in the levy of tax on domestic fuel. Brown and Beavis (17.03.93) quote Greenpeace promoting ideas of social solidarity and justice, and therefore opposing the domestic fuel taxation plan. This is an interesting decentering from the environmental cause, and possibly reflects the importance of democracy in the reasoning of environmental organizations – they depend on public support and public legitimacy and thus cannot take stances that will endanger them. However, in 'The bad side of a good move' (18.03.93), we are told that Greenpeace welcomed the reform plan. In Papworth's article from 20.03.93 Friends of the Earth suggests a way around the tax reform with the 'ultimate tax dodge' – energy efficiency. These differences are an illustration of the ambiguities that haunt environmental NGOs and the delicate balances in which they function, but may also owe to the re-construction processes involved in media discourse<sup>7</sup>.

### **3.2. *Times*: opposing the government**

The *Times* published only one article linking the tax plan with climate change: 'Cries of anguish greet 8% VAT on domestic fuel' by Nicholas Wood and Jamie Dettmer (17.03.93). This indicates the *Times*' low valuation of this dimension of fiscal

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issues and political ideas.

<sup>6</sup> 'Lamont fuels fire of dissent with decision to tax energy', 20.03.93.

<sup>7</sup> We have already seen divergent re-constructions of NGOs' discourse in chapter five.

# Cries of anguish greet 8% VAT on domestic fuel

BY NICHOLAS WOOD AND JAMIE DETTMER

1 THE Chancellor was under fire last night from Labour and from some of his own supporters over his swingeing  
5 new tax on domestic gas and electricity bills.

The possibility that the government could face difficulties enacting the change in the  
10 Commons was raised last night when Sir Marcus Fox, chairman of the Tory 1922 committee, called it a "problem". He said in a television  
15 interview: "I do not welcome it, but people will be protected." He pointed out that poor families would be safeguarded through benefit increases.

20 Mr Lamont's announcement that VAT would be extended to domestic fuel and power from April next year so that Britain could meet its international obligations under  
25 the Rio climate change convention was greeted with cries of "swindler" from the Opposition benches, and a sharp intake of breath on the Tory side.

30 Conservative MPs were shocked that Mr Lamont planned to impose VAT at 8 per cent next year and then go  
35 to 17.5 per cent in 1995-96, perhaps the run-up to the next election. It will eventually raise £3 billion a year.

40 They voiced their anxieties at the Chancellor's post-Budget meeting with the backbench Tory finance committee, where Mr Lamont reiterated that the Rio convention  
45 was an important milestone in combating global

warming and that the tax increases were needed to enable Britain to play its part.

But Tory MPs were worried about his timing, saying it could provoke an electoral backlash as the government prepared to go to the country.

John Smith, the Labour leader, accused Mr Lamont of betraying the public and letting down his own supporters. Adding VAT to fuel bills, he said, would "push many families just on the edge" into despair. Millions who were poor but did not qualify for income support would be "hit savagely by this VAT on the basic cost of living".

Taxing fuel was part of an overall betrayal of general election pledges. Tory promises that taxation and national insurance would not increase had been shown to be false.

40 Pensioners' organisations and others denounced the VAT plans and warned of the hardship the elderly would be forced to endure next winter. They termed it a "Budget of despair". Sally Greengross, director of Age Concern, said she was very disappointed, and the Child Poverty Action Group accused the Chancellor of tilting the tax burden further towards the poor

45 The Low Pay Unit estimated that VAT on fuel, with other increases, would add £5 a week to the costs of a low paid family. Chris Pond, director, said: "They have no more notches on their belts to tighten".

*Times*, 17.03.93

policy. The fact that this newspaper gave the article front page honours does not mean much in terms of prominence for climate change since the reference to the problem is quick and a mere reproduction of the Chancellor's words. The article expresses a negative reaction to the tax plan on the basis of its political and social impacts. The most salient actors are Conservative MPs who predominantly argued in terms of the electoral costs of the budget proposal. There is a strong qualification of reactions to the tax plan using words such as 'cries of anguish' and 'cries of "swindler"'. Some space is given to the Labour party's social concerns and to the voice of 'pensioners' organizations and others'. In short, for the *Times*, the most newsworthy aspect of the tax plan was the conflict it generated between the Chancellor and various other political and social institutions, including the Conservative party. The *Times* did not make the link between the Fuel Duty Tax and climate change in any article.

### **3.3. Ambivalent *Independent***

The association of the Chancellor's tax plan with climate change appeared in the *Independent* about a week later than in the *Guardian* and *Times*<sup>8</sup>. This *Independent* article reported the decrease in British emissions of carbon dioxide in the previous year, therefore 'raising questions' over the decision to impose VAT on domestic fuel. Note that this construction departs from the tacit acceptance of the UNFCCC as a legitimating basis for the tax plan. The headline has a restrained tone of condemnation: 'Britain's carbon dioxide emissions fall by 3%: Decline raises doubt over Lamont tax move'. Nicholas Schoon's article ends, however, with a different standpoint, as Greenpeace and ACE representatives argue for stronger measures for reducing emissions (l. 15-29, col. 3) and turn the argument about the decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> measured in Britain (l. 35-39, col. 3). Overall, the article is ambivalent in its evaluation of the tax plan as an environmental policy instrument.

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<sup>8</sup> 23.03.93.

DECLINE RAISES DOUBT OVER LAMONT TAX MOVE

# Britain's carbon dioxide emissions fall by 3%

1 BRITAIN'S emissions of carbon di-  
oxide, the pollutant that poses the  
greatest threat of man-made climate  
change, dropped by 3 per cent last  
5 year owing to declining consumption  
of coal, oil and gas.

The fall will raise questions about  
Norman Lamont's justification for  
raising VAT on domestic fuel from  
zero to 17.5 per cent over the next two  
10 years. The Chancellor of the Exche-  
quer told the House of Commons on  
Budget Day that the tax was needed to  
curb energy consumption and tackle  
15 the threat of global warming.

Britain is committed, under last  
year's climate change treaty, to stabil-  
ise annual emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> at their  
1990 level by 2000. Last year's drop,  
20 due mainly to the recession, mild  
weather and a switch from coal-fired  
to nuclear electricity, shows there is a

NICHOLAS SCHOON

Environment Correspondent

chance that Britain could hit the tar-  
get by accident without bringing in  
any new policies or taxes.

In 1990, emissions stood at 160 mil-  
lion tons and they rose marginally to  
161 million in 1991, according to gov-  
ernment estimates. These are the  
most recent Whitehall figures, but it  
is possible to estimate how much CO<sub>2</sub>  
was produced last year from fossil fuel  
consumption figures, which are kept  
much more up-to-date. Almost all of  
the CO<sub>2</sub> that is emitted is produced as  
a result of burning coal, oil and gas.

Last year, emissions fell to 156 mil-  
lion tons, well below the stabilisation  
target. Government experts project  
that if energy prices are high and eco-

25 nomic growth is low through the  
1990s then emissions will have fallen  
substantially by 2000. But if energy  
prices remain low and economic  
growth is high then the projection is  
for a 12 per cent increase in emissions  
by the end of the century — unless  
new policies are introduced in order  
to meet Britain's treaty commitment.

Environment experts pointed out  
that the target for advanced industrial  
nations to stabilise emissions by 2000  
was only agreed because it was reason-  
ably easy to achieve.

Stewart Boyle, Greenpeace's energy  
director, said: "It's an extremely mod-  
est target. If we are going to avoid fun-  
damentally altering climate, while  
coping with the needs of the Third  
World then countries like Britain are  
eventually going to have to curb their  
emissions by 80 per cent or more."

He and Andrew Warren, director of  
the Association for the Conservation  
of Energy, warned that if the econ-  
25 omy revived then energy consump-  
tion could start to rise again rapidly,  
overwhelming last year's fall in CO<sub>2</sub>  
emissions within a couple of years.  
30 "The fall is largely due to nuclear  
electricity [which produces very little  
CO<sub>2</sub>] being ring-fenced and given a  
guaranteed market while coal de-  
clines," Mr Warren said.

35 "We should not be complacent. It  
shows how much more we could do to  
address the threat of climate change if  
we were really serious about saving  
energy."

*Independent*, 23.03.93

In a speech at a conference on climate change, Michael Howard attempted later to shift the focus of debate from domestic fuel to petrol, saying that the tax rise on the latter ‘declared a strategy for the future’ in terms of greenhouse gas reductions. David Nicholson-Lord makes a short reference to the claim of the ‘environmental lobby’ that the real intention of the government was to raise revenue<sup>9</sup>.

From the analysis of the three newspapers, it is clear that the government’s decision to levy VAT on domestic gas and electricity, legitimating the measure with the need for GHG reductions, faced various forms of contestation from other social actors and from the press. The *Independent*, the *Times* and the *Guardian* all disputed the policy measure. While previous appropriations of climate change by Thatcher’s government were successful in defining the problem for at least some media and in controlling or circumscribing constructions of the issue, Major’s government was mostly ineffectual, at least in this particular move, and was profoundly discredited.

The analysis of the media discourse in this critical discourse moment shows that discursive standpoints can fluctuate somewhat when tensions arise between environmental protection and other valued principles, such as social justice. For a newspaper like the *Guardian*, a usual champion of social equity, the new tax represented an ideological challenge. Framing the tax through the welfare point of view, some journalists condemned it while bracketing the climate change issue or pointing to the possibility of different policies. Alternatively, foregrounding climate change and the required reduction in energy consumption, other authors endorsed the tax, although exposing the limited reach of the government’s global politics for the greenhouse effect<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Petrol prices to continue rising’, 08.05.93.

<sup>10</sup> The Fuel Duty Tax on petrol came in the direction of claims of several types of environmentalists and could potentially lead to a decrease in private car use and a shift to public transport. However, the press, and most notably the *Guardian*, failed to frame this policy in terms of climate change and it was silenced amidst negative reactions to VAT on domestic fuel.

#### 4. THE EC CARBON TAX IN THE PRESS: AN OPPOSITIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE

One of the potentially most important political issues of 1993 was the EC debate on the creation of a carbon tax aimed at reducing greenhouse emissions. The tax would progressively escalate to ten dollars per barrel of oil by the end of the decade and offered the prospect of substantial increases in energy efficiency. Discussions around the carbon tax had started a few years earlier and were resumed in early 1993 by the European Parliament, partly stimulated by the Clinton administration's proposal of an energy tax in the USA. A series of European ministerial meetings that year addressed the issue. The plan met with opposition from the British government, based on the principle that such a tax should be the responsibility of individual countries and not the EC.

As had happened in previous years, throughout 1993 the tax plan and its connection to climate change received very little coverage in the press: zero articles in the *Times*, three in the *Independent* and five in the *Guardian*<sup>11</sup>. In the *Independent*, except for one article (18.01.93), the carbon tax issue was covered from the point of view of Britain (meaning the British government)<sup>12</sup>. The European Commission's arguments were hardly mentioned and Europe is presented in an oppositional way towards the UK.

Tightly tied to official sources, as can be deduced from quotation patterns, several articles in the *Guardian* also constructed the carbon tax as a confrontation between Britain and Europe<sup>13</sup>. Be it the report of 'exasperated' environment ministers of six countries warning that Britain's commitment to the carbon tax would be necessary (24.03.93); John Gummer's account of how he 'killed off' the tax after an 'ambush' from the Danish presidency of the EC and a counter-narrative by the Dutch

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<sup>11</sup> The political debate on the carbon tax is not a conventional, well-defined critical discourse 'moment', as it spanned over several months and a series of political meetings.

<sup>12</sup> The headlines were 'EC carbon tax debate resumes' (by Mary Fagan, 18.01.93), 'European challenge to Britain on energy tax: Threat to agreement on greenhouse gases signed at Rio Earth Summit' (by Andrew Marshall, 24.03.93), and 'Tax rejected' (non-attributed very short note, 27.05.93).

<sup>13</sup> The author is John Carvel (presumably a correspondent for European matters) and the headlines are: 'Britain urged to back energy tax' (24.03.93); 'Gummer claims EC energy tax is dead' (29.06.93); and 'Fuel tax furore may scupper Rio ceremony' (06.10.93).

environment minister (29.06.93); or Britain's warning 'that it would scupper plans for joint EC ratification' of UNFCCC and would 'never abandon its opposition' (06.10.93), the framing was always one of conflict between political actors. While in the first text, the EC side was foregrounded, the others were ambiguous or mainly amplified the British government's views.

An alternative analysis of the issue was advanced, yet again, by Andrew Warren, ACE<sup>14</sup>. Favouring the adoption of the tax, Warren's main discursive strategy was to heighten the stakes of the coming meeting of EC finance ministers by arguing that '[f]ailure to deliver an EC-wide agreement' would make other countries feel 'unable' to ratify UNFCCC and could 'precipitate the worldwide unravelling of the Earth Summit commitments'. In an earlier article, Warren had advanced a critique of European policies for climate change and energy efficiency by contrasting them with Japan<sup>15</sup>. A representative of business is thus constituted into political commentator who favours an interventionist role of the state for reducing greenhouse emissions.

Reporting on the favourable position of the Liberal Democrats concerning the tax<sup>16</sup>, Stephen Smith<sup>17</sup> discusses the environmental, economic and political implications of both VAT on domestic fuel and the carbon tax. In a detailed debate of the meaning of fiscal policies (rarely found in the media), Smith repeatedly emphasizes the advantages of the carbon tax<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the enormous potential of this measure for reducing greenhouse gas emissions the carbon tax plan failed to gain a significant press coverage. Most articles were relatively short and of little salience. The main environmental correspondents – Nick Nuttall, Nicholas Schoon, Paul Brown – remained silent about the topic. Most articles did not provide an in-depth discussion of the implications of the EC tax, nor of the British reasons for rejecting it. This is relevant as several authors have maintained that a carbon tax with hypothecated revenues could bring economic and employment

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<sup>14</sup> 'Emission control', 04.06.93.

<sup>15</sup> 'Japan steps on the gas', 12.02.93. Both this article and the previous one were authored by Andrew Warrend.

<sup>16</sup> The Liberal Democrats, and opposition parties in general, are very rarely mentioned in press reports on climate change.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Smith was then at the Institute for Fiscal Studies and at the Department of Economics at University College London.

<sup>18</sup> 'Heat and blight', Stephen Smith, 24.09.93.

gains, in addition to environmental benefits, and that coordinated policies in Europe would be advantageous over unilateral ones (Ekins, 1994; Barker, 1998). Instead politics was again represented in the press as a matter of individual performance in getting through an unquestioned agenda. Newspapers pursued a strategy of heteronomisation (Wodak et al., 1999) by depicting Europe in confrontation with Britain. Anderson and Weymouth (1999) show that the *Times* is systematically critical of the EC, and that its discourse is ideologically underpinned by a defence of national sovereignty and opposition to interventionism. In this case, the *Times*' Euroscepticism was translated in exclusion of the carbon tax from its news agenda. However, the *Guardian* and *Independent*'s pro-European discourse (ibid.) was not confirmed with regard to this subject.

## 5. PASSIVELY SANCTIONING THE CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMME

On 25 January 1994, the government published its Climate Change Programme (CCP), which set the main aims and policy instruments for addressing climate change in the UK<sup>19</sup>. The CCP is the most central national document in the field and is therefore worth some analysis. It appears to embrace a discourse of ecological modernization by highlighting a 'partnership approach' and a 'precautionary approach' (HM Government, 1994: 6). Whereas ecological modernization promotes cooperation between government, industry, moderate environmentalists and scientists in addressing environmental issues, such a 'partnership' is translated by the government into reliance on voluntary measures such as 'Making a Corporate Commitment' and the 'Best Practice Programme'. A technocratic/corporatist style of policy making dominated by elites seems to be prevalent over a 'strong ecological modernization' perspective (Dryzek, 1997: 147).

The government made the precautionary principle central to the CCP. Yet, Hajer (1995) demonstrated that the traditional-pragmatist approach to science and policy,

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<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, three other documents appeared in response to the Rio requirements, covering sustainable development (HM Government, 1994b), biodiversity (HM Government, 1994c), and forestry (HM Government, 1994d).



which requires proof of damage before acting, was still dominant in the UK in the early 1990s, at least in acid rain policy. Despite the association between anticipatory environmental policy and economic growth, other aspects of the Programme, especially the strong emphasis on market, are incompatible with an eco-modernist discourse. The 1990 White Paper on the environment (HM Government, 1990) had unambiguously endorsed the use of market based instruments to achieve reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and this was not much altered by the CCP. In fact, the UK's CCP is conceived within the parameters of the neo-liberalist approach to political economy that dominated the Conservative governments for most of the 1980s and 90s, and 'economic rationalism' is thus a central framework<sup>20</sup>.

The Programme comes at a time when the 'dash for gas' in power stations, with the subsequent closure of coalmines, was the real cause of reduced GHG emissions in the UK. The government repeatedly made use of this reality for gaining credit, both nationally and internationally, while at the same time it actually reduced the budget for renewable energy industries, and missed important opportunities related to energy efficiency, combined heat and power, and public transport (Collier, 1997: 105)

The Climate Change Programme received very little attention from the broadsheet press. The *Times* did not carry a single article on the issue, the *Guardian* published one and the *Independent* two. The first and most critical article to appear in the three newspapers was Geoffrey Lean's 'Expect a lot more of hot air: the Government is unveiling its plans for the environment, but don't hold your breath' (*Independent on Sunday*, 23.01.94). Lean, one of the most senior environmental correspondents in the UK, framed the government's announcements historically, by looking back at the 1990 White Paper, Major's promises in Rio, and the lack of real policy achievements. The publication of new documents setting out Britain's plans for the environment was thus viewed as the 'next act in this drama of disappointed expectations'. Lean anticipated that the action plans 'will be long on rhetoric, short on new commitments for definite clean-up targets'. Lean looked at the overall environmental policy, contrasting the

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<sup>20</sup> What Dryzek (1997) designates as 'economic rationalism' is a set of propositions that aim to solve environmental problems through market management. Being typically associated to Promethean views, economic rationalism involves a degree of design by and intervention of policy-makers that the former refutes.

official talk with cuts in energy-saving programmes, closure or budget cuts in environment-related institutions, and a general deterioration in the state of the environment. With this strategy of broadening the scope of analysis, he provides a diachronic and comparative perspective which throws new light onto the CCP's promises. This type of systematic analysis of the government's environmental records is very rarely found in the press, stuck as it is in daily or weekly temporal logics.

In contrast with Lean's text, Susan Watts' 'Greenhouse gases to be cut by 5%' (*Independent*, 26.01.94) closely followed the official 'line' by focusing on the Prime Minister's statements and replicating the text of the Programme. The *Guardian*'s only article on the CCP was authored by Paul Brown: "'Greenhouse' document targets cars and domestic fuel' (26.01.94). Brown was here hardly analytical, limiting himself to listing the measures proposed by the government and occasionally conveying some mild scepticism of the possibility of achieving the proposed results. Summing up, with the partial exception of the *Independent*, all the newspapers took a passive approach to the CCP, the most central policy act for climate change in the UK at this time. At a crucial moment, the potential incoherences and fragilities of the UK's climate policies were largely ignored, as expressed by the low levels of coverage and by the absence of critique.

## **6. LACK OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE 1995 BERLIN SUMMIT**

The first Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC occurred in Berlin between 28 March and 7 April 1995. While the summit did not make as much progress in strengthening the convention as some had hoped, it gave origin to a document designated as the 'Berlin Mandate' which committed the parties to define 'quantified ... reduction objectives within specified time frames' (UNFCCC, 1995). The Berlin conference thus marked a significant step forwards in the international regime for climate change (Depledge, 2001). The British broadsheet press awarded the summit a modest salience, carrying a relatively low number of articles: *Guardian* – 15; *Independent* – 11; *Times* – 13. Each of the papers had only one leading article on the topic. The *Independent* carried no articles on the front page, while the *Guardian* and

the *Times* had one each. Several factors help explain this lukewarm treatment of Berlin by the media: a long succession of negotiating meetings before the summit, associated with an increasing number of formal bodies dealing with the issue (Paterson, 1996)<sup>21</sup>; the lack of significant scientific findings on climate change around this time (IPCC, 1995)<sup>22</sup>; and NGOs being increasingly invested in ‘integration’ (Jamison, 2001) rather than contestation.

I make a detailed analysis of news articles of this critical discourse moment in appendix two and will mention here only the main traits of press representations in this period. Ideological standpoints were clearly reproduced in discursive constructions of climate change in 1995. From the outset, the *Guardian* heightened the stakes of the summit by strongly emphasizing the risks involved in the potential scenario of a failure and created a sense of urgency. It also denounced the ideological standings of the climate change ‘sceptics’. The *Times* de-legitimated the summit suggesting that the problems in debate were a construct of ‘extreme greens’ and ‘obsequious politicians’. The strategy of scorning and discrediting environmental discourses returned to this newspaper sometimes through the voice of overt right-wing commentators. This often combined with devaluation of environmental politics by construing it as mere rhetoric. The *Times* reinstated its strategy of self-positioning as the only realistic analyst of climate change.

Both the *Times* and the *Independent* promote Promethean views of development in some articles. In both papers we can also find articles that make a preemptive analysis of the summit. By suggesting failure in anticipation and presenting international political action as an impossibility they prepared their readers for the inertia of industrialized countries in relation to climate change. In the *Independent* extreme neo-liberal views that oppose any intervention on climate change, obfuscate the risk and the strong probability of irreversible destruction of natural and human habitats, coexist side-by-side with texts that construct a sense of risk and attempt to mobilize concern. The editorial voice of the *Independent*’s leading article of this period took up a strategy

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<sup>21</sup> Subsidiary Bodies on Implementation and on Technical and Scientific Advice.

<sup>22</sup> The summary for policymakers of this report states that ‘new findings add detail to our knowledge but do not substantially change the essential results concerning radiative forcing of climate’ that appeared in the earlier IPCC scientific assessments.

of 'rationalization' and advocated a cost-benefit analytic approach (cf. Jacobs, 1997; Spash, 1997; Davies and Demeritt, 2000).

Divergent ideological standpoints are also reproduced in the re-construction of scientific knowledge in this period. Giving voice to analysts clearly aligned with right-wing agendas, the *Times* emphasizes uncertainties and casts doubt on climate change. Nevertheless, several articles by Nick Nuttall point to indicators of climate change in the *Times*. The *Guardian* consistently attempted to build confidence in climate change scientific studies and the forecasts of severe impacts.

The summit is recurrently constructed as a confrontation of interest between power blocks. This conflict served the generation of a sense of crisis appreciated by news editors. Various imbalances can be identified in the event's coverage and there are important exclusions in news discourse. Thus, while OPEC countries initially appear to be holding back agreement, the responsibility of the US (dominated by a Republican majority in the Congress), as the main responsible for weakening the final document, is not sufficiently exposed (Paterson, 1996: 70). AOSIS countries are extremely vulnerable to climate change and 'were highly vocal during the negotiations ... calling for actual cuts in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions' (Paterson, 1996: 85). But they only received little attention in the press (with the relative exception of the *Guardian*), continuing the trend of the Earth Summit's coverage. The Global Climate Coalition (GCC), a lobby group of fossil fuel interests, is given about the same discursive space in the *Times* as AOSIS. The GCC's interests are only denounced in the *Guardian*. A further issue to be left out of the news agenda was the crucial proposal of 'Joint Implementation' of UNFCCC's commitments advanced in Berlin, possibly viewed as too technical or complex for the average audience. All the cultural and ethical matters involved therein were thus also ignored (see Brown, 1996; Kaergard, 1998).

Overall, the most significant development is the emergence of the insurance industry as a new high-profile actor in this period, demanding political commitment to curb GHG emissions. All three newspapers highlighted this new player. In a sign of renovation of ideological standings the *Times* reports on a study that suggested shifting taxation from labour to natural resources, mentioned by insurers. The environment is apparently prioritised but always within an economically rationalist perspective, given that gains are promised for economic performance. But in some ways, the insurance

industry did authorize climate policies for the *Times*. Framed as a financial matter by insurers, the threat of climate change is actualised in the press. The industry both exerted political pressure for stricter emissions control and re-interpreted scientific knowledge, claiming to believe in forecasts and arguing for a precautionary approach. The discursive alliance of Greenpeace with the insurance business was a valuable strategy (Leggett, 2000; Brown, 1996) which led to significant re-assessments of the climate change cause in the media.

## 7. IPCC SECOND ASSESSMENT REPORT: IDEOLOGICAL READINGS

The main contribution of the IPCC's 1995 science report (IPCC, 1996a<sup>23</sup>) was to state clearly for the first time that human activities have an impact on climate: 'the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate'. The IPCC documents (also 1996b; 1996c) forecast an increase in tropical diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and dengue fever, as a consequence of climate change. The stabilization of emissions by 1990 levels agreed in Rio is shown to be insufficient and the report maintains that substantial mitigation measures should be taken.

Throughout 1995 mainstream scientific magazines like *Nature* had featured studies on climate change. All substantiated the thesis that measured variability in the climate could not be explained by natural fluctuation and pointed, instead, to a human influence in the greenhouse effect (Leggett, 2000). In November, leading IPCC scientists held a meeting in Madrid to complete their part of the IPCC's Second Assessment Report. The Report was finally released on 15 December in Rome. I will focus separately on the portrait of this crucial scientific development conveyed by each newspaper.

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<sup>23</sup> The report was released at the end of 1995 and published in 1996.

### 7.1. *Independent*: building confidence and casting doubts

Reports in the *Independent* are split between consolidating the claims of the IPCC and challenging them. In the earliest reference to the IPCC report (23.07.95), some months before its official release, Geoffrey Lean focused on the valuation of human life in climate change models<sup>24</sup>. The placing on page 2 gives this story an important highlight. The article indicates that in documents yet to be published, economists in the IPCC's Working Group III had made calculations valuing human lives in developing countries at a cost 15 times smaller than in Western countries. This arithmetic has important consequences for political decision-making. Depending on the monetary estimate for the loss of life, a cost-benefit analysis may either 'be taken as a justification for inaction' or 'call for dramatic preventive action' (see Demeritt and Rothman, 1999<sup>25</sup>; cf. Repetto and Austin, 1997). A series of critical reactions to the cost-benefit calculation were reported in this article. While the article's headline appeared to raise moral matters, Lean did not pursue this line of debate in the body of the piece. Except for comments like 'ludicrous' and 'economics of genocide' made by others, Lean's main strategy was to denounce the political implications of the IPCC's calculus.

A front-page headline in the *Independent on Sunday*'s issue for 15 October expanded the scope of the problem: 'Global warming 'will last centuries''. Based on 'two confidential draft documents', Lean described a scenario that includes 'droughts and floods' and the 'spread of tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever.' The time-scale of the threat put the issue into perspective: 'even if dramatic cuts are made now, the world's systems respond so slowly that warming will inevitably continue for centuries'. Lean also wrote that the IPCC was no longer reluctant to say that 'pollution is at least partly to blame' for an enhanced greenhouse effect.

Source-attribution patterns like inverted commas in the headline and expressions such as 'they [scientists] have decided', 'say that' or 'warn that' could be understood

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<sup>24</sup> 'One Western life is worth 15 in the Third World, says UN report', *Independent on Sunday*.

<sup>25</sup> Demeritt and Rothman (1999) have pointed the political and ethical judgements built into the IPCC's (1996c) models of economic damage assessment that Lean's article refers to. They have also shown the conservative nature of calculations of the potential costs of future climate change, which are put at 1,5-2% of world gross domestic product, and how this can be used as grounds for political inaction.

as a form of qualifying the IPCC's claims. But, given that this came together with the reference to 'world's leading experts' or to '2,000 top meteorologists and other experts', and with the use of adjectives like 'earnest' and 'certain' about global warming, such forms of attribution appear instead as forms of authorization of the claims and confidence building in the forecasts.

A long feature on page 5 entitled 'Global warming is leading to climatic upheaval, say scientists. Experts have reached consensus after years of disagreement', also by Lean, continued the front-page story. The journalist attempted to mobilize concern by providing a detailed description of the 'dramatic effects' of climate change. The forecasted scenario was 'as alarming as it could be for humanity' and 'global warming could accelerate out of control', he warned. An image of confidence in the forecasts was built with the repeated reference to 'consensus' between scientists.

A few days later<sup>26</sup>, under the headline 'The right climate for tax on fuel', Nicholas Schoon proposed a very inclusive analysis of climate change, discussing the modus operandi of a variety of stakeholders and the intricate ways in which the realms they represent are connected (see next page). Like Geoffrey Lean, Schoon also promoted trust in the IPCC in this feature. In l. 5-14, col. 4, his strategy of enhancement of the IPCC's reliability is expressed in a discussion of the specific conditions of the global science-making world. Earlier, such a strategy involved highlighting the nature of the earth's system (l. 22-28, col. 1). The tactics of the fossil fuel lobby, environmentalists and the nuclear power industry in relation to scientific knowledge on climate change are exposed in l. 15-34, col. 4. In a reflexive move, the simplistic extremes of the media and the distortions of the news-making world also come under Schoon's critical eye: l. 35-38, col. 4. The journalist advances support for the potentially unpopular fuel taxes again (l. 12-29, col. 5), acknowledging the social justice issue which scuppered earlier proposals (see above), by arguing for protection of the poor and elderly as well as jobs. Finally, he denounces the short term views and lack of responsibility of the government and other political parties: l. 30-40, col. 5.

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<sup>26</sup> 16.10.95.

# The right climate for tax on fuel

Scientific consensus about global warming is growing so why are the politicians unable to act?

1 **A**t the end of this year an obscure but important body called the Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change will publish a fat report on the science of global warming.

5 If the IPCC's draft version leaked on to the Internet last month is anything to go by, this United Nations document will show that the scientific consensus is strengthening: pollution is very likely to alter climate over much of the earth's surface in the next century. The scientists are saying that we are probably seeing this already, in the run of exceptionally warm years in the 1980s and 1990s. This year will also turn out to be an unusually hot one, not just in Britain but in terms of average temperatures around the globe.

10 When the final version of the IPCC science report is released the qualifications will be there. One hundred per cent certainty cannot be provided for systems as complex as the earth's atmosphere, oceans, ice-caps and life, which all interact in shaping the planet's response to humanity's massive intervention.

15 But even the qualified conclusions will be sufficient to spark an explosion of alarming and vivid headlines. It's a funny business, this global warming. Most of the time the media and society ignore the issue. Every now and then we have big stories warning us that sea levels will rise and tropical plagues spread as temperatures rise. Droughts and floods will become more common. Then, not quite as frequently, we get the big debunking

pieces which tell us that another group of scientists has disproved global warming and it is all a big scare.

20 So what are we to conclude from all this? And what measures would it be sensible for modern industrial societies to take in the face of continuing uncertainty about a threat that was first recognised almost 100 years ago, when Sven Arrhenius, a Swedish chemist, made the first prediction about man-made global warming?

25 In 1896 Arrhenius calculated that if the burning of fossil fuels doubled the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, then temperatures would rise by around 5 degrees Centigrade. In the 99 years since then we have frantically burnt coal, oil and gas, and we can be sure that if we go on at present rates the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide will, midway through the next century, reach double pre-industrial levels. We also now know that we are adding several other kinds of "greenhouse gas" to the atmosphere - methane, CFCs - which are even better than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the lower atmosphere.

30 But although the hundreds of climate scientists who contribute to the IPCC have made much progress in the past decade in understanding what we are doing to the planetary thermostat, they are still at least five years away from giving a precise estimate of how rapidly average global temperatures will rise.

35 They are fairly certain that Arrhenius's alarming 5 degrees for a



NICHOLAS SCHOON

## Every government wants to know which countries will suffer the most damage

doubling of carbon dioxide is a little too high. Their low- to middle-range estimates imply rates of warming and resulting sea level rise that are within the bounds of what advanced industrial societies (but not crowded, poor countries) can easily cope with for the next 50 years - and whoever thinks further ahead than that?

40 What every government wants to know most of all is how regional climates will change. Which countries will suffer the most damaging changes; which ones might even benefit from benign climate shifts?

The scientists are probably at least 10 years from making good regional predictions. They need computing power much greater than that of the

number-crunching supercomputers they now employ for their simulations of the world's changing atmosphere and oceans.

This is high science, involving dozens of research groups which collaborate and debate. It is not the kind of work that throws out an abrupt consensus, when suddenly everyone can agree that pollution has already caused this much climate change and will go on to do that much more in the next x years. It churns out probabilities, not pat answers.

Those with vested interests watch this unfold, then put their own spin on things. The USA's gigantic fossil fuel industry, along with oil exporters like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, play up the uncertainties. Their lobbyists stoop to suggesting that the scientists exaggerate in order to get their research grants.

Some environmentalists, meanwhile, suggest that every extreme weather incident is a manifestation of man-made climate change - forgetting that at any one time extreme and unusual weather is being experienced somewhere in the world. The nuclear power industry also likes global warming because it generates electricity with far less of the "greenhouse gas" pollution of its fossil fuel rivals.

The media simply wants good, strong stories. So climate change is either very serious, or a scare, or off the agenda.

While the scientists plod ahead in trying to ascertain the threat, the sen-

sible response is not to do nothing, relying on adapting to climate change once it happens. It is to take measures that reduce our reliance on fossil fuels without harming the economy.

These so called "no regrets" measures are a moral as well as a rational response to the threat, which is why many politicians advocate them. The problem, as ever, is that they tend to pay lip service to them.

Take one example close to home. At a time when the real cost of household energy is falling (gas and electricity bills are coming down) there is an excellent environmental case for placing higher taxes on fossil fuels. That would encourage people to use less of them and curb pollution.

The revenue raised should first be used to make sure those worst affected (the poor and the elderly) can keep warm in winter, by installing better insulation and more efficient heating systems. The second call on this revenue should be to reduce taxes that keep people out of work, such as income tax and employers' National Insurance contributions.

But what do we get? A botched, enormously controversial introduction of VAT on electricity and gas in which no politician seriously advocated the environmental case. The Government introduced it simply because it needed to raise the money, and Labour is hinting at getting rid of it simply to raise votes. And the bigger picture of a planet in real danger is ignored.



Another article by Nicholas Schoon strengthened the sense of scientific agreement<sup>27</sup>. In a more 'descriptive' text, Schoon told of the intense 'opposition' and attempts to 'water down' the report, and of the implications of the IPCC report for governments. The headline strongly dramatized the problem.

On 01.12.95 the *Independent* ran three articles on climate change. They conveyed quite different images of the problem of climate change. Based on the claims of scientists and pressure groups, Charles Arthur<sup>28</sup> referred to the need to stabilise the use of fossil fuels by Western countries, and to limit the use of such fuels by developing giants such as China<sup>29</sup>. In a strategy of actualisation of the threat, the article referred to then-recent and tragic climate events as indicators of climate change. Arthur reinforced the idea that human activities play an important role in the intensification of the greenhouse effect.

Tom Wilkie's article, headlined 'Science 'using language of the adman''<sup>30</sup>, was based on the views of Jack Barrett, of the department of chemistry at Imperial College London, and Richard Lindzen, professor of meteorology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who was committed to an agenda of American Republican ideas and interests (Gelbspan, 1997). Wilkie, science editor for the *Independent*, explored the climate change 'sceptics' case. Barrett and Lindzen both claim changes in climate fall within the limits of natural variability. As immediately salient in the headline, the article attempts to de-legitimize the IPCC:

[It] produces 'waffle statements which don't say anything, which nobody can disagree with.' ... Prof Lindzen maintained ... Dr Barrett also says there is no experimental evidence for anything that could be ascribed to man-made effects. But he also takes issue with the fundamental conceptual approach underlying the climatic models of the IPCC. The panel, he says, has underestimated the extent to which the oceans would naturally absorb carbon dioxide ... He also believes that the panel is mistaken about the length of time the gas lingers in the atmosphere.

The argumentation in this article and its persuasiveness potential are weakened by contradictions between Lindzen's statement and Barrett's claims and in Lindzen's own

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<sup>27</sup> 'Global warming is here, experts agree. Climate of fear: Old caution dropped as UN panel of scientists concur on danger posed by greenhouse gases', page 3, 30.11.95.

<sup>28</sup> Science and technology correspondent.

<sup>29</sup> 'Experts warn fossil fuels must be curbed'.

views (he is also quoted saying that '[t]he warming of the global climate over the past century has been completely within the range of natural variability'), as they both contest/disagree with the IPCC's views. It should also be noted that 'experimental evidence' is largely impossible or inadequate in this field.

Wilson's claims that science reporters 'had statistically more accurate knowledge' of climate issues than other reporters, and that reporters who 'relied on scientists as their primary sources' also had a more rigorous information about climate studies, (2000b: 10-11) certainly do not apply here. The journalistic choice of *which* scientists-as-sources appears, instead, to be a crucial factor.

An unusual position was taken by Keith Shine, a member of the IPCC who made a public statement expressing some reservations about the report<sup>31</sup>.

The [IPCC] at its Madrid meeting [has stated that] 'the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate'. Although, as one of the IPCC authors, I accept that this statement represents the majority view, I remain nervous about it. The computer simulations that were used as its basis have not included many of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. These pieces need to be added, but we may never be able to unambiguously identify the human influence on the climate during the past century.

Putting the emphasis on the complex nature of climate and the multiple factors that affect it, Shine re-emphasized the importance of uncertainty and lack of knowledge in any scientific predictions. Shine's observations are valid and an important addition to public debate.

In short, the *Independent* amplified quite different messages about the science of climate change, depending on who wrote the articles. Lean and Schoon, whose articles were in numerical majority over other authors, promoted the IPCC's reliability, emphasized the seriousness of the risk and called for action; discrepant voices cast doubts on the IPCC's report, and some attempted to deny or lessen the problem. Lean's strategy of disputing the IPCC's assumptions in the first article mentioned in this section is of a different nature than the latter critics. The consequence to be derived from Lean's article is not a general suspicion or dismissal of the IPCC's work; rather it

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<sup>30</sup> The subtitle reads 'Global warming debate: Scientists agree world temperatures are rising but cannot find consensus on whether Man is to blame'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Another View: Our role in global warming'.

is a way of deepening understanding of the difficulties of making decisions about alternative strategies to ameliorate climate change.

## **7.2. *Times*: the de-accreditation of the IPCC**

The *Times* carried just three articles on the IPCC report; and two of these were dismissive of the IPCC's work. Nick Nutall made the first reference to the IPCC report in 'Climate experts predict 100-year drought in Africa' (18.10.95). The focus was on the impacts of higher temperatures in Africa's agriculture and wildlife. Although Nutall wrote other articles on scientific aspects of climate change, generally suggesting the problem is serious, this was the only one on the IPCC.

Nigel Hawkes' 'The heat of argument' (30.10.95) starts off with an ironically dramatic construction of the impacts of climate change. The first paragraph of this article, which can be viewed in the following page, defines the preferred reading of the knowledge produced by the IPCC. The implicit message is that it should not be trusted. The word 'conjured' immediately denigrates the report while the rest of the text attempts to offer a scientific critique of the IPCC report. The headline had already thrown the report into the realm of 'argument'. Terms like 'apocalyptic vision' and 'grim future' add to the rhetoric of sarcasm that is recurrent in the *Times* reporting of environmental issues. Attempting to cast doubts on the IPCC's work, Hawkes emphasizes the fact that forecasts of temperature rise in the latest report were 'significantly lower' or 'rather lower' than earlier ones (l. 24-30, col. 1). The UNFCCC is de-legitimated (ibid.) at the same time. The alternative 'scientific' claims put forward in the article are questionable, such as the statement that there had been a cooling trend in the polar regions or that a hypothetical temperature rise of 1 °C would probably be felt 'at night during the winter' and would hardly be noticed. The accusations of dogmatism in the article's last paragraph complete the strategy of de-accreditation of the IPCC. The audience of the *Times* is basically told that the IPCC report is not reliable and instructed not to believe in its claims.



AN apocalyptic vision was conjured up last week in a new report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Vast areas will flood, people may starve, glaciers will melt and deserts expand as a result of global warming over the next century, said the report, issued by IPCC's Working Group II.

The striking thing about the report, however, is not the grim future it predicts, but the quite small rise in temperature it believes will bring these changes about. By the year 2100, the report suggests, temperatures will have risen by 1.0-3.5 degrees C. As well as offering a very wide margin of error, these figures are significantly lower than those that appeared in the IPCC's 1990 report which inspired the UN Climate Convention, and rather lower than the "best estimate" of 2.8C in the 1992 update document.

As usual, the IPCC is claiming widespread consensus among climatologists for these estimates.

though it made just the same claim for the earlier figures. One scientist who is definitely not part of the consensus is Professor Patrick Michaels, of the University of Virginia. He recently explained why at a conference in London organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs.

In the past century, he said, temperatures measured at ground level have increased by only 0.5C, far below the levels that would have been predicted by the models. And although most of the global-warming gases have

**SCIENCE BRIEFING**

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Nigel Hawkes

# The heat of argument

been pumped into the atmosphere since 1945, most of the warming occurred before that.

The modellers have an answer. They say that sulphate pollution has tended to depress the temperature increases, and that when it is included, the models do a much better job of matching past trends. This is true, but Professor Michaels suspects it is more by luck than judgment.

At the IEA conference he pointed out that it is the regions with the largest sulphate output — North America and Western Europe —

which show the greatest warming, while the sulphate-free polar regions and the tropical oceans show cooling. The opposite should be the case if the sulphate model were right. Thus, although adding sulphate may get the overall temperature increase closer to the truth, it fails to capture regional variations.

Professor Michaels suspects that the model may still be overestimating future warming. Even if it is not, the actual amounts are small, and could on the IPCC's own admission be as little as 1C in more than a century. Would we even notice this? If it happened at night during the winter, as seems quite possible, we almost certainly would not. The effect would be to lengthen growing seasons, but melting ice caps and rising sea levels are far less plausible.

Such is the nature of the IPCC procedure, unfortunately, that criticisms like these seem to get a poor hearing. Global warming, says Professor Michaels, is "monopoly science", in which politics has excluded the normal scientific courtesies. It is hard to disagree.

Hawkes attempts to refute scientific consensus within the IPCC by citing Professor Patrick Michaels, of the University of Virginia. American journalist Ross Gelbspan (1997) describes the involvement of Patrick Michaels with the ‘public relations apparatus’ of the coal industry and how he has been heavily funded by fossil fuel interests. But this context is not made clear in the *Times* article. Hawkes refers to Michaels participation in a conference organized by the Institute of Economic Affairs. We should note that this Institute is well-known for its right-wing views and for the promotion of economic liberalism, an ideology very much in sympathy within the *Times*<sup>32</sup>.

### **7.3. *Guardian*: un-doing science and mobilizing concern**

The *Guardian*’s representation of the second IPCC report and related issues was centred on two main discursive objects: the backstage of science, and the urgent need for action. For Paul Brown, there was no doubt about the greenhouse effect. Climate change was a fact. ‘The effects are real and we are feeling them. There is a great crisis ahead.’<sup>33</sup> Brown did not discuss the science. He started from a completely different position to that of most other journalists in the analysis of climate change. He not only took the IPCC forecasts for granted but also substantially dramatized them by writing: ‘Millions will die in storms, floods and droughts. Many more will lose their homes and their livelihoods.’ This was the starting point to debate the politics of climate change and attribute responsibility to governments. The article made an extended reference to the action and agenda of Don Pearlman, a lawyer who worked for the Global Climate Coalition seeking to wreck the climate change negotiations (see Brown, 1996, and Leggett, 2000, on Pearlman and the GCC). In explaining the inside dynamics of the meetings that led to the IPCC documents, Brown made an important contribution to their understanding.

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<sup>32</sup> In a later article – ‘Mankind blamed for global warming’, 27.11.95 – Nigel Hawkes raises the issue of contestation again:

Scientists meeting in Madrid this week are expected to claim that the world is getting warmer, and that human activities are responsible. The claim is unlikely to go unchallenged. In a strategy of denigration of the IPCC’s reliability, Hawkes closes the article with the comment that ‘the group may be pressed to justify ... claims’ such as rising sea levels and points again that present forecasts of temperature rises are ‘well below earlier figures’.

Dr Merylyn McKenzie Hedger, of [WWF], has been at all the negotiations and watched them operate. “This is a long-term strategy to weaken the text, take out key phrases, bully the scientists. Each decision has to be taken by consensus, so one objection means that everything has to stop. To get on, people are happy to change words. The effect is dilution.”<sup>34</sup>

Such public exposure of the usually hidden (political) games that determine whether action is taken on climate change or not throws a new light on the final decision, the finished reports or declarations which are usually the only reference for the media.

In ‘Who says that life is cheap?’ (01.11.95) Richard Douthwaite, an expert in sustainable economics<sup>35</sup>, explored the assumptions of climate science, as well as the role of different agents and ideological standpoints in this debate. The central object of the very long text (1878 words) was the (previously mentioned) differential valuation of human life in the IPCC models, and ‘how an individual [Aubrey Meyer] can help change world thinking’ in this respect. Most of Douthwaite’s narrative opposed two individuals and their ideological stances: Aubrey Meyer, of the then-recently founded Global Commons Institute, and David Pearce, a renowned neo-classical economist of University College London working in the IPCC’s Working Group III, and who has been advising successive governments on their sustainability strategy. Using a technique of environmental economics called contingent valuation, Pearce calculated the cost of lives by ‘estimating how much people would be willing to pay to avoid a higher death rate or having their land flooded.’

As people in poor countries can’t offer to pay very much, their deaths and the damages they will suffer were valued at much less than in wealthier countries, skewing the international distribution of the cost.

This method obviously entails principles that are ethically challengeable. Douthwaite told the story of how Meyer fought Pearce’s unequal life valuation by successfully circulating a letter and collecting signatures of eminent people which later

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<sup>33</sup> Such words are from a feature he authored for the *Guardian*’s issue of 28.10.95 headlined ‘World’s burning issue. Paul Brown on why next week’s global warming summit is in no hurry to save the Earth’.

<sup>34</sup> Note how this contrast with Hawkes’ allegations (30.10.95) on the way the IPCC works.

generated international press coverage. 'To show how unreliable the draft chapter's figures were and how much they depended on the assumptions on which they were based', Meyer and a statistician recalculated them, 'using the same damage figures throughout the world' and making 'allowances for possible feedbacks'. The 'dynamite' results showed that uncertainty was so great that by the year 2050 annual losses could amount to between 12% and 130% of Gross World Product. 'At the higher end of this range, life as we know it would collapse.' Meyer's campaigning led to pressure on the IPCC to review Pearce's section (Pearce et al., 1996), which did not happen, but the Policymakers' Summary of the report was changed, stating that 'the value of life has meaning beyond monetary value'. Douthwaite's conclusion was piercing:

It was a triumph for Aubrey. But why has everyone been happy to leave him and his handful of friends to fight what is patently absurd? What was the British government thinking of when it generously grant-aided Professor Pearce's IPCC work? Why was his team so determined to produce figures that show that little need be done about warming that they refused to accept even the possibility of much worse damage happening? Was it that they couldn't see that at least as much growth could be generated building a new type of economy as it can by tinkering with the old?

Here is a series of questions that systematically escape the public fora and that are intensely revealing of the backstage of environmental politics. Rhetorically forceful, such questions reconstructed political and moral responsibility anew. Douthwaite's strategy of revealing the assumptions and implications of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) was a crucial addition to public knowledge of the science and politics of climate change. In Brown's and especially in Douthwaite's texts, the IPCC, usually presented in the *Guardian* as an institution worthy of trust, is shown to be permeable to biases. Like Lean's article (*Independent*, 23.07.95), these texts prevent closure in relation to the conditions, presumptions and value commitments behind apparently 'objective' 'scientific' analyses.

The two following articles mentioning the report – 'Human warming', AP, 01.12.95 and 'Earthweek: a diary of the planet', Steve Newman, 01.12.95 – came only a month

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<sup>35</sup> Douthwaite is the author of *The Growth Illusion. How Economic Growth has Enriched the Few, Impoverished the Many, and Endangered the Planet* (Dublin, Liliput, 1992). He contests the mainstream view that there is a correlation between economic growth and human welfare.

later and offered very brief references to the IPCC's attribution of responsibility to human activity in the greenhouse effect. The *Guardian's* issue of 05.12.95 carried two articles by Paul Brown: 'Climate: Emissions turn up the heat' and 'Climate: A race against time'. The first article, shown in the following page, focused on science and the impacts of climate change; the second one, both on science and policies. As expressed in the metaphorical headlines, Brown's main discursive strategy in both articles was the mobilization of concern through the generation of a sense of urgency and construction of an image of crisis. The language employed in both texts suggested a pressing truth and an inescapable future. In the first article, like in his other article mentioned above, Brown used the language of the future – 'will' – instead of the conditional 'would' preferred by other journalists to talk about the forecasts of the IPCC's Second Assessment Report. The second article made a stringent call for action with the presentation of certain measures as an imperative through the repeated use of the word 'must' – l. 30- 35, col. 1.

Linguistic choices contributed to dramatizing the issue: 'calamity', 'threat to the future of life on the planet', 'danger is very great'. In one article, Brown actualised the risk saying that 'Global warming is no longer some distant threat in the next century but has already begun' ('Emissions...'). In the other article, Brown brought in the wider temporal scale that is inherent to the greenhouse effect to heighten the risk – l. 14 – 26, col. 1 ('A race...'). And simultaneously he suggested the imminence of impacts: 'getting out of control', 'impending crisis'. He provided a reinterpretation of the IPCC report forecasts of temperature rises that others had considered insignificant.

The figures in the report seem tiny, and subject to a remarkable range of uncertainty ... But the fact that these are global averages masks quite dramatic changes in some places. ('Emissions...')

After presenting some of the possible solutions and showing that the mission was possible, Brown appealed to politicians and to everyone else: 'we must act with greater urgency'.



# A race against time

Politicians have been meeting to try to agree on ways to cut pollution, but demand for energy is still set to increase

1 **W**HILE scientists in Rome are describing the effects on humans of the atmosphere heating up, politicians are struggling to agree on how to change our behaviour to prevent the process happening so fast it causes a calamity.

5 The leaders of 150 countries have already accepted that if global warming happens faster than we can adapt, it will pose a threat to the future of life on the planet. So far, though, they cannot agree on a plan to slow it down.

10 The situation is critical because we now know there are already enough extra greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to make sure global warming will continue. There is an inbuilt time-lag so the seas will go on rising for at least a century and the world will go on heating up even if we stopped adding to the pollution now.

15 The battle then is not to stop the processes, because we cannot, but to slow them down to prevent things getting out of control. In 1992 at the Earth Summit there was great optimism that the problem could be solved.

20 It was accepted we could not go on burning the Earth's resources. We must find different ways of generating electricity and so use less oil and coal. We must drive fewer petrol and diesel cars. Rubbish must be disposed of differently to reduce the methane emissions.

25 The problem is that we are currently set to do more of these things not less. Many parts of the world have no electricity at all and people want it. Millions of people who do not yet own a car would like one. In other words, if development is allowed to go on unhindered, as it has in the past, the problem will get rapidly worse.

30 At the Earth Summit the developed countries of Europe, North America and Japan agreed on immediate steps to prevent an increase in carbon dioxide emissions and promised to return them to 1990 levels by the end of the century.

35 While this was regarded as an

important first step, it was agreed that more drastic measures were needed.

The daunting figure which the scientists recommend to get the climate back to some kind of stability is a 60 per cent reduction in emissions from the levels of 1990. This is at a time when countries such as China and India are developing very fast; their new industries and transport needs will produce gases which add to global warming.

For a group of island nations, many of which are only a few feet above sea level, this raises the prospect of disappearing beneath the waves during the next century. About 35 countries, called the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), will either be washed over completely or lose a large part of their land surface if the worst predictions come true. They are not alone in this problem. Parts of Europe, including much of Holland and eastern England, are threatened too.

The AOSIS nations demanded action at a Climate Convention meeting in Berlin last spring. They asked for greenhouse gas emissions to be cut by 20 per cent by the year 2005 with further cuts later. Ranged against them were the oil-producing states from the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the big coal-exporting countries such as Australia. The US, the world's biggest consumer of energy, was concerned that reducing emissions would undermine its way of life.

Despite these differences of opinion it was agreed that the world was not doing enough, and decisions were urgently needed about what to do. In Geneva some progress was made and more meetings have been arranged for 1996 and 1997 so new targets can be set.

While no deal has been reached, the possibilities are exciting. Existing and new technologies are being developed to generate electricity by renewable means, and find forms of transport that cut emissions. Transfers of technology to eliminate wasteful emissions are being organised between countries. There are plans to plant millions of trees to remove the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and store it in the form of carbon in the growing tree trunks.

The impending crisis is stimulating new technologies and encouraging cooperation between countries. All agree that it is only the beginning, that the danger is very great and that we must act with greater urgency. But at least a start has been made.

*Guardian*, 05.12.95

An intensely dramatic tone characterized George Monbiot's headline from 14.12.95 – 'Last warning on Earth'. A vocal environmentalist<sup>36</sup>, Monbiot contrasts the IPCC's forecasts, and the practical consequences of climate change already taking place, and governments' procrastination: a 'strange disjunction', he remarked. While it is often politicians who use science as a rhetorical tool, in this text it was a representative of the environmental movement who built an image of credibility for science. He referred to the IPCC as 'the world's foremost climate scientists' and commented on the 'uncomfortable accuracy' of earlier climate forecasts. Monbiot advanced some important insight into the interdependency between the public's and the politicians' agendas.

... why aren't we panicking? Why aren't we mobilising? Part of the reason is that, while we are waiting for government, government is waiting for us.

The author discursively built an argument for the responsibility of governments to develop new programmes to address climate change depended on them, but also pointed to the responsibility of each individual. It was an encompassing 'we' who were addressed: e.g. 'Worried about the loss of our comforts, we won't pay for change'. One important reflection concerned people's sense of agency (Staats et al., 1996; Burgess et al., 1995): Monbiot noted that 'the scale of what might be happening and its complete disproportion to the apparently innocuous causes ... take effort and imagination to grasp'. Comparing our inability to respond to climate change with the refusal to understand the signs of the Second World War in the 1930s, the article calls for immediate action.

## CONCLUSIONS

Between 1991 and 1995 climate change evolved from an unregulated issue to a sophisticated international regime and became the object of national policies of various types. 1996 did not register any event sufficiently significant to be considered as a

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<sup>36</sup> Monbiot is a regular contributor to the *Guardian* and the author of several books (by 1993, he had written, for example, *Amazon Watershed. The New Environmental Investigation*, London, Michael

critical discourse moment. This chapter has attempted to analyse the press's discursive re-construction of political and scientific transformations with regard to climate change. The following are the main conclusions that can be drawn.

### **Many new actors, several old scripts**

In this period, various new social actors gained prominence in the press. Although this did not bring about significant discursive shifts, as actors and/or the press often pursued known 'scripts' (or ways of constructing climate change), some nuances are worth pointing. While new Prime Minister John Major built largely on Thatcher's discourse in a variety of domains (see Chilton and Schäffner, 1997), he chose to constitute climate change into more of an administrative matter rather than awarding it a high political and public profile, as Thatcher had done. Kavanagh (1997: 194) maintains that 'Majorism is a large dose of Thatcherism, minus the abrasiveness and much of the hyperbole.' Indeed, Major followed, for instance, Thatcher's market-based logic to regulate greenhouse emissions but abandoned much of her grand interventions on the topic. Except for the fact that, during the 1992 Rio conference, the *Times* awarded him a significant agency, Major got little visibility in the press. This also meant that, unlike Thatcher, Major was not the subject of much critique and delegitimation.

New Environment Secretaries Michael Howard (1992) and John Gummer (1995) had a bigger presence in the press than previous Secretaries, especially at the international level. They pursued a strategy of mediation between Europe and the US, which was endorsed by the *Times* and passively sanctioned by the other two papers. The European Commission, in particular, and the European Community, in general, could have had a significant discursive role in re-defining policies for climate change and even the social role of taxation through the planned EC-wide carbon tax on energy. Instead, newspapers preferred to dedicate little or no attention to this proposal and to construct the EC in an oppositional relation towards the UK (cf. Anderson and Weymouth, 1999).

Another potentially important new actor in debates on climate change was the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), as it represented a set of countries that are extremely vulnerable to the problem. AOSIS' discursive strategy was to dramatize climate change, emphasize the risks, and mobilize concern. The AOSIS situation is interpenetrated with value-related issues such as international equity, empathy and solidarity. The press could have chosen to launch a significant ideological and ethical discussion on the international politics of climate change. But they did not. Conversely, AOSIS' standing was given less media salience than the Organization of Petroleum Producing Countries (OPEC), which attempted to block negotiations. Equally, the Global Climate Coalition, which represented fossil fuel companies and repeatedly sought to undermine climate policies received almost the same space as AOSIS. An 'equal-time' logic, 'objectivity' claims, and the valorization of conflict by the press (see chapter two) may partly explain these options. Nevertheless, such forms of representation also appear to hinge on ideological standings.

The insurance industry, in coalition with Greenpeace, brought a significant transformation to constructions of climate change. Favouring radical reductions of GHG reductions, insurance companies contributed to a split in the 'homogeneous industry interest' and showed it as a 'fossil fuel' interest (Newell and Paterson, 1998: 691). Given that, in their assertive pronouncements, insurance companies highlighted the risks involved in climate change, they had an important role in the securitization (Stripple, 2000) of climate change.

### **Consolidating politics**

As international negotiations on climate change intensified and gave purpose to summits like Rio and Berlin, new objects of discourse were built in press representations. Climate change came to be associated with, for instance, diplomacy, intergovernmental relations, and the equation of environment and development. While this could have broadened the scope of analysis of the problem and led to an inclusive debate of responsibilities, most reports made a narrow analysis, and viewed the climate change through the lenses of the northern official 'environmental' agenda. The hegemonic power of sustainable development as a new consensual ideology

consecrated in Rio explains a large part of the media discourse. By putting economic growth in tandem with environmental balance, sustainable development annihilated much of the space for contestation on both ends of the press's ideological spectrum. Naturally, there are exceptions and critical views can be found, mainly in the *Guardian* and *Independent*. Ideological divergences between newspapers were actually translated, again, in opposed constructions of risk and responsibility.

Despite the renewal of a challenging debate in the *Guardian*, and partly in the *Independent*, the press generally enabled the British government as an international leader. As the 'dash for gas' subsequent to the privatisation of the electricity industry brought substantial reductions in GHG emissions, the UK evolved 'from a reluctant participant in climate change talks to a leading light advocating action' (Brown, 1996: 163). Despite writing that '[o]nly politicians can take advantage of accidents of history like this and with a straight face claim credit' (ibid.), not even Paul Brown or others in the *Guardian* sufficiently exposed the largely fortuitous and accidental basis of the UK's standing regarding CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The press also rendered invisible the environmental and social benefits potentially derived from the carbon tax proposed by the EC. Either ignoring the issue (*Times*) or mainly depicting Europe in a power and word confrontation with the UK (*Independent* and *Guardian*), newspapers fomented an isolationist – if not defensive – British attitude.

Although it established the main lines and policies of the UK, the Climate Change Programme (1994) was hardly acknowledged by the press. The missed opportunities for reduction of emissions or alternatives to the chosen market mechanisms were not discussed. Newspapers thus passively entitled the British government to pursue a limitative approach that built on the ideological bases of capitalism under a polish of 'green'.

The one governmental move that received strong contestation from all the papers – VAT on domestic fuel – could have had benefits for GHG reduction but also had negative welfare impacts with severe social consequences for the poorest. The values of social justice and solidarity prevailed over environmental concern in the analyses of the press. However, tensions were detectable on the principled stands of those who normally promote environmental protection, like NGOs and the *Guardian*. While the government was uniformly discredited in the three papers concerning the plan for VAT

on domestic fuel, near to nothing was said in reaction to the petrol Fuel Duty Tax, which offered the prospect of decreased emissions from private transport. This standing on petrol fuel and on the EC carbon tax is inconsistent with repeated calls for political action in the *Independent* and mainly in the *Guardian*.

Overall, the government's 'struggle for credibility' (O'Riordan and Rowbotham, 1996) was aided by the press, mainly by silencing its faults. In the period covered by this chapter the press generally legitimated and consolidated both the international and the national politics of climate change.

### **Ideological reconstitutions of science**

This chapter has shown that science is forcibly filtered through ideological strainers in newspapers. Both at the time of COP1 (see appendix two) and in relation to the IPCC report, news on scientific knowledge was visibly shaped by, and reinforced various types of values and programmes of action. As already suggested at the end of chapter five and now strengthened, the *Times*' deference to science (as displayed in the first years of coverage of the greenhouse effect) is definitely overpowered by the newspaper's ideological commitments in the political and economic fields. When important transformations start to be required to address climate change, the *Times* not only refutes the authority of science and the legitimacy of scientists to control the climate agenda but actively promotes mistrust of science and scientists (cf. Zehr, 2000). A minority voice in the *Independent* also engaged in these strategies. Alternatively, in the *Guardian* and in most of the *Independent*'s articles, journalists and other authors promote confidence in the IPCC's claims. Mobilizing public concern by emphasizing the risks forecasted by science, these papers appeal for urgent and radical political action. This does not mean that they uncritically empower the IPCC and systematically endorse their output. As seen with respect to the issue of valuation of life in IPCC models, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* are able to denounce the (un)ethical and political implications of scientific assumptions (Demeritt and Rothman, 1999).

## CHAPTER 7

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### KYOTO, 1997: A DISCURSIVE RENEWAL?

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#### INTRODUCTION

The massive victory of the Labour Party in the General Elections of 1 May 1997 broke with almost two decades of consecutive Conservative governments and was therefore bound to encourage speculation that it represented a watershed in the history of modern British politics. Did the political discourse on climate change evolve with the change of government? The Third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) to the UNFCCC was held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1-10 December 1997 (Depledge, 2001). After much contentious negotiations, the treaty agreed in Kyoto (United Nations, 1997) mandated legally binding targets for GHG reduction for the first time in history. How did each newspaper represent the Kyoto conference?

The volume of press coverage in 1997 indicates a renewal of interest on climate change. According to Downs (1972) issue-attention cycle 1997 would correspond to the 'post-problem' phase in the media attention to climate change; and in terms of the (meta-) narrative analysis advanced by McComas and Shanahan (1999), the resolution of the climate change story should have been achieved by that time. Nevertheless, in relation to the American press, they have claimed that a new cycle of attention and narrativity started in 1997 (McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Shanahan, 2000), building on the outcomes of the previous one. This chapter will aim to assess whether there was a significant renewal of discursive constructions of climate change between 15 November – 31 December 1997.

# 1. NEW LABOUR AND THE UNITED KINGDOM'S POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

This section will begin with a short analysis of the standing of the New Labour government on the environment<sup>1</sup>. What, if any, innovations were brought by New Labour to environmental governance? How did New Labour construct climate change?

## 1.1. New Labour's environmental discourses

During the General Election campaign in 1996-7, New Labour pledged to 'put concern for the environment at the heart of policy-making' (Labour Party, 1997: 4) and has pursued a 'holistic, cross-departmental' approach (Young, 2000: 161) while in government. This was exemplified by the establishment of a new Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) under Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, when New Labour assumed power. Changes in the rules governing stakeholder participation in environmental decision-making; the introduction or intensification of consultation processes; more institutional coordination through partnership working; and a welter of working groups to progress sustainability characterise the new institutional arrangements (Bloomfield et al., 2001).

In New Labour's discourse, addressing environmental problems is not seen as a necessary trade-off, or a zero-sum game. Ecological modernisation sits at the heart of New Labour's approach to sustainable development, as the following words of the energy minister illustrate.

What we are building is a virtuous equation. The development of new environmental industries will create new manufacturing jobs and enable us to tackle environmental problems at the same time. It is a win, win, win situation. (J. Battle, in Department of Trade and Industry, 1997 – Press Release)

The equation between environmental protection and economic growth will necessarily be central in debates around climate policy. In reconciling the two terms of the equation, this discourse of ecological modernization provides an attractive answer.

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<sup>1</sup> For a wider analysis of the 'character of New Labour' see Coates (2000).



In the international negotiations on climate change, the UK claimed to lead industrial nations in the run-up to COP-3 in December 1997. In June 1997, it pledged to cut domestic emissions of carbon dioxide to 20% below 1990 levels by 2010, and supported the European Union's calls for a 15% cut by all developed nations over the same period. This represents an enormous leap from the UK's position at the beginning of this decade when it was reluctant to accept a project of stabilisation of GHG emissions by the year 2005 (by 1990 levels), and even from the position in March 1997 when the UK had accepted a 10% reduction within the EU proposal for Kyoto. Despite the policies mentioned above and the ambitious goals proposed by the UK, Collier (1997: 87) demonstrated that 'the UK [was] still dragging its feet in many important policy areas and environmental concerns [were] often compromised by other policy priorities'. Meeting the 20% reduction target would nonetheless require significant policy changes (Greene and Skea, 1997).

The UK's Second Report under the UNFCCC presented in February 1997 still put a strong emphasis on the role of the market in the achievement of the planned reductions: 'Competition ... has stimulated significant structural changes and improvements in efficiency and innovation in the energy sector.' (HM Government, 1997: 13). Thus, 62% of the total proposed reductions of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were attributed to market mechanisms and market liberalisation (ibid.: 53). The New Labour government did not significantly change this, if not intensified it (cf. DEFRA, 2001), and free market and free enterprise are still assumed as guarantors of good environmental management.

In fact, a shift in the Labour Party's understanding of the economy has 'located New Labour's foreign economic policy squarely within a prevailing neo-liberal global orthodoxy: one which accepts that economic prosperity is best realized through domestic deregulation, industrial competitiveness, and trade and investment liberalization.' (Wilkinson, 2000: 136) It is immediately clear that New Labour incorporated several elements of the Thatcherist discourse (cf. Phillips, 1998).

The UK's climate change policy, therefore, seems to draw upon two main and well established environmental discourses: economic rationalism (associated with a neo-liberal ideology) and ecological modernization. These discourses constitute the social agents involved in climate change very differently. The role and authority of scientists,

business people, environmentalists, and political institutions and decision-makers differ extensively between the two approaches. Let us take governmental institutions as an example. Their subject-position in a neo-liberal system (economic rationalism discourse) points towards a reduction of government regulation of economic activity, leaving the management of economic problems to the market. On the other hand, the discourse of ecological modernization, at least in its strong version, positions those institutions as important regulators of the environmental domain.

We will now focus on representations of the British politics of climate change in the press at the end of 1997.

## 1.2. Government-speak in the papers

In the period under examination, the press carried several articles written by political actors. It is crucial to analyse their public constructions of climate change. Tony Blair, the new Prime Minister, is cited as author of an article for the *Times* entitled 'Facing up to a climate of change' (see next page). The timing of 04.12.97 was probably chosen to profit from the momentum generated by COP-3, taking place in Kyoto. The scarcity of Blair's public pronouncements on the environment makes the article he authored for the *Times* quite important. It was his first and last until the speech on environmental matters which took place in October 2000<sup>2</sup>. Blair's article was undoubtedly drafted by his policy advisors and the text condenses a whole lot of characteristics of the discourse of New Labour on other issues, such as the economy, international relations, and responsibility.

The headline metaphorically uses the issue of change to prepare readers for both an unavoidable process and the intent of the government to mould it. In other speeches by Blair and texts from New Labour, the state of the world is often presented as one of irresistible 'change', where 'change' appears not as process, but as a causal entity in other processes (Fairclough, 2000b). Abstract actors often take the place of concrete agents (like companies or governments). While this construction 'backgrounds questions of agency and causality, of who or what causes change' (ibid.: 26), Blair

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<sup>2</sup> More specifically, on 24.10.00, at a joint meeting of the CBI and the Green Alliance.

# Facing up to a climate of change

**Tony Blair** on the significance of today's Green summit

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1 I can remember the excitement both in politics and among people, particularly the young, when the Rio Earth summit faced up to the growing threat to our environment.

5 If we are honest, however, much as that summit put environmental issues on the map, a huge amount needs to be done. It has not created the sort of world that we all want.

10 Kyoto must be different, and the Government is doing all that it can to put pressure on countries resistant to tackling global warming. John Prescott has done an excellent job in focusing the minds of fellow governments on the difficult choices that lie ahead.

15 Today John and I are hosting a "Green summit" in Downing Street with some of the nation's top business people. Some commentators have said that the needs of business and the environment cannot be reconciled — I don't agree. There is a third way. It is vital that business is involved, and it wants to be. Climate change affects us all. If we are to tackle it, everyone must work together. If business is not involved then the targets we sign up to will be empty and meaningless. Kyoto is very much the beginning of the process. It does not end there. It will be up to governments, business and individuals to ensure that any agreement reached leads to real change.

talk of the pain involved in cutting greenhouse gases, not enough talk about the gains. Climate change is an international phenomenon, which does not respect national borders. Nations cannot act alone. Many of the businesses represented today are multi-national companies with worldwide interests. They can play a leading role in delivering cuts in greenhouse gases, not only in the UK, but in both the developed and developing worlds.

Among those at the summit will be John Browne, of BP, Dr Chris Fay, of Shell, Sir Colin Marshall of the CBI, Sir Ronald Hampel of ICI, Keith Henry of National Power, Nick Reilly of Vauxhall, and Bill Morris of the T&GWU. They will have ideas about how we can deliver what is agreed at Kyoto, and how we can exploit the opportunities that arise.

20 The European Union wants to see a 15 per cent reduction in those gases that cause global warming. Yes, it is ambitious; yes, other countries, including America, believe this is too difficult. Yes, developing countries feel it will harm their chances of catching up with the developed economies. But we should see it as an opportunity for business and a means to create jobs. The environmental industry is growing rapidly. At present it is worth in the region of £170 billion, of which the UK share is about

*Times, 04.12.97*

The whole of the British Government is involved. As well as John Prescott, I have  
50 invited four other members of the Cabinet — Gordon Brown, Robin Cook, Margaret Beckett and Gavin Strang — to today's meeting with business people.  
55 It is the first time business has got together at such a summit to think through the best options on how to tackle climate change. We have two  
60 simple questions to put to them. What can you do to help to combat the threat of climate change? and what can the  
65 Government do to assist?

We will also have the opportunity to study a report which will be submitted to me at the meeting by David Davies,  
70 chairman of the Government's Advisory Committee on Business and Environment. It concludes that inaction is not an option. The report also says  
75 climate change offers opportunities for all business sectors to improve competitiveness and take advantage of the need for improved processes and products. Although the science is far from exact, and it is difficult to estimate the costs of the damage, it is clear that, unchecked, climate change  
80 threatens the world's ecosystem and will impose enormous human and business costs.

Global warming could lead to an increase in stormy weather, with low-lying areas of eastern and southern England facing the threat of flooding. To give some idea of that threat, the great storm of  
95 1987 cost our economy about £3 billion at today's prices. That is nothing compared with what could happen if we allow global warming to go  
100 unchecked.

At this morning's summit I want to hear practical proposals. There has been too much

£7.5 billion. By the year 2000 it is estimated that the industry will have grown to £203 billion, and by 2010 its value could rise to £388 billion.

The UK has an excellent track record in science and technology. We need to build on this knowledge and expertise to develop new, clean technologies. We need to look at new ways of producing energy. This could involve promoting greater use of solar energy and making more use of renewable sources. This will ensure that the UK delivers what it has signed up to and will help other countries fulfil their commitments.

**T**here is money to be made and there are jobs to be created. To do that we must meet the challenge of Kyoto. Global warming is not going to go away. If we are to make real progress at Kyoto there has to be a partnership between governments and business. We need to develop a common cause, an international crusade to win this battle.

The nations of the world must act. The science is far from perfect; we cannot be precise about what might happen, or the exact timescale, but the clock is running. If we do not act to tackle global warming then we run the risk of leaving a dreadful legacy.

The threat from global warming is already affecting this generation, it will affect out children even more; we cannot even begin to predict how it will affect out children's children. That is why the Kyoto climate change conference is so important. We will do our bit. Other countries must do theirs. So must every individual. We owe it to future generations to make it a success. Anything less would be a betrayal.

seeks an active role and a leading position for Britain (l. 52-66, col. 2)<sup>3</sup>, implicitly acknowledging the importance of policy and decision-making in the new 'global' context. We therefore find a striking incongruity in New Labour's discourse. On the one hand, it speaks of inevitable processes taking place in a globalised world; on the other hand, it aims to shape such processes (cf. Flowerdew, 2002).

The article's subtitle pegs the theme of 'change' to a 'Green summit'. In an unconventional address to the public, the Prime Minister attempts in this text to justify a meeting with business representatives and, more widely, to legitimate the decision to give business (part of the) responsibility to control climate change. Blair puts much emphasis on the idea that addressing climate change is a win-win situation, in a typical eco-modernist fashion: l. 39-42, col.2; l. 68-70, col. 2; and l. 3, col. 2. Another aspect of ecological modernization is cooperation between government and various social agents in managing the environment. Blair attempts to generate commitment to such a 'partnership' in this article (l. 31-39, col. 1).

That is also noticeable in Blair's way of involving the public. Fairclough (2000b: 35-7) maintains that Blair's use of the pronoun 'we' is consciously ambiguous and serves a variety of discursive purposes. This article features numerous examples of an indefinite use of the word 'we'. There is 'we' as in 'Britain': l. 54-59, col. 2. There is 'we' as equivalent of 'government and business': l. 77-80, col. 2. And there is a totally undefined use of the word 'we': l. 93-104, col. 2. Blair creates an ambivalence and confusion between the people, the state and the country. The result is blurred responsibility. This discursive strategy is advantageous for the government in that it builds a sense of union of purpose and, therefore, rhetorically enfolds all the British people. New Labour constantly aims to commit individuals to certain goals, as expressed in l. 100-101, col. 2. While this article positions Blair (notice the 'personal involvement' in l. 1-7, col. 1) and the government as pro-active with regard to climate change, these actors are actually transferring responsibility to business and the public. An important difference between Thatcher's and Blair's discourse is that the former is 'highly polemical and very much oriented to identifying enemies of her new right political project, dividing 'us' from 'them', whereas Blair's discourse is inclusive and

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<sup>3</sup> See Fairclough (2000b) on New Labour's views on inter-national competition.

consensual.’ (Fairclough, 2000b: 74). This eliminates much of the grounds for critique and dissent.

Another characteristic of New Labour that appears in Blair’s article (l. 14-22, col. 1; l. 35-36, col. 1) is what Fairclough calls the ‘getting tough’ language. The repeated use of the word ‘must’ and the reference to the government’s pressure can be seen as part of an authoritarian style that is quite common in Blair’s public addresses. It leaves little room for debate<sup>4</sup>.

Environment minister Michael Meacher authored two articles that appeared in the *Guardian* in November 1997. The main theme of ‘Pollution: Streets of shame’ (19.11.97) was air quality and the government’s programme for addressing the issue. In ‘Power from the Sahara’ (25.11.97), Meacher significantly heightened the risk associated with climate change, speaking of the possibility of a runaway greenhouse effect. To avoid this risk, Meacher advanced a ‘world project for the millennium’: a grand proposal of covering substantial areas of the Earth’s deserts, such as Death Valley or the Sahara desert, with solar batteries or electricity-storing devices which ‘could meet the world’s electricity needs indefinitely’. This was clearly a position of faith in techno-managerial solutions which did not account for issues like energy transport and environmental impact. A comparison of Meacher’s ‘bold’ vision amplified by the *Guardian* with Blair’s ‘pragmatism’ and ‘common-sense’ in the *Times* clearly shows how politicians address different members of the public via different newspapers. The main intended effect of politicians’ discursive intervention in the media is to legitimate government’s policies and build public support. The press is a privileged means to direct certain messages to target groups, while television and radio have more diffuse audiences.

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<sup>4</sup> The *Independent* carried a short note on Blair’s article in the *Times*, headlined ‘Environment: Industry must cut emissions, says Blair’ (04.12.01). Blair’s ‘tough’ attitude is evident here too.

### 1.3. A tamed press

The first non-obvious trait of the press coverage of this period is the scarcity of articles about the domestic politics of climate change. Although the Kyoto negotiations polarized discourses around the international level, more debate would have been expected on the crucial national programmes throughout a month and a half of intense media talk on the greenhouse effect. In fact, there were only nine articles where the central object was the UK's domestic policies; there were no leading articles on the issue. Such lack of news texts is itself equivalent to a relative passivity/pacification of the media. In the eyes of news editors, there was nothing in the government's actions, inactions or proposed policies that deserved a significant volume of coverage. Furthermore, despite some signs of (mild) contestation, there were several endorsements of the options of the new government in this period.

In the *Guardian*, the eco-modernist dimension of the government's programme for ameliorating climate change was not only sanctioned but even enabled by an article by John Elkington, chairman of strategy consultants SustainAbility Ltd<sup>5</sup>. Commenting on Blair's meeting with business leaders, Elkington wrote:

The first agenda item: how to build new partnerships between the Government and business to re-focus the climate change debate from "pain to gain". Colour me green, but the debate really did seem to promise a new era in politics.

Blair's strategy of inclusion and engagement with a number of actors in the debate and the promise of profits from climate change policies were obviously successful at this stage. A positive note was also given elsewhere to the institutionalisation of a sustainable development discourse through the creation of the Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast, both the *Guardian* and the *Times* voiced some disagreement over taxation policy. When the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced in Parliament the main options for the next budget, Roger Cowe concluded that 'Saving the planet must

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<sup>5</sup> 'From the top', 13.12.97.

<sup>6</sup> 'Eco soundings', John Vidal, 03.12.97.

wait'<sup>7</sup>. Exposing the gap between the government's promises and its options, Cowe emphasized that the government did not take any steps into shifting taxation from labour to resource use. In the *Times*, Nick Nuttal foregrounded NGOs' views on the budget<sup>8</sup>. There was however some justification of the government's options with explanations of its reasons and plans for the future.

The *Independent* voiced scepticism about the government's capacity to reach the proposed targets and even cast some doubts on its intentions to do so, given the planned budget cut for the Energy Saving Trust<sup>9</sup>. Elsewhere, the newspaper amplified the Confederation of British Industry's discursive strategy of contesting the government's plans for GHG reduction and disputing their accuracy or adequacy<sup>10</sup>. On the contrary, in two articles Nicholas Schoon built support for the government's policies and helped prepare citizens for the necessary changes, including higher household and industrial energy taxes<sup>11</sup>.

In sum, in an intense 'honeymoon' with renewed New Labour, the press was generally only slightly critical of the government's policies for GHG emissions. After all, that is a natural position after a long period of bitter discontent with the Tories. The risk is that the press weakens its surveillance role. Cowe's article revealed that the *Guardian* was capable of continuing its critical readings of politics, even in relation to the New Labour government. But the volume of coverage indicated some reluctance to do so.

One issue where the recently-elected government fell short of a public relations success was that of coal. As we have seen in previous chapters, the coal industry had been facing extreme difficulties and losing ground to new gas-fired power stations for a number of years. Peter Hetherington and Antony Barnett exposed New Labour's troubles in managing the issue and their difficulties in articulating conflicting agendas, namely supporting coal mines and addressing climate change<sup>12</sup>. The newspapers' own ambiguity in analysing the problem was also perceptible in the articles. On the one

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<sup>7</sup> Headline, *Guardian*, 26.11.97.

<sup>8</sup> He mentioned them in the headline: 'Activists urge more help for energy conservation', 26.12.97.

<sup>9</sup> 'Britain struggles to meet emission cuts as demand for electricity surges', Fran Abrams, 06.12.97; 'Anger over environmental cuts', Nicholas Schoon, 18.12.97.

<sup>10</sup> 'Labour faces rethink on greenhouse-gas curbs', Charles Arthur, 12.12.97.

<sup>11</sup> 'Is the Government's target for greenhouse gas just so much hot air?', 08.12.97; 'Prescott paints a greener and more frugal land energy', 09.12.97.



hand, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* are newspapers that strongly promote environmental protection. On the other hand, they want to support workers in a threatened industry and the mining communities who had suffered much as a result of pit closures. The social dimensions of a social democratic ideology sit uneasily with ecological concern, as we have seen before. In the *Times*, Graham Searjeant argued in favour of coal saying that it ‘has suffered more than market forces required’, and suggesting that the industry fell victim of a sequence of bad policy decisions in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. BUSINESS: CHANGING DISCOURSES

In this period, there are indicators of a significant shift in business attitudes to climate change and, more, generally to protecting the environment. However, we ought to differentiate between different branches of business, and even between companies, as positions vary considerably. If we look further back, we find previous signs of change in industry’s views on ecological questions. Reports from the Government’s Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment (1995) and from the Confederation of British Industry (1995) had recognized the need for public policy intervention in environmental issues, as voluntary measures were unlikely to be effective. During 1997, both BP and Shell announced significant investments in solar energy (Leggett, 2000: 277). In mid-November, the CBI released the results of a poll of its members about Kyoto in which 83% of the companies expressed support of the EU’s 15% target for GHG reductions and 62% of the companies believed that Europe should go ahead with such a goal unilaterally if the other industrialized countries rejected it (Legget, 2000: 288). The *Guardian*, not surprisingly, pays the most attention to the relation between business issues and climate change in 1997. A strong endorsement of ecological modernization is the most prominent feature of the paper’s discourse.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Why the dash for gas is the pits’, *Guardian*, 02.12.97; and ‘Labour digs itself into a deep pit’, *Observer*, 07.12.97.

<sup>13</sup> ‘That prize of clean power stays elusive’, 11.12.97.

## 2.1. Oil industry: the good and the bad

While the oil industry has been the strongest and most consistent opponent of climate change policies, some companies promoted in 1997 a quite different stance. Shell announced the abandonment of coal production and that it backed ‘an international plan for carbon taxes’<sup>14</sup>. BP’s chief executive John Browne personifies a newly greenified discourse<sup>15</sup>. In contrast, Exxon’s chairman continued to minimize human influence on climate change and claimed that policies would mean ‘lower economic growth, lost jobs and a profound and unpleasant impact on the way we live’<sup>16</sup>. Even with BP or Shell not everything is rosy. We often find ambiguous actions, as in the case of BP opening new oil rigs in the Atlantic continental shelf<sup>17</sup>, and the ‘trail of corruption, despoliation and death’ that ‘lies’ in Shell’s ‘wake’, as well as its participation in the Global Climate Coalition<sup>18</sup>. The *Guardian* appears consistently attentive to developments in corporations’ image management and vigilant of their overall performance.

## 2.2. Insurance industry: the new environmental watchdog

In the vein of their pronouncements in Berlin, the insurance industry was responsible in Kyoto for a major new development in the business world’s discourse towards climate change. European and Asian insurance companies, which are some of the world’s biggest stock owners, announced that they would unload their shares from companies that damaged the environment unless they improved their performance<sup>19</sup>. A British pension and insurance company even added that oil and petrol advertising ‘should carry global health warnings, as tobacco advertising carries personal health

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Shell beefs up green moves’, David Gow, *Guardian*, 19.11.97.

<sup>15</sup> ‘BP’s ‘heretic’ hailed: Good Times, Bad Times: The Business Personalities Of The Year’, Reed Landberg, *Independent on Sunday*, 21.12.97; see also Browne, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Fight for the final frontier’, R. Nicoll, *Guardian*, 19.11.97.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Fight for the...’

<sup>18</sup> ‘Unlovable Shell, the goddess of oil’, Andrew Rowell, *Guardian*, 15.11.97. Rowell is the author of *Green Backlash – Global Subversion Of The Environmental Movement*, London, Routledge, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Polluters warned of equity pullout’, Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 06.12.97.

messages'<sup>20</sup>. With this interpellation a lot of things change<sup>21</sup>. The relative positions of actors in climate discourses are moved and the business world now appears managing the environment on their own. Economic rationalism becomes environmentally friendly. Companies become the environmental watchdogs of other companies.

### 2.3. *Guardian*: promoting the new economic optimism

The most significant aspect of the *Guardian*'s coverage was the frequent advancement of an ecological modernization discourse. Environmental protection was repeatedly articulated and made compatible with economic vitality. Various articles highlight or refer to the jobs that could be generated by an investment in renewable energies and energy efficiency. This discourse is sometimes brought in by NGOs<sup>22</sup>. But it is also promoted by other actors. The environment minister, Michael Meacher, the EU, and governmental think tanks, for example, also find an important potential for 'green employment'<sup>23</sup>. A new consensus emerges. Investing in new forms of energy is depicted as the new economic common-sense. In fact, ecological modernization is an attractive promise for everyone. It is a win-win possibility. No surprise then that part of the classical antagonism between environmental pressure groups and economic actors gets diluted.

... there is one thing that Greenpeace and Shell, the US and India, boffins and eco-bandits will all agree on. They have seen the future, and it is solar.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> 'Polluters warned...'; see also 'Call for warning on petrol adverts', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 06.12.97.

<sup>21</sup> Brown's article claims the decision of insurance companies to base some of their investment decisions on the companies' attitudes towards global warming was the result of a two-year long work with UNEP. Jeremy Leggett (2000) suggests that it is the outcome of Greenpeace's and his own lobbying actions.

<sup>22</sup> 'Working at a solution to CO<sub>2</sub> pollution: 'Green' employment', Lina Saigol, Weekend section, *Guardian*, 06.12.97.

<sup>23</sup> 'Working at a solution...'; 'Ray of hope in EU solar power plans', Celia Weston, *Guardian*, 21.11.97.

<sup>24</sup> 'Science and technology: Sun rises at Kyoto', Fred Pearce, *Guardian*, 27.11.97.

# Warming to the prospect of global greening



Edited by  
Lisa Buckingham

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**A**T LEAST one part of the City seems to have finally awakened to the environmental challenge, with the International Petroleum Exchange saying that it is interested in running a market for tradeable pollution permits.

Never mind that it took a sideswipe from the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to spur the IPE into action. And never mind that the IPE could be pushed aside by US markets, which already have experience of trading emissions permits. At least the exchange is interested and is preparing to tell the Government how it would operate such a market.

The question is how long it will take the rest of the City to catch on to the many green opportunities arising from Kyoto and elsewhere.

The prospects range from financing environmental industries to reporting on green

performance. They affect just about every City institution and activity from corporate finance to equity analysis, risk management and investment. So far, institutions have tended to react only to green threats, rather than opportunities. Thus the insurance industry is more advanced than most on environmental issues because it stands to lose out from unusual weather and climatic catastrophes.

In other sectors it has proved difficult to raise enthusiasm. Accountants have tried to develop environmental reporting but, in the absence of any statutory requirement, this has had limited success. Analysts have been reluctant to factor in liabilities from problems such as contaminated land to their assessments of share prices, mainly because of the time scales involved in such liabilities. And they have been sceptical about the potential for green products and processes because of doubts about the sustainability, as it were, of consumer interest and the seriousness of governments' positions.

Beyond the City, the business world has been less sceptical, although action has tended to be concentrated in a handful of leading companies, such as B&Q.

Prompted by the last green summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, many companies have now begun to understand

their environmental impact and the opportunities, as well as dangers, which might emerge from action to combat climate change and resource wastefulness. It is to be hoped Kyoto will have the same effect on financial institutions as Rio had on industrial and commercial businesses.

In 'The City Column: warming to the prospect of global greening', Lisa Buckingham reports on the London International Petroleum Exchange's interest in running a market for tradable emissions permits. With a strict economic reasoning, Buckingham's text emphasises the opportunities arising from environmental protection, including the Kyoto agreement (l. 44, col. 1 – l. 5, col. 2; l. 43, col. 2 – l. 20, col. 3). This represents a radical shift in the economic stakes of climate change. But it is a very narrow framing of the problem.

As part of a growing focus on solutions for the problem of climate change, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* often assessed costs and opportunities involved in various options<sup>25</sup>. Renewable energies in general, and solar power in particular, came out with a definitely positive balance<sup>26</sup>.

This economic optimism is an important dimension of the new government's discourse. The refashioned New Labour party has trouble with the anti-consumerism and/or anti-modern forms of environmentalism (Jacobs, 2000). But the transformation in perceptions of business interests is also a crucial factor for policy-making. In the history of the international negotiations on ozone-depleting products, for example, the existence of business opportunities that would be positively affected by an agreement gave a powerful push to the Montreal Protocol (Litfin, 1994). Business interests should not to be perceived as a reality external to discourse. Interests are constructed and revised through discourse.

### 3. INDIVIDUALS' BEHAVIOUR

Together with promoting serious political action, the *Guardian* incited ordinary citizens to play a role in cutting GHGs. 'We can play our part by taking action at home' was Will Callaghan's main message in 'What a waste of energy', an article published on 25.11.97 in the educational supplement of the *Guardian*. On the same

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<sup>25</sup> 'Sun rises at Kyoto: Kicking the carbon habit', unattributed, *Guardian*, 27.11.97; 'Alternatives: Crushing blow', Crispin Aubrey, *Guardian*, 19.11.97.

<sup>26</sup> 'Money matters: Sun rises on cheap power', Neasa Macerlean, 30.11.97; 'Policy Forum: global warming brings a glow to green energy', Antony Barnett, 30.11.97; both articles in the *Observer*'s business section.

page, 'Green up your home' analysed the costs and savings linked to each measure towards home energy-efficiency. The articles were based on data from Friends of the Earth and also refer the Energy Saving Trust. An even more thorough examination of the environmental impact of each individual, especially centred on energy use, was suggested by Peter Beaumont<sup>27</sup>. The object of the story was EcoCal, a computer programme produced by Going for Green, a publicity campaign to raise environmental awareness. The project was backed both by the DETR and the private sector, and aimed at auditing the environmental health of communities. Another dimension of economics was brought up by Ian Wylie: investment funds and the environmental record of their companies<sup>28</sup>. Wylie listed a number of environmentally-friendly funds for the conscious investor.

The recommendations of the *Guardian* were in stark contrast with an article in the *Times* which expounds environmental advice that was later contradicted.<sup>29</sup> This paper maintains its sceptical stand towards doing something to protect the environment.

#### 4. NGOS: A VARIETY OF DISCOURSES AND ROLES

What was the position of pro-environment interest groups on climate change in this period? What discourses did they engage in? The press created a multi-faceted portrait of NGOs.

In one *Guardian* article, Greenpeace was constructed as a counter-force to the dominant, but outdated, forms of modernity, represented by the oil industry<sup>30</sup>. 'At a time when we should be phasing out our reliance on fossil fuels, why open up new fields?', asked a Greenpeace representative. Nicoll showed strong sympathy towards Greenpeace and its attempt 'to show the public the global folly in the lust for oil.' Except for parts of this article, this type of 'green radicalism' (Dryzek, 1997) is notoriously absent from the press coverage of climate change.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Last chance to turn the earth's heating down', *Observer*, 30.11.97.

<sup>28</sup> 'Working at a solution to CO<sub>2</sub> pollution: Some funds are greener than others', Weekend section, p. 2, *Guardian*.

<sup>29</sup> 'Shooting down eco myths', Alex Wijeratne, 13.12.97.

<sup>30</sup> 'Fight for the final frontier', Ruaridh Nicoll, 19.11.97.

Direct action, the ultimate emblem of Greenpeace, and also used by other groups, received almost no attention in the 13 years covered by this thesis partly explained by the fact that it was very scarce in the cause of GHG reductions. At the end of 1997, only Nicoll's article relates to this type of discursive construction of the environmental crisis. This is partly a symptom of the fact that this type of intervention was scaled down by Greenpeace during the 1990s. But partly, it may be also caused by media fatigue in relation to these strategies<sup>31</sup>. Worth mentioning is the brief coverage of Friends of the Earth's calls for increases in the prices of air travelling<sup>32</sup>. Calling for restraint in consumer behaviour is part of a 'limits' discourse that is vastly absent in the press, as we have seen. These kinds of construction of the problem are the exception rather than the rule.

NGOs were also portrayed in the press performing the 'traditional' attention-grabbing and advocate roles. 'Life's a gas when Carbonosaurus meets the tree people: sketch' was the headline for an article by Richard Lloyd Parry that described a range of NGO strategies for mobilizing people and the media in Kyoto: the 'Gas Mask Please Tree', the 'Melting Ice Penguins' and the Greenpeace's 'Carbonosaurus'<sup>33</sup>. But it was not only 'environmental activists of the traditional school' that 'ha[d] mounted protests, demos and photo-opportunities'. The self-entitled 'free market NGOs' also took to the stage, but were de-legitimated by the press<sup>34</sup>.

Concerning another role of environmental organizations, that of knowledge providers, an NGO that had been almost never mentioned before, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, was given a significant highlight in several articles due to its report on the effects of climate change on wildlife<sup>35</sup>. In a similar fashion, FoE actualises the risk by showing us how 'climate takes its toll on Japan'<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> As hinted by Paul Brown in 'Back to swashbuckling for a body that has lately gone 'softly softly'', *Guardian*, 18.04.95.

<sup>32</sup> 'Europe: Green Channel', Sue Wheat, *Independent*, 06.12.97.

<sup>33</sup> *Independent*, 09.12.97; also mentioned in 'Climate conference: Temperatures rise with long hours and cheap stunts', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 09.12.97.

<sup>34</sup> Parry describes these as 'a tribe of lobbyists, lawyers and academics who have as much in common with the green movement as Hitler's National Socialists had with Karl Marx': 'Greenhouse optimist takes the stage with lunatic fringe', Richard Lloyd Parry, *Independent*, 10.12.97.

<sup>35</sup> 'Rare birds just can't stand the heat', Mark Rowe, *Independent*, 23.11.97; 'Wildlife feels the heat from our climate folly', Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 03.12.97; 'Remote forests show fatal effects of global warming', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 04.12.97.

<sup>36</sup> Headline, Richard Lloyd Parry, 08.12.97.

In the *Sunday Times*, NGOs were again discredited<sup>37</sup>. The defense of ‘rationality’ in decisions in this discourse interestingly contrasted with an article in the *Guardian* about critiques of Greenpeace’s ‘emotional’ reasons, as detailed in the next section<sup>38</sup>.

There is a significant contrast in the number of references to NGOs in this period and 1992 (see appendix two). The *Times* now has the least occurrences, less than a fifth of what it had for a similar amount of time in 1992. The *Guardian* mentions NGOs twice as much as at the time of Rio. It is only in the *Independent* that the frequency of references to NGOs remains stable, although they are awarded a bigger framing power<sup>39</sup>. In the *Guardian*, NGOs’ framing power in this period is also much higher in 1997, as their views are dominant in three articles.

## **5. REPRESENTING SCIENCE: CONTINUITY AND PROGRESS**

Together with a very high number of articles on the politics of climate change, the press also carried several texts on the state-of-the-art knowledge of the phenomenon. There are both traits of permanence and change in this period.

### **5.1. Continuing to mobilize concern and to promote scepticism**

At the end of 1997, the strategy of mobilization of concern through emphasis on risk was dominant in science reporting. However, a sceptical attitude was also advanced in the press, with attempts to dismiss climate change studies. In this period, the *Independent* run a high number of articles on the dangers posed by climate change. Nicholas Schoon and Colin Brown referred to a report by the Met Office which was said to make a ‘grim forecast’ of a warmer world where large-scale flooding and mass starvation were to be expected<sup>40</sup>. With an imposing ‘visual’ metaphor, Nicholas Schoon depicted climate change as a ‘supertanker’ whose ‘irresistible force’ had been

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Calm down, it isn’t the end of the world’, 30.11.97.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Last night’s TV: You don’t want to do that’, Desmond Christy, 12.12.97.

<sup>39</sup> Especially if we go slightly before the period covered in this chapter when FoE and Greenpeace reports are highlighted: ‘Is the world’s climate turning ugly?’, William Hartston, 04.11.97; ‘Could global warming sink your holiday plans?’, Nicholas Schoon, 13.11.97.

<sup>40</sup> ‘The heat is on, in the world’s warmest year’, 28.11.97.



‘heading for collision with two twin, immovable objects – ordinary, everyday politics and economics’. The ‘big bang’ was predicted to happen at Kyoto, in this review of knowledge on climate change headlined ‘Trying to slow the global warming supertanker’<sup>41</sup>.

Schoon was also responsible for a moving representation of the situation of low-lying islands in ‘Paradise islands: will the world act to save them?’<sup>42</sup>. On 07.12.97 attention turned to Christmas Island and the effects of that year’s El Niño<sup>43</sup>. The moral of this story about the death of coral reefs, the disappearance of birds and fish and the occurrence of unbearable weather, is that it ‘provides a warning of the sudden and devastating changes that can be caused by small adjustments in the world’s climate’. Parry subsequently appealed for action at Kyoto. Small tropical islands, normally associated with an imagery of ‘paradise’, were turned into one of the most powerful and blame-building symbols of the dangers brought by GHGs<sup>44</sup>. Risk was also heightened by the possible tie between El Niño (which caused large devastation in 1997) and global warming in two other articles<sup>45</sup>.

Amongst the very reduced number of *Times* articles that refer to scientific research in this period, there were some that contributed to the generation of a sense of urgency and the construction of an image of crisis<sup>46</sup> or to heightening risk<sup>47</sup>. Like the *Guardian*<sup>48</sup> and the *Independent*<sup>49</sup>, the *Times* also reported that ‘1997 was third warmest year for three centuries’<sup>50</sup>.

Once more we could find a consistent trend in the types of scientific knowledge publicized by each author. Reporters like Nicholas Schoon in the *Independent* and Nick Nuttall in the *Times* repeatedly presented scientific (or science-related) information that sustained the idea that a humanly enhanced greenhouse effect was leading to

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<sup>41</sup> 24.11.97.

<sup>42</sup> 24.11.97; title appeared on page 1.

<sup>43</sup> ‘A wet, warm, unhappy Christmas: This year’s El Niño is the worst ever’, Richard Lloyd Parry, *Independent on Sunday*.

<sup>44</sup> There were already attempts in earlier periods to generate responsibility through the reference to such islands.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Weather Wise’, unattributed, 12.12.97; ‘Is it El Niño, or just another cold winter?’, Richard Lloyd Parry, 04.12.97.

<sup>46</sup> Like Nick Nuttall’s ‘Islanders ready for Pacific evacuation’, subtitled ‘Global warming threatens to swamp a string of atolls and create a refugee crisis’, 29.11.97.

<sup>47</sup> Like ‘Climate change sparks age of the volcano’, by new environment correspondent Jonathan Leake’s, 30.11.97.

<sup>48</sup> ‘UK in 1997: warm, rather dry and sunny’, Michael Hulme, 22.12.97.

<sup>49</sup> ‘That was ‘97, another year of rising heat’, Nicholas Schoon, 31.12.97.

climate change. In contrast, William Hartston, a new contributor to the *Independent* in this field and free-lance science writer, always took the opposite side. He made a sustained attempt to expose limits, contradictions or other problems of climate sciences in order to suggest that we do not know enough about global warming or that the scientific knowledge is not reliable. While, as detailed below, some authors expose the issues involved in scientific uncertainty to reinforce the claim of the need for action, others use the same uncertainty as grounds for inaction (cf. Zehr, 2000).

Let us follow the chronological order of Hartston's feature articles in this period and identify his strategies for dismissing climate change. First, on 19.11.97, he attempted to weaken the standing of climate studies by expanding the problem of climate change. Thus, he put the emphasis on the oceans as an unknown factor in the weather system<sup>51</sup>. In 'Taking a cool look at the threat of global warming'<sup>52</sup>, Hartston cast doubts on the scientific bases of climate change and shifted agency and causation by suggesting that it was the politicians' drive to be seen as green and gain public applause that had constituted greenhouse emissions as a problem. The same type of reasoning was prevalent in 'Warming or cooling?'<sup>53</sup>. Here the blame was put on the fact that the debate had 'been hijacked by political activists.' Hartston appealed to 'some truly independent scientists' in opposition to 'scientists from government-funded agencies'. This positioning strategy harms the reputation of all the latter, which may include all research at universities and centres that are publicly funded.

Hartston was fortuitously supported in his campaign by a television documentary in a BBC2 series called 'Scare Stories'. Entitled 'Scorching the Earth', the programme leaned, in Hartston's words 'towards the sceptical side, with some excellent historical footage of scientists making fools of themselves with their global cooling theory of the 1970s'<sup>54</sup>. Hartston then asked rhetorically: 'How could we be expected to take seriously all these threats of global disaster if the doom-mongers could change their minds so dramatically?' This is his simple way of refuting all the scientific knowledge on climate change<sup>55</sup>. The headline of the following article – 'Weather: The very model

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<sup>50</sup> Nigel Hawkes, 31.12.97.

<sup>51</sup> 'Current ideas in climate research'.

<sup>52</sup> 28.11.97.

<sup>53</sup> 01.12.12.

<sup>54</sup> 'The politics of climate', 04.12.97.

<sup>55</sup> Confront this reading of the programme with the *Guardian's*, as discussed below.

of a global argument'<sup>56</sup> – promoted suspicion by conveying the idea of generalized scientific in-fighting or disagreement. In the same article, Hartston's focused on the present to reject concern about the future: 'Personally, I'm rather enjoying the milder weather we've been having.' Finally, in 'Predictions of doom and disaster'<sup>57</sup>, Hartston raised suspicions in relation to the IPCC's then-newly published report entitled 'Regional Impacts of Climate Change'. Words like 'doom' immediately disqualified the IPCC's forecasts. Moreover, he asked new rhetorical questions as part of a strategy of generalization of uncertainty:

But are the models to be trusted? ... If we can't even confidently predict whether the Gulf Stream ... is going to change direction, can we really trust the other conclusions?

The regular space awarded to Hartston in the *Independent* is strong evidence of split stances within this institution regarding climate change.

In contrast with previous years, the *Times* carried less 'science' articles dismissing climate change with only one article devaluating the role of human activities in the process of climate change<sup>58</sup>. However, a long 'profile' article in the *Sunday Times* headlined 'Calm down, it isn't the end of the world' (30.11.97) constructed 'environmentalists' (meaning NGOs and most scientists, including those of the IPCC) as 'visionary hobbits' who see in global warming the doom of our age, who 'avoid economic "progress" like the plague', and want to deny developing countries the possibility of progress. This is a 'new age imperialism'. The root of the problem was seen as the 'impassioned interpretation of often genuine scientific data'. But there are still those who are reasonable, advocating a 'moderate' position in Kyoto, we were told. The debate is between 'sense vs con-sense, rationality vs doggerel, moderates with both feet planted firmly on the earth against those with their heads in the clouds.' This type of ridicule and cynicism are part of a reactionary discourse about climate change that, as we have seen, has been pervasive in the *Times* and especially in the *Sunday Times*.

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<sup>56</sup> 09.12.97.

<sup>57</sup> 17.12.97.

## 5.2. Scientists' renewed tactics

In the *Guardian's* issue of 02.12.97 a feature headlined 'Trouble is on its way' was authored by four leading scientists, all key advisors to the government: Dr. Mike Hulme, Prof. Martin Parry, Dr. Nigel Arnell and Dr. Robert Nicholls. They advanced a reinterpretation of the achievements of Kyoto.

...the effects of the mitigation proposals at Kyoto are really quite small. ...the Kyoto conference is about whether the world warms by a further 1.4C by 2050 (the 'no-action' case), or by 1.3C (if Kyoto agrees on emissions stabilisation ...).

The authors then suggested more 'realistic priorities for action'. While recognizing the need for a limitations approach at Kyoto, they implied that adaptation to climate change was a more sensible pursuit (cf. Kane and Shogren, 2000).

These scientists were openly politically mobilized and took up a lobbying role in the public arena. The article in the *Guardian* is, therefore, an indicator of scientists' self-awareness: how certain scientists view their agency in the process of addressing climate change. Moreover, the article suggests that (some) powerful climate change scientists see the press as an important political agent.

The scientists' strategy of coming forward into the public arena may be intended to generate support not only for their views, but also for their needs and professional agendas, as this article paved the way for potential claims for funding. The researchers stated that 'we need a sounder base of understanding just what levels of climate change can be adapted to'. There, in a subdued fashion, was a claim for more research and, thereby, a strengthening the role of science in the process of decision-making (cf. Zehr, 2000). We have seen this sort of strategy in the first years covered by this thesis; focusing on adaptation rather than mitigation may represent a renewal of the scientists' tactics, as it may indicate a belief that climate change processes are unstoppable. Adaptation is the only solution.

Whatever the motivations, this public pronouncement did change the usual discursive framing of science. While most journalistic appeals to science had been the basis upon which to claim for GHG reductions, now scientists appeared *instead* to be

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<sup>58</sup> 'Yellowstone gases 'worse than ten power stations'', Tunku Varadarajan, 27.12.97.

advancing adaptation in response to the consequences of GHG emissions. This could affect the credibility of science in the eyes of the public and lead to confusion about what are adequate programmes of action. The promotion of adaptation implicitly incites the continuation of the practices that cause the problem.

But does the press act as a mere channel for scientists' voices? The same *Guardian* issue gives the answer: definitely not. More striking for the newspaper reader than the scientists' article was the (revised) introduction to it, bylined Paul Brown on page 3, under the title 'Global warming 'will kill 20m''. Hulme et al.'s article appeared much farther on page 17 and under a much less catchy headline. Brown's opening paragraph intensified the sense of tragedy and attributed the statistical forecast to Hulme et al.

More than 20 million people face starvation, drowning, or dying of thirst in the next 50 years because of the "unstoppable juggernaut" of climate change, four leading British climate scientists claimed today.

While the scientists' point and purpose was to highlight the inadequacy of the Kyoto agreement to address climate change and to argue the need for other forms of action, Paul Brown turned their pronouncement into a prediction of devastation which could be read as a call for stronger action at Kyoto. Such a transformation of meaning illustrates the complex relations between scientists and journalists, and the multiple re-embedding processes that may take place in the media.

### **5.3. Paradoxes, backstages and reflexivity**

Media conceptualisations of scientific 'truth', of science-making, and of the journalists' own views and standings are taken further in this period. Let us start with the issue of contradictions between scientific predictions. The *Guardian* awarded significant salience to the possibility of Britain becoming considerably colder in the sequence of climate change, due to alterations in the Gulf Stream. Until now, the predominant forecast had been of higher temperatures for the UK, viewed by many as a national gain. A reversal of climate fortunes could, in theory, generate more support

from UK citizens for fighting climate change. However, it could also increase public scepticism in relation to climate sciences.

Page 3 of the *Guardian*'s issue for 28.11.97 featured three articles on this inversion of stakes: 'Record global temperatures bring scientists cold comfort'; 'Summer in SpitsBritain' (both by Tim Radford) and 'Meltdown. How global warming could make Britain much colder' (unattributed)<sup>59</sup>. In the first piece, Radford explored the paradoxes and ironies of climate studies and expresses wariness towards scientific knowledge claims. 'Summer in SpitsBritain' enhanced the contradictions in scientific predictions. The picture of Britain with the climate of the Loire Valley, proposed by the Department of the Environment, contrasted with the temperatures of Spitsbergen, suggested by the *Science* article. Having reported the issue for around ten years and typically reinforcing climate change claims, Tim Radford turned somewhat cynical in these texts towards the various knowledges in the field. One possible explanation is that (some) science journalists were unable or unwilling to engage with the uncertainties of trying to predict how extremely complex, interactive bio-physical systems will behave in 20-50 years time. However, Radford did not in any way convey the idea that the struggle against GHG emissions ought to be eased. In 'Damming major rivers is pulling the Gulf Stream nearer'<sup>60</sup>, Robin Mckie noted that contradictions in predictions were such that 'we could swelter or freeze, or possibly bake in a desert or see our land washed away'. So what should we make of it?

[Such] a startlingly varied range of forecasts ... does not make warnings about global warming false or hollow. It merely underlines the harsh fact that our planet is entering an epoch of meteorological uncertainty.

In 1997, there is an increased propensity for journalists to disclose the backstages of science (cf. Nelkin, 1987; 1991), to describe their goings-on and how this affects forecasts and claims. Thus, Robin Mckie found the 'climate prediction business' to have a 'chaotic nature'<sup>61</sup>. But neither the journalist nor the quoted scientist were reluctant to expose the constraints involved in the making of such science.

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<sup>59</sup> On the same day as the *Guardian*, the *Times* also carries an article on the subject: 'Europe may catch cold from global warming', by Nigel Hawkes and Nick Nuttall.

<sup>60</sup> *Guardian*, 30.11.97.

<sup>61</sup> 'Damming major rivers ...', 30.11.97.

For years their computer modellers have been perfecting the factors and equations that best account for previous years' climatic fluctuations. 'We had to fudge a lot of things, particularly factors concerning air and ocean interactions,' said Dr Geoff Jenkins, head of the [Hadley Centre's] climate prediction programme.

The sort of honesty displayed here is an important new dimension of the media construction of scientific knowledge. Also in the *Guardian*, Desmond Christy speaks of ...

...the real world, a place where facts are hard to come by, where science struggles to establish what the facts are, where the work of government scientists is suppressed, where grants are refused for work that might reach uncomfortable conclusions...<sup>62</sup>

In 'Getting warmer, but still a long way from our goal: The Kyoto climate talks' (*Independent*, 12.12.97) Nicholas Schoon also exposes the agents behind the scenes of science and policy-making (l. 30-42, col. 6). Schoon's article (on the next page) is a good example of another tendency observed for the first time in this period: an increased reflexivity in science reporting. In other words, journalists are more prone to discuss their own preferences and values and the media's own role in public understanding of science now than at any previous time in the study. Published under the label of 'comment', Schoon's text is a brave, personal statement addressed to decision-makers. The journalist clearly exposes his standing on the matter: he is on the side of those who believe climate change depends on human activity and is already starting to be felt. The text is written in the first person and tells the history of his own engagement with the cause, his doubts (l. 25-34; l. 38-39, col. 1), hopes (l. 20-26, col. 6) and fears (l. 10-18, col. 2). The journalist openly states his own uncertainty with regard to climate change, not to weaken but to reinforce the credibility of climate change claims. Schoon also widens the scope of analysis by moving from the daily focus of news to the scale of a decade and by depicting climate change as a matter of values, rather than framing it exclusively as a hard scientific matter with a 'risk assessment'-type language.

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<sup>62</sup> 'Last night's TV: You don't want to do that', 12.12.97.

# Getting warmer, but still a long way from our goal



## NICHOLAS SCHOON THE KYOTO CLIMATE TALKS

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One of the greatest journalistic satisfactions is to find out you are right after making predictions in print, even when they are other people's predictions. But I have never known if I have been right in writing dozens and dozens of articles over the past nine years on the threat of global warming. Worse still, there is a chance I will not know for another dozen years, perhaps more. That is an uncomfortable feeling.

True, the climate seems to have started changing already due to humanity's intervention in the atmosphere. But we cannot be sure. Furthermore, the credible forecasters in this business (the climate scientists, as opposed to the greens or

their opponents) tell us that we probably won't have significant, harmful change until a couple of decades or more into the next century – and that it will keep on changing after that.

But current science still allows the possibility that the changes will be minor and even benign on the whole. My nightmare is that 10 years from now no one talks or cares or negotiates about global warming. That it will be seen as a silly millennial fad, blotted out by genuine global environmental crises such as water shortages. Twenty-first century hindsight may find us having had our eyes on the wrong ball.

There was a bitterly cold snap soon after *The Independent* was launched in October 1986. That prompted my first story on climate change, speculating on the possibility of a new Ice Age. I had not even heard of man-made global warming, although a few hundred scientists and environmentalists scattered thinly around the world were already taking an interest. The idea of a new Ice Age was still in vogue at the time, for, in the normal, natural course of events one could come along sometime in the next few thousand years.

Soon afterwards I learnt how the emissions from burning coal, gas, oil and forests

could trap heat in the atmosphere, and so began writing the odd global warming story. Then, at the end of 1989, Margaret Thatcher made a speech on climate change which put the issue on the political map. In the US, they had a freakishly hot summer and a rising young senator called Al Gore took an interest. By the end of 1990 the bandwagon was really rolling, and it was during that year that governments decided they should negotiate a climate change treaty through the United Nations.

They had one agreed in time for the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, but it was a mouse of a treaty. The Framework Convention on Climate Change gave a legal definition to the problem and asked developed countries to volunteer to stabilise their rising annual emissions at the 1990 level by 2000. The majority failed to hit this target; those that succeeded did so only by accident of economic decline or of policy changes unrelated to global warming.

Clearly another treaty was needed – one which really did stop greenhouse gas emissions rising with each passing year, accelerating the rate of climate change. That was what could and should have been negotiated in Kyoto. But it was already pretty clear, months

before delegates from more than 150 countries arrived in Japan for 10 days of intense, against-the-clock negotiating, that this was not to be.

Meanwhile, the science of climate change has become stronger and deeper over the past seven years. The super-computer models of global climate have simulated changing temperatures and rainfall more and more convincingly. Globally, the 1990s have seen the warmest years since world-wide records began more than 100 years ago. And, though the uncertainties remain large, and will stay that way for years, an impressive scientific consensus has emerged. Climate change has begun or, to use the cautious, painstakingly negotiated words of the Science Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate."

I was at the meeting in Madrid two years ago when they came up with that phrase, and it honestly was a thrilling moment – although my excitement was admittedly intensified by being the only British journalist there.

To see opinion swing around through the 1990s has been fascinating, and often thrilling. This is a subject on

which presidents and prime ministers have been phoning each other in the middle of the night over the past few days. An issue that was once the concern of only a few hundred people now engages millions who think that, even in spite of the uncertainties, we need to reduce the risk of catastrophe and start slowing climate change now.

Along with leading politicians, every kind of expert and lobbyist and pundit now has an angle on climate change: economists, biologists, geographers, media commentators. It has been fun to watch the doubters of the right wing think-tanks and the fossil fuel lobby shift their ground. First they said the science was baloney. Then they said the warming was so uncertain it was too early to act. Then they said that it would probably work out cheaper to do nothing about cutting emissions, and adapt to a changing climate when it came.

Seeing the failure to take decisive action in Kyoto over the past week, however, has not been at all thrilling. The contrast between ministerial rhetoric and the hard bargaining behind closed doors is an unattractive spectacle. Years ago, in the fairly early days of global warming, I guessed that nothing which

really attacked the problem would be done until well into the next century. It was a gloomy bet, but a pretty safe one. When it comes to acting now to tackle an uncertain problem which lies years in the future, and when that action involves national interests and difficult changes, and when the problem is so global that most of the 160 very different nations have to agree on what to do, decisiveness is hard to come by.

Kyoto is not the end of the road. Within a few years another treaty or an annex will have been negotiated, and probably condemned for not doing enough. I just hope I make it *compromis* into my seventies, around 2030, enough time to find out for sure whether our predictions were far-sighted, or misconceived.

If we prove to be right, let's hope a few of the doubters are still alive so we can tell them this. To the executives of Exxon (Esso as they are known in Britain) and those of Mobil Oil, to the Australian Government, the Global Climate Coalition, the Republicans in the US Senate, the Institute of Economic Affairs in Britain, and to all you others who did your best to stop a decent, effective treaty being negotiated in Kyoto: you self-interested, reckless fools.

*Independent*, 12.12.97



Geoffrey Lean reviewed his own experience of science reporting to emphasize consensus: ‘in 28 years spent covering the environment, I have never known so much consensus on any single issue.’<sup>63</sup>

The *Guardian*’s Desmond Christy discussed the role of science in decision-making, à propos the BBC programme ‘Scare Stories’ and its depiction of Greenpeace’s stand towards Brent Spar.

Scare Stories – expert at being wise after the event – seems to believe in some idealised version of democracy: we have a rational debate about a problem, using the facts supplied by experts, and calmly adopt the most rational policy. Simple.<sup>64</sup>

Christy exposed this ideology as unrealistic and dangerous and suggested that ‘it is better to err on the side of caution than on the side of pollution’. This is an interesting reflection on the role of the media in advocating trust in ‘rational’ expertise or in ‘emotional’ activism<sup>65</sup>.

## 6. COP3 IN THE PRESS

Instead of pursuing an article by article analysis, which would become repetitive, I will refer to the main traits of the discursive construction of the Kyoto negotiations, especially emphasizing the innovative characteristics in comparison with earlier periods.

### 6.1. International relations revisited

As in Rio and Berlin, there was an important emphasis on conflict between different groups of countries. This would be inevitable given the divergence of proposals they advanced, associated with inequalities of power between the US, the EU and other parties (Depledge, 2001; Roberts, 2001). Journalists at Kyoto predicted failure while

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<sup>63</sup> ‘It may be our last chance: This week 166 countries can halt global warming’, ‘comment’-type article, *Independent on Sunday*, 30.11.97.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Last night’s TV: You...’

negotiations continued<sup>66</sup> and were sceptical about the outcome of the summit<sup>67</sup>. There are nonetheless significant differences in relation to previous summits. While newspapers mainly blamed the US<sup>68</sup> for holding back agreement, we also find some acknowledgements of the constraints on the American administration<sup>69</sup>. There was also some opposition to Europe's internal burden-sharing agreement and the implicit claim of moral superiority<sup>70</sup> with regard to other countries. The positioning of developing countries as victims of climate change was reinforced. While the US, Australia and New Zealand demanded that such countries accepted CO<sub>2</sub> reduction commitments in Kyoto, the press tended to build the case for exempting them from obligations in the combat of GHG emissions<sup>71</sup>. There was, especially, a promotion of empathy with the situation of small island states: 'As well as being the most endangered communities in the global warming stakes, these tiny islands also have the weakest voice because they are small and poor.'<sup>72</sup> The perverse consequences of the international distribution of power were thus brought into the analysis of the 'fiendishly complex issue'<sup>73</sup> of climate change. And in an interesting reframing of the problem, a representative of one small island state, Tuvalu, said that 'curbing emissions to save such nations was a crucial human rights issue'<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Another interesting discussion of media coverage of climate change, appears in 'Greedy Americans and nice, wet Europeans – the politics of weather' (Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 29.11.97). Schoon expounds the media's inclination to polarize positions.

<sup>66</sup> 'Climate conference has stormy outlook', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 29.11.97; 'Three days to save the world: global warming summit on brink of failure', unattributed, *Independent*, 08.12.97; 'Kyoto gets off to an icy start', Richard Lloyd Parry, *Independent*, 02.12.97.

<sup>67</sup> 'All that Kyoto heat, for next to nothing', Nicholas Schoon and Richard Lloyd Parry, *Independent*, 11.12.97; 'Kyoto deal 'leaves US free to pollute'', John Vidal, *Guardian*, 12.12.97.

<sup>68</sup> 'Tough US line threat to global warming talks', Bronwen Maddox, *Times*, 01.12.97; 'US threatens to scupper climate talks', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 29.11.97.

<sup>69</sup> 'Greedy Americans and nice, wet Europeans – the politics of weather', Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 29.11.97; 'Can meaningful targets be agreed in Japan?', Patrick Wintour and Ed Vulliamy, *Observer*, 30.11.97; 'Clinton shackled by barons of energy industry', Mary Dejevsky, *Independent*, 01.12.97; 'Marathon talks put US to the test', Nicholas Schoon, *Independent*, 11.12.97.

<sup>70</sup> 'Europe pressed to bear brunt of emission cuts', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 05.12.97; 'Kyoto gets off to...'; 'Environment: Japan puts heat...'

<sup>71</sup> 'Atoll nations get that sinking feeling', unattributed, *Independent*, 24.11.97.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> 'Islanders ready for Pacific evacuation', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 29.11.97.

## 6.2. Empowering the new government

Clearly, like the Conservatives before them, the New Labour government found on the UN negotiations on climate change a good opportunity to increase its international power. One of the party's manifesto pledges had in fact been to 'pursue a leadership role in international institutions and the global economy' (Wilkinson, 2000: 137). The government's constant attempt for international leadership was aided by the press.

The *Guardian's* coverage of the Kyoto conference vividly endorsed the conduct of the British government, adding legitimacy to its stances and reinforcing its public image. New Labour acted repeatedly as the main, if not the exclusive, definer of the issue for this newspaper's texts. On the one hand, Britain did have a much more defensible position in the climate change debate as it had pledged to cut its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 20% by 2010. This was described in the *Guardian* as a source of 'moral authority'<sup>75</sup>. On the other hand, the *Guardian* has traditionally supported the Labour party. The action of the British government<sup>76</sup> and 'Prescott's global mission'<sup>77</sup> are also highly applauded in the *Independent* before and, mostly, after Kyoto for the 'brave new world'<sup>78</sup> they helped to create. The *Times* is now the least 'official' of the three newspapers. It rarely quotes government members and the one time they are foregrounded in news texts the strategy is not to promote but to challenge their positions<sup>79</sup>.

## 6.3. Agency enhancement

Performing a discursive shift in comparison to previous years, the *Guardian* and the *Observer* attributed an important agency to some members of the British government in conducting the negotiation process and achieving results at Kyoto. Most of the credit for 'saving the talks'<sup>80</sup> went to John Prescott, deputy Prime Minister and head of DETR. Prescott was portrayed as dramatic and emphatic – 'apocalyptic' in his

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<sup>75</sup> 'US threatens to...'

<sup>76</sup> 'Britain shows way on warming', Geoffrey Lean, *Independent on Sunday*, 07.12.97.

<sup>77</sup> Headline, Nicholas Schoon, 19.11.01.

<sup>78</sup> 'Now the test for Kyoto resolution', Nicholas Schoon, 12.12.97.

<sup>79</sup> 'Prescott urged to stick to 15% pollution cut', Nick Nuttall and 'Political staff', 08.12.97.

<sup>80</sup> 'Kyoto deal 'leaves...'

vision of the future impacts of climate change; prolix in his description of the necessary measures; somewhat bigger-than-life<sup>81</sup>. Michael Meacher, Environment Minister, was also awarded an important place in the depiction of the Kyoto summit. John Gummer, the former Conservative government Environment Secretary (who had won support from environmental groups for his measures regarding climate change) and a member of the British delegation to Kyoto, recurrently appeared in the *Guardian* as Prescott's helper in the saga to save the planet. Another form of conferring centrality to certain social actors were sourcing patterns. Prescott and Meacher not only were frequently quoted but were also awarded the biggest framing power in several articles<sup>82</sup>.

As in the *Guardian*, Prescott was a central actor in the *Independent*'s representation of the negotiations that led to Kyoto, mainly in Geoffrey Lean's articles<sup>83</sup>. Lean spoke of Prescott's heroic 'odyssey' across the world and suggested that Prescott, Tony Blair and Robin Cook (Foreign Secretary) would have had a crucial role in persuading world leaders to get an agreement and show 'an extraordinary degree of commitment' to the combat of GHG emissions<sup>84</sup>. There were also indicators in the *Independent* of a privileged relationship with British officials as sources of description and interpretation of events. An example was an insider account of the last moments of the negotiations and of Prescott's central role in reaching agreement, also authored by Lean<sup>85</sup>. In contrast, a satirical piece in the *Times* portrayed Prescott as an insane character obsessed with global warming, vain and unrealistic<sup>86</sup>. Several factors may explain the weight of official sources in the press representation of COP-3: news values of personalization and eliteness, a certain nationalistic tendency of the press in international conferences and sympathy of the *Guardian* and *Independent* towards the new government.

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<sup>81</sup> 'Sketch: Labour miracles save the planet', unattributed, 17.12.97.

<sup>82</sup> 'US threatens to...'; 'Can meaningful targets...'; 'Last-ditch US offer on gas cuts rejected', Paul Brown, 10.12.97; 'Clinton rescues Kyoto deal', Paul Brown, 11.12.97.

<sup>83</sup> 'If it's Tuesday it must be Delhi as Prescott takes to shuttle diplomacy', Geoffrey Lean, *Independent on Sunday*, 30.11.97.

<sup>84</sup> 'Britain shows way...'

<sup>85</sup> 'Saved at last by an old pro', Geoffrey Lean, *Independent on Sunday*, 14.12.97.

<sup>86</sup> 'Thus saith Prophet John ... and saith and saith and saith', Mathew Parris, *Times*, 17.12.97.

#### 6.4. QELROS, sinks and hot air: a new (value-laden) terminology

As established by the Berlin Mandate, one of the main aims of the Kyoto meeting was to set up quantified targets for reducing GHG emissions or QELROS (quantified emission limitation and reduction objectives). However, since COP1, debate had intensified on whether these targets ought to be uniform. The EU was opposed to differentiation and so were NGOs. The US and a few other countries defended it. A variety of economic, ethical and pragmatic arguments are engaged both for and against a common QELROS denominator (Paterson and Grubb, 1996). In the *Guardian*, John Prescott and Michael Meacher defended the proposition that all countries should make equal cuts whatever the deal to be achieved<sup>87</sup>. But, later, they attempted to legitimate the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC which did, in fact, set differentiated goals. The United States was committed to cuts of 7%, the European Union 8% and Japan 6% below 1990 levels<sup>88</sup>. The other two papers did not discuss the issue.

Another contentious issue in Kyoto was emissions trading. This would allow countries that expected to meet their targets to sell their spare emission rights to other countries. Emissions trading has substantial economic, political and ethical implications (e.g. Vrolijk and Grubb, 1999). Crucial issues of equity arise, for instance (Yohe, Montgomery and Balistreri, 2000). Meacher and Prescott assert their approval of emissions trading, although with reservations, claiming that 'the major effort'... 'must be at home'. Already looking forward to gains for the British economy, though, Prescott was keen on promoting an international market of emissions rights with London in the centre<sup>89</sup>.

The *Guardian* challenged the adequacy of emissions trading. Under the headline 'Trading self-indulgence'<sup>90</sup> was a very pointed critique of the stands taken by the Western countries in Kyoto.

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<sup>87</sup> 'EU softens greenhouse gas stance to win deal', 08.12.97 (the headline alluded to the EU's concession on lowering its proposed target of 15% reduction of emissions); 'Last-ditch US...'

<sup>88</sup> 'Kyoto deal 'leaves...'

<sup>89</sup> 'EU softens...'

<sup>90</sup> Leading article, unattributed, 11.12.97.

# Trading self-indulgence

Kyoto needs a big change in attitudes to growth

1 THE KYOTO conference has teetered to  
the edge of agreement on global warm-  
ing in a manner which whatever the  
result inspires no confidence at all.  
5 This was supposed to be a new ap-  
proach to a new world issue in the  
inclusive spirit of the Rio conference  
five years ago. Instead we have seen the  
same old divisions setting developed  
10 nations against the developing, with the  
same last minute concessions and late  
night fudges. The result, assuming it  
can be pinned down and ratified, is  
acknowledged on all sides to be only a  
15 tentative stab at tackling a problem  
already soaring out of control. All con-  
cerned, including most environmental  
lobbyists, say that a defective accord is  
better than none. Wearily we must  
20 accept the logic of this argument. The  
question remains whether, a few years  
down the road, such a spatchcock  
agreement will have made any signifi-  
cant difference at all.  
25 In the age of wall-to-wall marketisa-  
tion, it is no surprise that market  
economics loom so large in the pro-  
posed solution. The key to success or  
failure now lies with the emission trad-  
30 ing plan which held up agreement last  
night. Without it, the US would not  
have agreed to any reduction of 1990  
emission levels by the year 2012. This  
much advertised concession was only  
35 offered in the last 48 hours after Vice-  
President Al Gore had descended on  
Kyoto to promise "increased flexibili-  
ty." It has already resulted in the EU's  
own targets being lowered. Their origi-  
40 nal proposal for 15 per cent cuts has  
been euphemistically adjusted to  
"match" the US offer. This may still be  
a necessary compromise to achieve  
agreement across the field — but will it  
45 be a level emitting field?

The theory behind emissions trading  
is that since global warming is a world-  
wide phenomenon, a net reduction  
counts the same wherever it may be

achieved. A power plant in the EU  
could claim a credit for helping another  
plant somewhere in Eastern Europe to  
clean up its emissions. The atmosphere  
would still gain. On a much larger  
scale, the US could subsidise its high  
level of emissions by helping China to  
tackle its own huge emerging problem.  
The balance sheet would still be im-  
proved. But in practice it won't be so  
simple. There will be a temptation to  
exaggerate the level of potential pollu-  
tion so that higher credits can be  
earned. There is a risk of double-count-  
ing if existing pollution deficits are  
traded. Why should one country be  
allowed to emit more because another  
has suffered a recession and is emitting  
less? A global scheme of this kind will  
be unwieldy and open to abuse.

The main objection however is one of  
principle: emissions trading will be  
seen as a device by which the richest  
countries who produce the bulk of cur-  
rent pollution — and particularly the  
US — can carry on doing so. It sends  
entirely the wrong signal to developing  
countries who are now being asked to  
exercise voluntary restraint over their  
new (and potentially more polluting)  
industries. Their opposition last night  
to wording on voluntary participation  
was directly linked to criticism of the  
trading option, and fears that developed  
countries would simply buy their way  
out of reductions. The message which it  
conveys is one of self-indulgence rather  
than self-restraint. This inability of  
rich societies to throttle back their all-  
consuming appetites — and the nega-  
tive example which this sets to the  
emerging rich elsewhere — is at the  
heart of the problem. The energy lobby  
in the US, with its 15-mile-to-the-gallon  
culture, only carries a general view to  
its flamboyant conclusion. The ultimate  
fate of any agreement in Kyoto depends  
on a much more fundamental change in  
attitudes to growth and consumption.

*Guardian*, 11.12.97

The article points the risks and flaws of an emissions market approach. Crucial issues of international equity and fairness are brought back into a policy instrument that could be framed, as many wanted it to be, as value-free. The *Guardian* publishes an important critique of economic rationalism as an adequate discourse to protect the environment. Indeed, for once, it overtly supports a 'limits to growth' discourse. Going into the crucial technical details of the Kyoto Protocol, Paul Brown and Roger Cowe<sup>91</sup> reproach the American negotiators for making US agreement to the protocol conditional to the inclusion of emissions trading. John Vidal also condemned the Kyoto agreement, given that it could allow the US to maintain business-as-usual by simply buying emissions rights from Eastern Europe<sup>92</sup>. A significant weakness of the *Guardian's* analyses was that they remained silent on the UK's specific role and responsibilities in relation to the emissions trading approach. As we have seen, the UK also promoted emissions trading, although maintaining a double discourse that spoke of avoiding loopholes in the agreement.

Living up to its economically liberal tendency, the *Independent* endorsed the introduction of emissions trading in the Kyoto Protocol<sup>93</sup>. Despite mentioning the possibility of loopholes, the *Independent* made a determined case for that mechanism as a solution for climate change. While Nicholas Schoon had, during the previous years, tended to acknowledge the risk of climate change and called for action to combat it, several of his 1997 texts showed a strong support for market based mechanisms, which could, according to some, conflict with pro-environmental action. Very few articles alluded to other instruments for meeting emissions stabilization or mitigation objectives discussed in Kyoto, such as 'hot air' and carbon sinks<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> 'Analysis: Emissions Trading: How to trade pollution rights', 11.12.97.

<sup>92</sup> 'Kyoto deal 'leaves ....'; see also 'Whistling in the fog after Kyoto', unattributed, 12.12.97.

<sup>93</sup> 'US proposes swap club for emissions', Nicholas Schoon, 10.12.97; 'Developed nations look to a free market in pollution', Nicholas Schoon, 09.12.97. In the latter, Schoon writes: 'Economic theory says that free-market trading in permits guarantees to minimise the total costs of stabilising or reducing the global level of pollution.'

<sup>94</sup> 'Hot air' and 'super-heated air' are the designations of emissions saved from former Eastern bloc countries that the US wanted to see traded for dollars. The first are savings to be made in the future by improved technology; the latter are savings already made.

Carbon sinks are areas of forest and farmland, which absorb carbon through photosynthesis. The amounts of carbon sequestered in this way are not well known by science, and this is therefore a very contentious matter. Europe held that any emissions cuts should mean actual reductions, not just relying on nature to soak up unabated pollution.

## 6.5. Disclosure of the wings of politics

Descriptions of what went on behind the scenes of official negotiations are a significant new aspect of the press representation of climate change in this period (cf. Depledge, 2001). While the standards of political reporting and the reliance on governmental sources would suggest the predominance of the official side of things, numerous articles provided a very ‘alternative’ depiction of the Kyoto summit. Some stories described the conditions of the Kyoto negotiations, such as the warm weather, the excessive work, and the tiredness of negotiators<sup>95</sup>. In the words of Richard Lloyd Parry, for example, Kyoto was ‘a tedious, migraine-inducing waste of time, an orgy of dismal food, pompous rhetoric, short tempers, and bad jokes.’<sup>96</sup> Instead of the rational outcome to a lucid debate, the Protocol was depicted as the result of ‘the longest night of the most acrimonious session of the most frenetic set of negotiations in which 160 governments have ever engaged’<sup>97</sup>, achieved when ‘[h]alf those involved were asleep on the floor, chairs or tables, unaware that history was being made’<sup>98</sup>. Although somewhat of a caricature, these insider depictions provided an interesting image of how world-important matters depend on a set of specific circumstances which often affect the mood of decision-makers in a negative way.

In some articles, like the following, the strategy underlying the description of the backstages of politics was attribution of responsibility. In one article, John Gummer was quoted, providing details on the profile of the American delegates to Kyoto and accusing them of ‘dishonesty’<sup>99</sup>. Under the line ‘Night of the long knives’ Paul Brown retold the insider story of the last night of negotiations with drama and suspense. The ‘carbon club’ was the main actor – and the villain – in the narrative.

In the centre sat the bulldog-faced lobbyist Don Pearlman. Around him were the men from Exxon, Mobil, Texaco, the woman who heads the Global Climate Coalition, and a clutch of other foot soldiers. Here were the main executioners of the fossil-fuel industries’ prolonged rearguard action. Their paymasters had poured millions of dollars into their efforts in the run up to this night. Soon they would know if that money had been well invested.

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Last-ditch US...’; ‘Kyoto deal ‘leaves ....’

<sup>96</sup> ‘Global warming? Pah! Just give me some clean socks: Sketch’, *Independent*, 11.12.97.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Kyoto deal ‘leaves...’

<sup>98</sup> ‘Environment: Only way is up’, Paul Brown and Jeremy Leggett, *Guardian*, 17.12.97.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Last-ditch US...’



Brown exposed the ‘bad guys’ tactics and showed how, with the help of the almost heroic chairman of the Kyoto conference, the Argentinian Raul Estrada, a happy ending was possible. In contrast, showing what goes on behind the scenes was part of a strategy of exemption of responsibility in other articles. For example, some understanding for Clinton’s position was built by describing the characteristics and standing of a powerful political and economic American elite with a highly reactionary ideology<sup>100</sup>. These descriptions of politics-in-the-wings may be an important form of communicating constraints and difficulties, or blame and hidden commitments. But this can also work as a marketing resource for newspapers. Instead of the dry and dull reports of politics, irony and common sense can make the news more appealing for readers. Mixing humour with the appearance of insider access, this hybrid genre (see Fairclough, 1995) may capture the public’s imagination more effectively. In part, this kind of reporting may have been due to the very large contingent of environmental correspondents in Kyoto. In the absence of progress, it was inevitable that stories would be written about more ‘backstage’ activities.

## 6.6. Debating values

In this critical discourse moment, more articles than usual attempted to widen the scope of analysis of climate change and identify the value- and ideology-related root causes of the problem. A debate on social and political values was brought into the ‘agenda of expectations’ of newspapers prior to COP-3. In the *Independent*, two articles presented self-interested citizens as the main cause of the climate change problem. Hamish McRae<sup>101</sup> raised the crucial issue of reconciling the wishes of the present generations with the rights of future ones, in other words, of inter-generational responsibility (see Litfin, 2000). He suggested that the short-termism of politics is rooted on the short-termism of voters preferences and is one of democracy’s perverse effects which is especially damaging in relation to environmental policy-making<sup>102</sup>. The

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<sup>100</sup> ‘Can meaningful targets...’; ‘It may be our last chance: This week 166 countries can halt global warming’, Geoffrey Lean, *Independent on Sunday*, 30.11.97.

<sup>101</sup> McRae is an economic commentator for the *Independent* and the author of *The World in 2020: Power, Culture and Prosperity. A vision of the future*, London, HarperCollins, 1994.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Cover your posterior isn’t the long-term answer: Future Generations’, Hamish McRae, 19.11.97.

same kind of dilemma was explored in a leading article<sup>103</sup>. People's oblivion to the consequences of their lifestyles was presented as a great problem, the consequences of which were already being felt. It is somewhat surprising in a paper that typically promotes neo-liberalism. In spite of this, the *Independent* did not clearly appeal for its readers to change their practices. So we have another example of editorial moralising, using the topic as an opportunity to claim rhetorical high ground.

The *Observer* called for a 'new internationalism', a 'spirit' of 'active' 'collaboration'<sup>104</sup>. There was a clear assertion of the newspaper's stand regarding international politics, framing expressions of nationalism such as British Euro-scepticism, as a terrible danger. The article often intersected with New Labour's views on foreign policy and international security, with the expression 'new internationalism', for instance, being taken out of New Labour's discourse. This 'new internationalism' could be a new gloss for the strategy of globalization of climate change, initiated by Thatcher and associated to the constitution of global responsibility, as discussed in chapter five. As shown by Fairclough (2000b), New Labour has contributed to reinforcing the process of globalization by presenting it as an inevitability.

Climate change was re-examined from the point of view of ethics in a *Guardian* article by Tom Spencer<sup>105</sup>, who claimed that the challenges were 'political, intellectual, spiritual and institutional'. The recommended solution to equity problems was 'contraction and convergence', an approach advanced by the Global Commons Institute. In the *Independent*, Schoon also promoted this proposal, according to which 'every inhabitant of the planet would be allocated the same quantity of GHGs to emit, divided out of a total which kept climate change within tolerable limits.'<sup>106</sup> Surprisingly, this approach was made compatible with economic liberalism.

Prometheanism continued to have a place in the *Times*, although not dominant<sup>107</sup>. As it had always done, the *Times* also continued to promote 'pragmatic' standings in the climate change debate. In an editorial just before the opening of COP3, this was

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<sup>103</sup> 'Today we save energy, tomorrow we save the world', unattributed, 24.11.97

<sup>104</sup> 'We need a new spirit of global co-operation', unattributed, *Observer*, 30.11.97.

<sup>105</sup> 'Eco politics: Enemy within', 03.12.97.

Spencer is a Conservative MEP, as well as president of the Globe International group of parliamentarians and chairman of the European Parliament foreign affairs committee.

<sup>106</sup> 'Now the test...'

merged with anti-Europeanism. Criticizing the EU's call for substantial reductions of GHG emissions, the *Times* wrote: 'The EU should get off its high horse, fast. ... The EU goes to Kyoto clothed in righteousness. It is more important to return with a deal than with a glow of virtue unrequited'<sup>108</sup>. Pragmatism, apparently the antithesis of ideology, can be an ideological discourse if it involves, as appears to be the case, value standings and a programme of action or inaction with regard to the status quo. In the same vein, the *Times* also made a veiled endorsement of the position of the American Senate, which was opposed to the Kyoto Protocol<sup>109</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Covering a much shorter time-span than previous chapters, chapter seven has shown that there was a significant degree of continuity in discursive representations of climate change in 1997. However, there was also a good deal of change, mainly regarding the aspects debated below.

### Opening and deepening science reporting

The re-constitution of scientific knowledge on climate change kept some characteristics of earlier periods. Thus, emphasis on risk co-existed with attempts to cast doubts or discredit climate change claims. Scientists appear again in an interventionist role with a somewhat renewed discourse but similar goals to earlier periods (cf. Brunner, 2001). Progress is identifiable in the *Guardian* and *Independent* which amounts to an increased openness and depth of science-reporting. Hence, the most significant trait in this period is the intensification of a tendency previously detected, namely that journalists are willing to expose and discuss the backstages of science; the processes of production and diffusion of ideas; interests at stake; actors' commitments, etc., without intending to dismiss scientific claims. In other words, the

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<sup>107</sup> 'Warming to global change', Wilfred Beckerman, 11.12.97.

<sup>108</sup> 'Green pique', unattributed, 29.11.97.

<sup>109</sup> 'The climate in the Senate', unattributed, and 'US senators vow to kill off climate deal', Bronwen Maddox, both articles in the *Times*, 12.12.97.

contingent conditions and social relations involved in the making of scientific knowledge have a higher probability of being publicized. This means that there was a certain de-sacralisation of science and scientific institutions in the media (cf. Nelkin, 1987; 1991).

Faced with the need to present contradictory or uncertain forecasts to the public, several journalists were prone to acknowledge that ignorance and uncertainty cannot always be banished from science (Smithson, 1993), but maintained a pro-active position with regard to GHG emissions. There are also signs in this period of an increased reflexivity with regard to the journalists' own standings and the role of the media in the public construction of climate change.

### **The economics of (climate) change**

Economic and business matters are more salient in this critical discourse moment than ever before (cf. Carpenter, 2001). The explanation for this transformation is twofold. Firstly, while we have already seen some concern by businesses regarding the public image of their environmental record in previous years, this trend clearly expands in 1997 and we see a growing, pro-active move towards pro-environmental stands. This shift in companies' strategies is positive and may, hopefully, lead to GHG reductions. Integrating climate change in the analysis of economic and financial matters, can contribute for a crucial 'normalization' and 'routinization' of climate change – both at the level of press coverage and at the level of actual economic practices. However, another, certainly intended, consequence of business's image-polishing is the reduction of contestation. Secondly, the standing of economic matters in the press owes much to the reinforcement of a discourse of ecological modernization and the optimism it brings to all parts in the climate debate. The *Guardian* largely amplified this new vision of economics, one which accorded with the ideology of both the Conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major, and strongly embraced by New Labour when it came to power in 1997.

## Re-presenting politics: closures, disclosures and ambiguities

1997 appeared to promise a renovation of political discourse. After a long reign of the Conservative Party, New Labour was now in government. In the media field, even the traditionally Tory *Times* supported Labour in the May General Elections. A widespread disaffection with the previous administrations invested New Labour and Tony Blair with a mandate for change. However, despite a revamped image, New Labour embodied more permanence than change. The rightward movement of the Labour party in the 1990s diluted many traditional differences in relation to the Conservatives. New Labour constructed neo-liberalism ‘as a given and irreversible fact of life’ (Fairclough, 2000b: 28) and made no ‘analysis, still less critique, of the modern capitalist system’ (ibid.: 29). New Labour strongly promoted a discourse of ecological modernization, constructing measures to address climate change as the potential sources for economic gains. Part of this new framing of environmental protection is a redefinition of the responsibility of social actors. The notion of ‘partnerships’ between government, business agents and environment-related institutions gains a strong rhetorical force. While this might mean wider participation and better coordination in decision-making, it is a discursive resource of political legitimation and of diffusion of commitment and duties. In other words, liability is more vague in these typically techno-corporatist arrangements.

The press was generally uncritical of New Labour’s discourse both at the national and international levels. The *Guardian*, a previous stronghold of political contestation, now accepted and endorsed New Labour’s constructions of climate change, reinforcing the power of the new government. Could this mean that the *Guardian* may now become the megaphone of the government, losing its initiative to confront diverse views, be inspired by alternative sources, and play a crucial critical role in the public debate on climate change? Despite ambiguous signs, this does not seem to be entirely the case. Instead of a new critical voice after the replacement of the Conservative government, the *Times* continued to frame climate change politics quite narrowly. The *Independent* remained multiple-voiced, often awarding British government officials

with the primary definition of events, loudly calling for GHG reductions and systematically giving space to the 'sceptics'.

In articulation with ecological modernization, the neoliberal project really became hegemonic under Blair. Corporate capitalism, like globalisation (Fairclough, 2000b), is presented as inexorable and irresistible. This may be a self-fulfilling prophecy (Douglas, 1997). Neo-liberalism tends to adopt the strategy of claiming to be no ideology at all (de Beaugrande, 1999: 290). However, it involves important stances on consumerism, individualism, free-marketism, etc and can thus be considered ideological.

Together with the forms of (ideological) closure discussed above, media discourse in this period is more open in some aspects of political reporting. Exposing the backstages of politics – interests, lobbying, constraints, etc – is an important addition to the analysis of climate change. Also, to some extent, the international politics of climate change were in this period relocated in ideological terrain, by bringing to the fore value-related matters.

### **Discursive coalescences**

In this critical discourse moment, important coalescences occurred between discourses on climate change. As economy and environment were made compatible, so the discourse of the government and of business agents became relatively similar. The promise of environmental awareness in ecological modernization also obliterated much of the distance between government and business, on the one hand, and environmental NGOs, on the other hand. The ideological framework of ecological modernization leaves even less scope for criticism than sustainable development. Insurance companies contributed to a significant merging of discursive standings as they now appear in a position of climate change watchdog, typical of the government or NGOs. Adjustments in the NGOs discursive strategies (Rose, 1993; Jamison, 2001) also led to a transformation of the traditionally adversarial relationship it maintained with business and/or government. Finally, another coalescence took place amongst the broadsheet papers as their interpretations of reality drew closer (cf. Seymour-Ure, 1998). There was a remarkable absence of contestation of governmental options in all of them, and even the *Guardian* appeared to surrender to a managerial discourse.

However, this chapter has also shown that in constructing climate change as a matter of moral, cultural and political standards important value-related differences between newspapers continued to exist.

## CHAPTER 8

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### CONCLUSIONS

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Developing from interdisciplinary theoretical grounds and a new analytical framework, this thesis has taken us through the history of media discourses on climate change. Stressing the importance of real-time in discursive constructions of social problems, I have shown how, in the midst of dramatic fluctuation in volumes of coverage, the greenhouse effect evolved from a purely scientific matter in the mid-1980s to a political issue subject to large degree of contestation at the end of that decade, and how this, in turn, has given way to a form of (predominantly) technicist governance legitimated by news professionals. This concluding chapter will make an overall assessment of those factors and dimensions that the thesis has identified as important in press representations of climate change. The conclusions will provide a critical reconstitution of the course of textual formulations of a set of discourse objects, namely politics, science, economics and activism. I will argue that the thesis' contributions have a wider, theoretical value as well as a methodological one.

#### 1. NEWSPAPERS' VERSIONS OF REALITY

The synchronic-comparative approach adopted in this thesis, as part of the proposed analytical framework for discourse analysis, has demonstrated that different newspapers carried often substantially different accounts of reality with regard to climate change. This involved not only divergent interpretations of events or issues but also alternative selections of 'facts', developments or problems to be reported, for example, in relation to scientific knowledge in the field. Graef (2000) has suggested that individual newspapers approach their coverage of reality in consistent ways which are distinctly different to others. Each newspaper promotes a different version of reality, thereby reinforcing the worldviews of their readers. One of the ways of doing this is by filtering out things that might disturb a particularly comfortable (or uncomfortable)



worldview. This means that the readers remain trapped in a 'rotunda of disinformation' (Graef, 2000). There is an illusion of information but, in fact, there are many other versions of reality that people do not receive. This image of press representations of reality and its relationship to specific audiences is a useful tool for the conceptualization of the role of the British quality press in the public construction of climate change. The *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Times* each promoted an alternative version of the world. To my knowledge there are no other studies examining this kind of differences thoroughly and systematically in the three newspapers (cf. Anderson and Weymouth, 1999). This is consistent with Hansen's (2000) study of the coverage of the Brent Spar issue in the *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* where 'the core frames, characteristic of each individual newspaper's coverage did not emerge gradually over the period of coverage or as a particular response to developments in the controversy ... but were in place from the outset, indicating the limits to claims-maker influence' (ibid.: 71).

This conclusion contradicts claims that all the media tend to follow the same patterns in representation of social issues (e.g. Glasgow University Media Group, 1976; Shoemaker and Reese, 1991), and highlights the role of the institutional ethos of organizations (Nimmo and Combs, 1982). 'Consensus views' of society and media audience are thus inadequate (e.g. Hall et al., 1978). While some have claimed that the media work on the assumption that members of society share fundamental interests, values and concerns, as far as the written press is concerned, evidence suggests that each medium perceives their audience to be ideologically distinct and reinforces such differences.

Most scholarship on media discourse tends to homogenise the varying representations of reality conveyed by the different media. Many studies of climate change (McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Meisner, 2000; Shanahan, 2000; Weingart et al., 2000) also take the media as a unitary body. In contrast, this thesis has argued that room should be made in research for diversity. Theory and methodologies should be able to capture the rich variety of voices and discourses present in each medium rather than reduce them to tight common categories. While the 'modernist *must* translate the code of paradox into the code of coherence and then treat this translation as a discovery that must be accepted by every healthy, rational, red-blooded academic'

(Connolly, 1989: 339), discourse analysis should acknowledge hybridity, tensions, and change.

## 2. DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES: A RECONSTITUTION

The notion of strategy encompasses actions and goals. Discourse involves specific actions of (re)construction of the world. It is thus important to analyse the nature of one's discursive manipulation of reality whereby certain meanings are constituted: what we do with words. This not only evokes the performative dimension of discourse but also, more fundamentally, its constitutive function and points to the issue of goals. Social actors (media professionals, scientists, politicians, etc) aim to achieve certain purposes with words. Such goals can be more or less conscious and more or less specific: e.g. to make a point; to be believed; to build the grounds for certain claims (cf. Wodak and van Leeuwen, 1999). Identifying discursive strategies has been an important part of the methodological programme of this thesis, and this section aims to provide a summary of the most significant discursive strategies, as shown in tables 6, 7, and 8<sup>1</sup>.

Discursive strategies can be organized into three levels of generality. At the first level, we find strategies of construction of the text. The main ones are choice of framing and the process of narrativization.

Table 6: Text construction strategies

<b>First-level Strategies: Text Construction</b>
Type of Framing Narrativization

At a second level, we can identify a number of strategies that may be generally deployed in the construction of any actor or object of discourse. They have been

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wodak et al.'s (1999) detailed inventory of strategies of construction of national identity in Austria.

organized into types, such as relational strategies (strategies that construct a certain relation between social actors or between them and certain objects).

Table 7: General strategies of construction of actors and objects of discourse

<b>Second-level Strategies: Actor and Object Construction (General)</b>	
<b>Type of strategies</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
<b>Relational Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positioning</li> <li>Authorization</li> <li>Disaccreditation</li> <li>Enabling–entitling–empowering/ Disenabling–disentitling–disempowering</li> <li>Attribution</li> <li>Appropriation</li> </ul>
<b>Analytical strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classification–categorization</li> <li>Naturalization–reification–objectivation</li> <li>Neutralization</li> <li>Blackboxing/Anti-blackboxing</li> <li>(Re)contextualization</li> <li>Inclusion/Exclusion</li> <li>Scope expansion/Narrowing</li> <li>Moving observation standpoint</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation strategies</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legitimation</li> <li>Justification</li> <li>Promotion</li> <li>Sanctioning-endorsement</li> </ul>
<b>Negative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>De-legitimation</li> <li>Opposition–contestation</li> <li>Disputing–refutation</li> </ul>
<b>Time-management strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipation</li> <li>Postponement</li> <li>Synchronization</li> <li>Late reaction</li> </ul>

Finally, at the third level, we find strategies that are specific to a certain subject, in this case, climate change. Such strategies refer to forms of constitution of objects like (scientific) knowledge and (political) governance with regard to climate change. Naturally, some of the second level strategies are also present here. Table 8 systematizes the main strategies identified in media discourse throughout the 13 years covered by this thesis. Listed on the left are the most general or main strategies and underneath are associated (sub-)strategies that are, typically, more specific or less important. The deployment of a discursive strategy does not necessarily involve the sub-strategies.

Table 8: Strategies of media construction of climate change

<b>Third-level Strategies: Subject-specific</b>		
<b>Main object</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Sub-strategies</b>
<b>General</b>		
	Scientification/de-scientification	Reasoning strictly in the realm of science Excluding non-science issues
	Politicisation/de-politicisation	Constituting the problem into a political issue Claiming political action
<b>(Scientific) Knowledge</b>		
	Mobilization of concern	Generation of a sense of urgency Construction of an image of crisis Heightening risk Actualisation of threat
	Dramatization/de-dramatization	(Intensification of strategies of mobilization of concern)

Rationalization

Claiming objectivity  
Claiming realism

Confidence-building (science)/ Promoting mistrust

Emphasis on consensus  
Enhancement of reliability

Dismissal

Casting doubt  
Devaluation–minimization– relativization  
Emphasis on uncertainty  
Denial

Discrediting (scientists–environmentalists)

Scorning  
Name calling

Anti-blackboxing

Reflexive examination  
Exposure of backstages

**(Political) Governance**

Endorsement

Promotion of political options

Objectivation of politics

Naturalization of arrangements  
Neutralization of political choices

Denunciation

Exposure of contradictions–antagonistic policies  
Exposure of disparities

Presentation of alternatives

Pointing other possible courses of action

Generation of responsibility

Emphasis on causation (e.g. international differences)  
Blame-building

Diffusion of responsibility

Blurring agency  
Shifting geographical scale

Refutation of responsibility	Globalization of causation Responsibility-shifting
Widening engagement	Partnership-building Inclusion of the views of others
Securitization	Emphasis on risk Constitution of responsibility for governments
Moralization	Appeal to intergenerational fairness Appeal to international equity
Shifting perspectives	Scope expansion Moving observation standpoint
Economic reasoning	Appeal to economic interest Emphasis on growth

Discursive strategies involve options regarding many of the other parameters of discourse analysis proposed in chapter four, such as language and rhetoric, surface descriptors and structural organization, and are related to the ideological standpoint(s) of a text.

The research programme of the thesis encompassed the identification of discursive effects of media discourses on climate change. The most significant effects to be identified were **discursive structuration**, **institutionalization**, and **non-closure**. These are explained in section 4 below. The analysis therein sheds light onto how the depictions of climate change examined in this thesis relate to the social and political evolution of the issue.

### 3. SOCIAL ACTORS' INTERVENTION IN DISCOURSE

While focusing on media discourse, the thesis has emphasised the ways social actors discursively construct reality and how that comes through in the media. I have

argued that, instead of looking at media discourse as the creative output of journalists and editors alone, the analyst should be aware that social and environmental issues usually already have a discursive 'life' by the time news professionals address them. This pre-media phase of the biography of a problem is very influential as journalists will almost inevitably draw on it.

We have seen how various British governments made systematic attempts to control definitions of climate change, and how newspapers often replicated their discursive strategies. Over a decade three British governments discursively appropriated climate change to achieve a variety of political purposes. Rhetorical games were deployed in both national and international arenas. Margaret Thatcher was clearly the most pro-active Prime Minister, recurrently advancing certain framings of climate change timed to maximize media attention between 1985-1990. Despite being de-legitimated by some newspapers, Thatcher shaped much of the meaning of climate change. Her discursive interventions in this field, as in others, had a lasting impact (Phillips, 1998). Dramatization, moralization and globalization of causation were three of Thatcher's powerful strategies amplified by the press.

Although appearing to have made fewer 'public' interventions on climate change than Thatcher, John Major (1990-97) pursued a strategy of (claiming) international leadership on addressing climate change - a claim bolstered by the UK's GHG reductions. When Major's government attempted, like Thatcher's, to justify and legitimate governmental fiscal options with the need to combat climate change, it received widespread criticism in the press. Overall, nonetheless, as Major's government 'retreated' to regulation of the climate change problem, it was generally – and at least passively – authorized by the press.

New Labour under Tony Blair assumed power in 1997 with an agenda to re-invigorate the managerial role of the state (Zifcak, 1994; Aucoin, 1995; Chiapelo and Fairclough, 2002) by publicly opening up participation in decision-making, and engaging other social actors. This strategy effectively diffused responsibility to address climate change. Most importantly, since 1997, the Prime Minister has simply bracketed the problem. Instead of remaining as a crucial political matter, climate has been commodified (Kopytoff, 1986), for instance by emissions trading plans, and technologized. The government has become increasingly technicist and many crucial

issues have been transferred ‘from the domain of politics to the domain of expertise, from the domain of values to the domain of facts, from the domain of ‘ought’ to the domain of ‘is’ (Fairclough, 2000, cit. by Flowerdew, 2002: 220).

Scientists also attempted to advance their agendas through the media. Either making claims for more research or promoting certain political options, scientists managed their stage performances in the media carefully (Hilgartner, 2000). They appeared, on the one hand, associated with strategies of amplifying risk and a sense of urgency while, on the other hand, others sought to deny or downplay the climate change issue. Authoring articles and presenting certain claims to journalists, scientists enacted the basis of their authority as experts, aimed to achieve and defend their credibility, cultivate the ability to offer political advice, and reinforce their social and political power (ibid.; Demeritt, 2001). Although news texts are only one ‘surface of emergence’ (Foucault, 1972) of the power struggles that take place within and between scientific institutions over who can ‘talk’ where and how, they are still a good indicator of the relative authority of scientists and scientific institutions. Thus, the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia certainly appeared to hold an authoritative position in the press. The cultivation of trust relationships between some scientists and journalists may have mattered, as well.

As newspapers have recently tended to cut labour resources in order to reduce costs (Davis, 2000), the potential dependence on external ‘information subsidies’ (Gandy, 1980) may be on the rise. The discursive strategies of social actors may be increasingly influential in press representations. The next section will continue to show the consequences of social actors’ active engagement in the attempt to influence the media representation (cf. Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994; Anderson 1997) and how central their discursive interventions were in defining climate change for the media (cf. Mazur and Lee, 1993)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> I will refer below to the strategies of other social actors, like NGOs and business.



#### **4. PERMANENCE, CHANGE AND PARADOX: A DIACHRONIC OUTLOOK AT OBJECTS OF DISCOURSE**

A diachronic-historical approach to media discourses on climate change has yielded significant answers to this thesis' research questions. A reconstitution of the career of the issue is provided below, organized by themes and relevant actors.

##### **4.1. Knowledge, science and scientists**

Being a complex scientific domain, climate studies are an important challenge to media representation. Given that a degree of uncertainty inevitably characterizes this area of research and given the importance of forecasting – or scientific ‘futurology’ – in this field, issues like perceived credibility and authority of science rank here quite highly (Nelkin, 1987; Irwin, 1995; Hilgartner, 2000). Research in other countries has shown that the media have conveyed an image of certainty (Weingart et al., 2000) with regard to climate studies or, on the contrary, put the emphasis on uncertainty (McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Zehr, 2000). In the UK, the representation of scientific knowledge on climate change varies both synchronically (across newspapers) and diachronically (throughout time).

It is in the *Times* that the clearest shift in discursive reconstitutions of scientific knowledge occurs. This newspaper's coverage evolved from a strategy of certainty-making, associated with an authorization of knowledge and promotion of trust, to the dramatization of the problem (co-existing in an uneasy relationship with calls for scientific proof at some points), and from there to dismissing scientific claims of climate change. From the late 1980s, the *Times* started casting doubts on claims of climate change or even denying them. From that point, there was a recurrent attempt to promote mistrust in science, through strategies of generalization of disagreement within the scientific community and, most importantly, discrediting scientists and scientific institutions.

The American media may have played a role in this discursive change for emphasis on controversy and on sceptical positions increased from the early 1990s (McComas and Shanahan, 1999). Gelbspan (1997) depicts in detail the ‘propaganda campaign’ of

the fossil fuel lobbies and how they promoted the amplification of the views of ‘a half-dozen dissenting researchers, giving them a platform and a level of credibility in the public arena that is grossly out of proportion to their influence in the scientific community’ (1997: 33; cf. Rowell, 1996)<sup>3</sup>.

Reporting on dissent may be attractive for newspapers as it helps to construct drama. It may also partly be attributed to the professional canon of ‘fairness’ and balanced reporting. Another important issue, as Gelbspan (1997) notes, is that the adamant rhetoric of ‘climate change sceptics’ may construe them as more authoritative for the general public than normal, non-overstating scientists. Journalists also take this perceived persuasiveness in consideration. However, these factors fall short of explaining the weight of ‘sceptical’ views in the *Times*, which goes beyond an ‘equal time’ logic. The frequency of editorials dismissing scientific claims regarding climate change, together with science articles that cast doubts on the problem, clearly indicate the power of the dominant ideology in the newspaper. In spite of this, a significant part of the *Times*’ coverage relates to advances in knowledge that reinforce claims that the climate is changing.

Zehr (2000) claims that a focus on uncertainty in American media also served to construct a boundary between scientists, as the only legitimate providers of knowledge, and the public who were depicted as ignorant and misinformed. The result was to reinforce the power of science. In striking contrast, this thesis has shown that the *Times* used uncertainty or disagreement to undermine the authority of science, to discursively dismiss the risks associated to climate change and, thereby, to delegitimise or refute political actions that might alter the economic and lifestyle status quo.

The *Guardian* has had the most consistent approach to scientific knowledge, both across authors and through time. Although giving some space to a discourse of techno-scientific rationalism in the early years, the *Guardian* soon attempted to contextualize scientific claims in wider fields of knowledge. As scientific uncertainty regarding the effects of the enhanced greenhouse effect decreased over the period, the *Guardian*

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<sup>3</sup> Besides ‘confusing the general public’ these ‘greenhouse sceptics’ managed to have a crucial influence over policy-makers as they were recurrently called to give hearings at Congress and other political institutions (ibid.: 35-54).

coherently advanced a strategy of building confidence in science, with an emphasis on consensus and an attempt to enhance the reliability of knowledge.

However, this strategy does not equate to an image of science as ‘pure’ and ‘universal’ (Nelkin, 1987; 1991; Irwin, 1995). Instead the *Guardian* often exposed the backstage of science, the conditions in which it is produced and the agendas it revolves around. This had two main purposes. First, the *Guardian* politicised science to show how climate change claims were eroded by lobbying pressures, mainly associated with fossil fuel businesses. Trust is thereby reinforced in claims that manage to stand up *despite* these circumstances. Second, the *Guardian* ‘opened up the labs’ as a form of denouncing commitments based on biased presumptions in scientific studies. Hence, while scientific narratives tend to de-emphasize agents and motives (Latour, 1987) several accounts of the IPCC’s Second Assessment Report, for example, put the emphasis on the people behind science.

Overall, the *Guardian* conveyed an image of scientific knowledge that emphasized the risks associated to climate change and constituted the basis for calls for political action. In conditions of incomplete or uncertain knowledge, the *Guardian* strongly promoted the precautionary principle.

In the *Independent*, the representation of climate sciences has been mixed, with characteristics of both other newspapers’. The authorship of articles was the most important factor explaining differences. The *Independent*’s editors awarded space to both those who promoted confidence in claims of climate change and those who consistently cast doubts onto the issue.

Overall, press coverage of scientific knowledge on climate change has had the discursive effect of non-closure (cf. Engelhardt and Caplan, 1987) of the debate which may, to a degree, have sustained political inaction on the issue. In sum, this thesis has shown that the representation of climate sciences evolved from an image of certainty and authority, prevalent in the mid-1980s, to an image split between reliability and mistrust. Instead of a monolithic logic dominated by rational arguments, we find multiple readings of science, often encompassing the human and social groundings of scientific knowledge, its contingencies and irresolution (e.g. Latour, 1987; Shackley and Wynne, 1995a; 1995b; Demeritt and Rothman, 1999). Professional expertise is thus not awarded the status of ‘arbiter’ rather than ‘advocate’ (Deacon and Golding, 1994).

Instead of routinized ways of addressing scientists, newspapers constitute these social actors into a range of roles with varying degrees of credibility: scientists often appear as ‘advocates’ of certain causes or interests, for example. This is closer to a golem image of science (Collins and Pinch, 1993) than to a god-like image. According to Locke (1999; 2001), such a dilemmatic view of science can also be found in public understanding of science.

I have argued that ideological standings on non-science issues act as a filter and a mould for reading science. In the early years, when climate change was strictly framed in the realm of science, differences were not very marked between newspapers and authors. From the moment the issue started to be politicised and became a challenge to existing economic and political arrangements, the representation of knowledge became more diverse. From that point, the British broadsheet newspapers consistently re-configured the state of scientific knowledge in ways that justified and promoted preferred courses of social, economic and political action. In other words, ideological viewpoints in such domains of reality commanded the interpretations of science each paper amplified.

#### **4.2. Politics, government and governance**

The thesis has shown that coverage of climate change has been strongly attached to political mobilization. The number of articles published in each paper followed a set of political markers, such as Thatcher’s ‘conversion’ to the greenhouse effect and international summits in Rio, Berlin, and Kyoto. The dependence of the British media on the political agenda for constructions of risk has been detected in other issues, such as BSE (Kitzinger and Reilly, 1997). As Adam (2000) has argued, the attachment of media discourse to political discourse has been a means of overcoming the problematic ‘newsworthiness’ of environmental issues. Political agendas have conferred a different timescape to BSE, as to climate change, which made these issues more appealing in terms of novelty, recency and immediacy. Also, politics provided these issues with much-needed factuality, as answers to questions such as ‘who’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ please journalists and editors.

British governments have, generally, been given most control of the definition of climate change by the press. The effect of discursive structuration by the government is dominant, albeit not equivalent to a uniform endorsement of governmental options or standings. Such an effect does not mean that the government was always given the primary definition (Hall et al., 1978) either. But the claims it advanced certainly had a major influence on the discursive (re)actions of other actors and on journalists' and editors' discursive reconstitutions of the problem. Nonetheless, during the Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major in power during the period 1985-1997, it is obvious that 'official status does not automatically ensure credibility' (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 23) in the *Guardian* and, less markedly, in the *Independent*. While the *Times* consistently reproduced and sanctioned Thatcher's constructions of climate change, legitimating her options and reinforcing her domination (see Hall and Jacques, 1983), the *Guardian* consistently contested such constructions and exposed the problems with proposed courses of action or inaction. The *Independent* initially aligned with Thatcher's discourse but critical voices soon arose. Instead of uniformly reproducing dominant definitions, some media functioned as arenas of resistance to such definitions. News institutions are therefore not necessarily at the service of the 'ruling powers' (cf. Bennett, 1988; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Barmasian, 1992). While some may aid the established powers in a particular historical moment, others take up various forms of resistance and challenge. And in a different historical moment, the relation of each newspaper with the authorized powers may be reversed.

As we have seen, Thatcher had constructed climate change in dramatic terms, possibly as a strategy to achieve legitimacy for other contentious policies, such as the expansion of nuclear power and the closure of coalmines. More recently, in contrast, climate change has been 'routinized' in the political machinery as it has been integrated into various policy domains, like energy and taxation (cf. Weingart et al., 2000). Although such regulatory actions were crucial, the press did not often remark them, thereby passively reinforcing official policies. A decline in the degree of dissent in the press between 1992-7 is closely associated with the official reproduction of the framework of sustainable development. This ideological programme rescued economic growth from earlier discourses on limits and set out an approach to environmental

protection ‘comfortably adjusted to the requirements of the existing corporate-industrial order’ (Fischer and Black, 1995: 1; see Torgerson, 1995). Sustainable development easily became hegemonic in the press. Still, the *Guardian* and some articles in the *Independent* often continued to lead an oppositional discourse with regard to the government’s policies and promoted alternative views. The *Times* and other authors in the *Independent* repressed any calls for change.

From May 1997, the New Labour government under Tony Blair reconstituted climate change within the hybrid ideology of the ‘Third Way’ (Giddens, 1998). With continuous economic growth remaining the holy grail of political governance, New Labour advanced a discourse of ecological modernization for the environment. By putting the emphasis on opportunities for financial gains in measures designed to combat GHG emissions, the government attempted to generate commitment by business. This diffused responsibility for managing environmental problems (see McCloskey and Smith, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995). Instead of holding the principal role in solving problems, the state positioned itself as a facilitator or enabling agent. Shared decision-making and shared liability were promoted in the idea of, an essentially techno-corporatist, partnership approach (Hajer, 1995). Constructing alliances and integrating (social) groups through consent was part of a hegemonic programme which appears to have been quite successful. The new government-promoted ‘corporate environmentalism’ has pre-empted and marginalized opposition (Churchill and Worthington, 1995). Internationally, the government followed a strategy of leadership which was widely endorsed in the press.

The representation of the national and international politics of climate change in this period thus empowered the government and enabled it to pursue the approach outlined above. As Rupert Murdoch, proprietor of the *Times* withdrew his support from the Conservatives in 1995 (Wheeler, 1997), opposition to New Labour decreased in the *Times*. This partly explains why, in 1997, there was no significant contestation of the new government. Also in contrast with previous periods, the *Guardian* was now in a non-adversarial relationship with the government. The *Independent* was also generally sympathetic to New Labour in this phase. Newspapers’ positioning in relation to formal political institutions had partly shifted and this may also have played a role in the coverage of the Kyoto conference, discussed in chapter seven.

and this may also have played a role in the coverage of the Kyoto conference, discussed in chapter seven.

The thesis has shown that constructions of international governance (cf. Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992) of climate change in the press closely followed British official views regarding the locus, forms and agents of governance. Hence, from the outset, the press aided Thatcher's programme of 'global management' of the greenhouse effect by replicating her framing of the issue as a global phenomenon calling for global responsibility. Generally unaware of the values implied in models of international cooperation and their implications, all newspapers contributed to globalisation becoming a self-fulfilling discourse throughout the period of the study (Douglas, 1997; Harré et al., 1999; Fairclough, 2000b; Demeritt, 2001). Globalization is not only a 're-scaling' but also a 're-structuring' (Jessop, 2000). It entails shifts in relations between different domains of life, including a 'colonization' of other fields by the economic field. Fundamental ethical issues such as international equity and developing countries' rights to economic development and improvement in the quality of life of their citizens (Leis and Viola, 1995; Silva, 1995) are overshadowed by globalization discourses. In this vein, some have suggested that this is the age of a new empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000; cf. Agarwal and Narain, 1991). The thesis has shown that while the *Guardian* attempted occasionally to reflect upon matters of international equity, the other papers have not heeded these matters. The arbitrary nature of a certain system of intelligibility of how climate change ought to be dealt with was hidden behind apparently consensual propositions in the media.

The thesis has shown that the ascension of New Labour to power in 1997 played an important part in constraining the governance of climate change within the parameters of free-market capitalism, industrialism and neo-liberalism. With the rhetorically powerful, ecological modernization discourse and, more widely, the ambiguities and open texture of sustainable development (Torgerson, 1995), climate change has been rendered into something amenable to international management and technological solutions. The institutionalisation of these ideological discourses has been aided by the press.

### 4.3. Environmental organizations, activism and governmentality

As suggested by Hansen (1993a), the capacity of NGOs to set the media agenda with regard to climate change was very limited in spite of the wide variety of claims-making activities that they enacted, from stances on scientific knowledge (cf. Mormont and Dasnoy, 1995) to economic proposals. A significant trait of the press representation of environmental NGOs and their claims regarding climate change effect was the diversity of alliances they appear engaged in. Often, it was possible to detect that environmental organizations were intent on strengthening their standing by making discursive coalitions with a range of other actors. At other times, journalists linked them with others. The association between NGOs and some business institutions represented by ACE was visible from the very start of the coverage of climate change. NGOs also appeared in the press associated with political parties in opposition, mainly Labour and the Green party. Finally, NGOs seemed to be able to ally to science (or scientists) as well. Environmental organizations hence appeared as the most versatile actor in the press. This was an advantage in the sense that they could enter various types of debates. Yet, allying with other actors often meant adjusting their argumentation and discursive strategies. An excessive flexibility and approximations to some types of political or business actors may have compromised their ideological coherence or independence in the view of the public.

These multiple forms of agency of environmental organisations in the press enabled them to have a significant framing power in some of the articles where they were mentioned or cited (Carvalho, 1999b; 2000a). NGOs achieved the highest framing power in the *Guardian*, followed by the *Independent* and the *Times*. This is not a striking finding (cf. Lowe and Morrison, 1991) but it is one that is far from obvious from a quantitative analysis or a non-comparative de-construction. As we saw, the *Times* often had a very high number of references to NGOs, often to create an appearance of balance. As Allan (1998: 121) notes, the 'authoritativeness of the hegemonic frame is contingent upon its implicit claim to objectivity, which means that it needs to regularly incorporate 'awkward facts' or even, under more exceptional



circumstances, voices of dissent'. However, NGOs' points were often dismissed by the *Times*. Sometimes this was done in a veiled way. Other times, there was an overt attempt to discredit and de-legitimize all 'greens'.

It was only the most powerful 'transnational' groups that had voice in the media – Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF. Other organizations, ranging from grassroots-oriented ones to those highly effective in the dissemination of knowledge (like the World Resources Institute and the Worldwatch Institute), or politically important (like the Climate Action Network) were absent from press reports. Instead of a truly inclusive politics, open to participation of a broad range of individuals and groups, the press promoted an elite- and expert-driven discourse.

Since the beginning of media discourse on climate change, NGOs enacted an economically 'sensible' attitude, compatible with the hegemonic paradigm of commitment to growth. This was often combined with political pragmatism and a discourse of administrative rationalism. As it was portrayed in the newspapers, the focus of NGO intervention on the issue of climate change seemed to be to put pressure on the government for adoption of legislation, financial commitment, and other administrative responses to ameliorate climate change.

Another important discourse promoted by environmental organisations is what can be called 'techno-scientific rationalism'. This is a set of propositions and concepts that rests fundamentally upon technological fixes for (technological) problems. The idea is that climate change can be solved by adequate research and by opting for the right technologies, typically linked to renewable energies. Obviously, putting the emphasis on administrative and technological solutions does not exclude the possibility of consideration of other solutions. It might be argued that NGOs decided to frame climate change in these terms because they were aware of the severe selection processes that take place in news production, and opted to argue in the same terms as the other voices heard by the media to avoid the possibility of total exclusion of a radically different discourse. But, in any case, NGOs avoided a deeper reflection on the causes of climate change and the 'revolutionary potential' of the environmental cause (cf. Southam, 1995). '[T]he critique of industrial progress, in particular the question about the viability of endless material growth and consumption' is missing (Hajer and Fischer, 1999).

Post 1997, conditions for such a critique have been further undermined, as a discursive coalescence seems to have occurred between the discourse of government, business and NGOs. Such a discursive coalescence was mutually-driven by the (apparent) greening of governmental and business discourses on the one hand, and transformations in NGOs' discourse on the other. The effects of the former process are illustrated by Roger Boyes: 'governments ... have taken over some of the rhetoric of Greenpeace... and Greenpeace now has to compete with, rather than confront, the political and industrial Establishment'<sup>4</sup>. In turn, Jamison (1996; 2001) has shown there has been a tendency for NGOs to move away from an adversarial relationship with established institutions of modernity and to integrate with them. While it has been argued that the press serves both NGOs' purposes of inclusion and identity (Alario, 1996), this thesis has suggested that, with regard to climate change, the former has been more important. Despite attempts to denounce the alignment of the media with authorized powers such as big business and politicians (Mellchett, 2000), NGOs' have aimed to improve their position in relation them. The big NGOs seem increasingly keen to collaborate in the ideological programme of sustainable development and to be part of the dominant forms of environmental 'governmentality' (Darier, 1996; Poncelet, 2001). This may mean their 'demise, at least temporarily, as an activist, outsider movement' (Jamison, 1996: 225).

#### **4.4. Economics, corporations and New Capitalism**

While in the American press economic difficulties and potential business losses have been prominently associated with addressing climate change (McComas and Shanahan, 1999), in the British press corporations were rarely positioned against climate policies. In the late 1980s, the nuclear energy business attempted to enhance the risk of climate change and to control definitions of climate change in order to promote another agenda, namely the expansion of the nuclear industry. Still, it contributed to advance the cause of climate change. Energy conservation industries, represented by ACE, had a very strong presence in the early public acknowledgement

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<sup>4</sup> 'Tide has turned against warriors of Greenpeace', *Times*, 24.10.97.

of climate change, appearing many times in the newspapers and clearly associated with environmental organisations. More recently, the insurance industry played an important part in re-emphasizing the potential consequences of climate change and re-constituting it into a vital, global security issue.

As ecological modernization became hegemonic in association with the neo-liberalist project throughout the 1990s, business was incorporated into the emerging climate change regime. Although the Global Climate Coalition and some American fossil fuel interests were narrativized by the press as reactionary forces, economic analyses in the *Guardian* promoted the idea of substantial financial gains to be derived from measures to reduce GHG emissions. The global nature of climate change management, as politically defined, fitted in well with new business ideologies and the worldwide mobility of capital and labour. New Capitalism (Fairclough, 2002) has thus been constitutive of, and reinforced by, climate change discourses. The press endorsed the management of climate change by the existing institutions of industrialism.

## **5. AUTHORS' DISCURSIVE STANDPOINTS**

Important discursive differences between newspapers have been identified in this thesis. However, we have also seen that constructions of climate change within each newspaper have not been uniform. The determining factor seems to be authorship of articles. Longitudinal analysis of press reports showed that authors consistently discussed climate change from a particular standpoint. Processes of individual learning have, in some cases, been identified. But coherence is the main diachronic trend for authors in newspapers, be they reporters or external contributors. Ideological views with regard to the problem and what ought to be done about it clearly shape – and are reproduced in – their authors' texts. This trend had been identified since 1985 and corroborated throughout the period covered by the thesis.

While politics tends to be a more controversial domain than science in news coverage, and alignments are more clear in the former, in reports of climate studies it has also been possible to detect ideological effects at both the level of author and newspaper. Take the *Times* in 1995, for example. Environment correspondent Nick Nuttall and science editor Nigel Hawkes wrote most of the *Times*' articles on climate

change throughout that year. Nick Nuttall authored a number of articles that pointed to signs of climate change taking place and reported its negative consequences<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Nuttall repeatedly made the connection between climate change and human activity referring even to ‘tantalising evidence’ of such relation<sup>6</sup>. In the articles authored by Nigel Hawkes, climate change was never mentioned in the headlines. It was not the main topic but a secondary matter, except for one article. Per se, this exclusion of climate change from headlines constituted an important form of devaluation of the issue. Moreover, Hawkes expressed doubts about the causal relation between observed phenomena and an enhanced greenhouse effect in a number of articles.<sup>7</sup> Hawkes also wrote some articles that referred to simple, technical-fix-type solutions for global warming, such as dumping enormous amounts of iron in the oceans<sup>8</sup> and undertaking a massive plantation of trees.<sup>9</sup> The differences between Nuttall and Hawkes are ideological. Their forms of filtering and reinterpreting information about climate change are rooted in, and reproduce, profoundly divergent value systems.

A similar consistency can be found in articles by Nicholas Schoon (*Independent*) and Paul Brown (*Guardian*), for example. These journalists recurrently presented the current economic and political status quo as a threat for environmental security in the future and promoted its transformation. Alternatively, contributors such as Wilfred Beckerman (*Independent* and *Times*) and Irwin Stelzer (*Times*) constructed the present system as a good one and attempted to reinforce it. Social, political and cultural values were deeply involved in the analyses all of these authors made of climate change. Ideology does seem to matter in reporting science and politics both at the level of the newspaper, as the next section will argue, and at the level of the author. An important implication of this is that a sustained attention should be given in future studies to the role of individual reporters and other contributors to environmental discourses in the press.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Where are all our salmon?’, 05.06.95; ‘Scientists forecast tropical storms as Europe gets warmer’, 21.09.95; ‘Global warming tempts native butterflies north’, 24.10.95; and several published at the time of the Berlin summit and mentioned in appendix two.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Tree rings hold clue to the hottest news this century’, 13.07.95.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Keeping cool’, 17.04.95; ‘Headache for the whales?’, 19.06.95; ‘New evidence proves that Antarctic ice is melting’, 10.08.95; ‘Astronomers are spot on’, 28.08.95; and ‘Warm water storm signal’, 20.11.95.

<sup>8</sup> ‘A good dose of iron could halt global warming’, 29.06.95.

## 6. IDEOLOGICAL CULTURES IN MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

Scholars in media sociology have provided significant insight into the process of news-making. Work on the production of news or the production of mediated reality, gives us relevant and useful knowledge of the role of organizational routines, hierarchies and news values and norms (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 1978; Bell, 1991). Yet, this is not enough to understand the radically diverse renditions of the climate change issue that were voiced by the three newspapers analysed in this thesis. Specific constructions of reality seem to be embedded in certain frameworks of interpretation that have an ideological nature. In the process of selecting and interpreting events and transforming them into news, multiple preferences, values and judgements came into play, which led to different representations of reality. In turn, by depicting the world in certain ways, news reproduced or challenged certain views, values and ideas, and implicit programmes of action with regard to a given status quo (Seliger, 1977). I propose the concept of *ideological culture* to refer to those shared value-systems, assumptions and ideas about social and political issues, and the routine reproduction and reinforcement of these beliefs in the making of news (cf. concept of journalism as interpretive community in Berkowitz and Terkeurst, 1999).

Obviously, a question arises about the compatibility of my earlier point about authors' standpoints and ideological cultures of news institutions. Three issues are worth highlighting in this Conclusion. First, ideological cultures do not prescribe a total homogeneity of views inside a news institution, not least for reasons of objectivity and balance. Second, there may be more than one ideological culture in such an institution; the case of the *Independent* illustrates this. Third, the participation of external contributors in newspapers' discourse is also influenced by the latter's dominant ideological preferences. Thus, for instance Jeremy Leggett, as Director of Science, Greenpeace, authored seven articles for the *Guardian*, four for the *Independent* and one for the *Times* (1985-1997). Bill (or 'William') Burroughs authored nine for the *Times*, eight for the *Independent* and none for the *Guardian*.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Breathe easy', 28.08.95.

Climate change is probably the single most relevant area where one can identify what Beck (1992; 1994a) has called modernity's 'reflexivity'. An unwanted side-effect of modernization, climate change is an important expression of the processes of self-endangerment and self-dissolution of industrial society (Beck, 1994b). This thesis has shown that analysis of the political, scientific and media discourses that sustain certain patterns of development in preference to others can be extremely valuable in raising awareness of the potential openness of problem definitions and solutions. The exposure of ideologies is thus a form of enfranchisement since it gives us the power of examination and challenge. By bringing to light the mechanisms that give meaning to human-environment interactions within one particularly powerful social system, the research has suggested the possibility to lay down a path to change.

## APPENDIX 1

### 1992: THE EARTH SUMMIT IN THE PRESS

#### Introduction

Maurice Strong, the chairman of the UNCED summit at Rio de Janeiro, called it ‘the most important meeting in the history of humanity’<sup>1</sup>. Despite the hyperbole, the so-called Earth Summit, held in June 1-15, 1992 did bring together the heads of state and government from more than 160 countries and international organizations. Over 10000 people attended the conference officially. Thousands more participated in parallel events organized by non-governmental organizations. The Rio UNCED summit is very important in the history of the international regime on climate change since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was launched there. UNFCCC was the culmination of two years of complex international negotiations for setting an international agreement on GHG emissions.

The Convention was, from the outset, considered one of the cornerstones of the Rio conference. In the words of a journalist, the Convention was intended to be ‘the summit’s central triumph’ that would ‘make banner headlines around the world’<sup>2</sup>. The summit produced two more agreements, the Biodiversity Convention and Agenda 21, and a statement of principles known as the Rio declaration.

The signing of the UNFCCC was more of a symbolic moment than an act of real importance since the substance of the Convention had previously been defined in a series of meetings of the INC (Paterson, 1996). However, such symbolism should not be overlooked and it is important to examine the ways it was explored by the newspapers. What were the objects of media discourse at the time of the Rio summit? How were matters of international politics and power conveyed by the newspapers? How did the British government construct the summit? How did the press reconstitute the government’s discourse? How were the positions of developing countries viewed

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in ‘Markets can marry growth to greenery and save the world’, Irwin Stelzer, *Sunday Times*, 31.05.92.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Drowning out the alarm bells of global warning. Earth Summit’, Michael McCarthy, *Times*, 30.05.92.

and conveyed? And the roles of NGOs? These are some of the questions that will direct the analysis of media discourse in this period.

In order to take in as many articles as possible on the UNCED conference the analysis starts in the beginning of May, when the Rio agenda was already being debated, and finishes on 15 June, when the last articles on the issue appeared (the exception is the *Times* which carried one on the 16<sup>th</sup> and this has been included in the analysis). This makes a total of 121 articles. It should be noted that these are only the articles where climate change is a main object, according to the guidelines of my data selection detailed in chapter three. This appendix will be structured around some themes that seem particularly prominent or relevant.

## **1. International (power) politics at play**

Very different interests and ideologies were advanced in and before Rio. In the negotiations for the Climate Change Convention, two main axes of tension deserve particular attention: the European Union-United States axis and the North-South axis.

The European Community took part in the negotiations as a single entity<sup>3</sup>. It had the most ambitious proposal for GHG reduction while the United States played the most reactionary role, refusing any quantified targets and timetables and pushing the agreement back. The USA was, therefore, in vivid conflict with some members of the European Union and also with the Nordic countries. The UK's positions were somewhere in between the two poles (Goldemberg, 1994).

Between North and South there were striking differences in levels of GHG emissions, due to profoundly different economic situations. In this context, valuations of the environment were naturally divergent and led to strong cultural and ethical clashes. The whole situation was aggravated by the fact that, as in the case of industrialized countries, there were no consistent positions amongst the 'Southern' countries.

... the pragmatic positions of China, India and Brazil, for example, were in stark contradiction to the more ideological and rhetorical positions of some other

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<sup>3</sup> Rather than an individual commitment by each member country, the EU aimed at setting an overall goal, with differential goals internally assigned to each member.



members of the G-77 and contrasted as well with the “go-slow” approach of members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). (Mintzer and Leonard, 1994: 35)

American participation in the conference was one of the main themes in the media’s coverage of Rio. This was not undeserved since the USA, under George Bush’s presidency, did shape the conference’s outcomes through its resistance to a binding target for reduction (or at least stabilization) of greenhouse emissions, and the refusal to sign the convention on biodiversity. The USA’s sustained rejection of more ambitious aims led to a significant weakening of the UNFCCC, since American participation was considered essential by many<sup>4</sup>.

We will now look at how each newspaper conceptualised American participation in the Rio conference and, more generally, matters of international relations. On 03.05.92, the *Sunday Times* printed a headline on the front page stating that ‘Bush offer edges Rio closer to pollution treaty’<sup>5</sup> (pp. 1/15). David Hughes and Sean Ryan<sup>6</sup> claim in the article that George Bush had given a ‘new impetus’ to the summit with the ‘decision to support a treaty to counter the threat of global warming’, and that this ‘offers a real prospect of progress in Rio’. On 04.05.92, an editorial in the *Times* is headlined ‘Greening of Mr Bush’ (unattributed).

Does this reading of events mean that the *Times* promoted the American position in the negotiations? Not in a straightforward way, since the second article acknowledges that existing scientific evidence calls for a precautionary approach to climate change, and suggests that the USA should be ‘setting an example’ by addressing the problem properly. Although this could appear to signal some ideological change in the *Times*, this editorial also expresses sympathy for Bush’s and industrialists’ economic interests.

What seems to explain best the optimistic views aired in the *Times* about American participation in the climate convention is the anchoring of the *Times*’ and *Sunday Times*’ discursive constructions in official sources. In Hughes and Ryan’s article, for example, ‘Whitehall sources’ are given an absolute primacy in the definition of the

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<sup>4</sup> The USA was responsible for about a quarter of the world’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

<sup>5</sup> As noted in chapter five, expressions like ‘pollution treaty’ are very imprecise and do not consist in good information.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Ryan was environment correspondent for the *Sunday Times*. He had previously been with the *Daily Mail* and worked on the seals ‘campaign’ of 1988 (see Anderson, 1997).

issue<sup>7</sup>. In this context, much merit is found in the action of British politicians who negotiated with the Americans. Both articles praise the work of Michael Howard, Environment Secretary, and glorify British diplomacy.

The president changed his position after Michael Howard... persuaded members of the American administration to compromise during talks in Washington last week. (03.05.92)

He might yet prove to have averted a diplomatic disaster which would set back the cause of *sensible* environmental management.<sup>8</sup> (04.05.92)

The draft text of the UNFCCC, after important concessions to the USA, is the object of another front page in the *Sunday Times*, on 10.05.92, where Sean Ryan's headline announced 'Pollution treaty approved'. Such agreement, we are assured, 'will herald sweeping measures to save energy and clean up industry and transport' and is 'a decisive step towards protecting future generations.' Appeal to science is part of the strategy of political legitimation: "This is driven by science and not national interest. It is something extraordinary in international relations," said a British source.'

The tone of official victory was reinforced by yet another article, this time by Michael McCarthy ('Global warming treaty agreed', 11.05.92). The new draft for the Convention was described as 'a critical and historic breakthrough yesterday by Michael Howard'. Obviously, the *Times* proposed an optimistic reading of the conference's chances of success in 'endorsing a new environmental path for the world economy'<sup>9</sup>.

Compared with the *Times*, it is notable that the Summit did not make it to the *Independent's* front page during the first weeks of May. But the most important difference is in the reading that the *Independent* made of the compromise with the USA. The key point of the story for the *Independent* was that a *binding commitment* to stabilize emissions was replaced by a much weaker *intention* of doing so. The *Independent* narrativized the USA as the reactionary force in the negotiations who led to impasse and to other countries conceding in weakening the Convention.

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<sup>7</sup> In an interview with Paul Maiteny in February 1991, Sean Ryan acknowledged his reliance on personal contacts as news sources, especially at the governmental level.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added. Note the implications of the word 'sensible'. Implicitly, alternative environmental policies are classified as unreasonable (radical?, irrational?).

Two articles by Nicholas Schoon cast the acceptance of the Convention by the United States in this new light. The main message is that the 'Earth pact [was] watered down to win accord' (headline, 09.05.92). Describing the draft treaty in more detail than the *Times*, which is essential for understanding what is at stake, Schoon attributed the responsibility for a weakening of commitments to address climate change to the USA. The 'price to be paid' for American agreement, he wrote, was a 'treaty so compromised and watered down that it is unlikely to make any impact on the problem'. The failure of the treaty in controlling greenhouse emissions was also predicted in Schoon's 'Bush to attend Earth Summit' (11.05.92), which was framed predominantly by NGOs views.

Leonard Doyle's main discursive strategy regarding the USA was to discredit it<sup>10</sup>. Washington was compared to a 'hardened drinker' who is in denial, and 'has refused to contemplate such basic life-style changes as using energy-efficient lighting, motors and air-conditioning equipment'. What about Britain? How was the international standing of Britain on the issue of climate change viewed? By contrast with the de-legitimation of the USA, Britain just about appeared as environmentally friendly. Moreover, although not prominent, the role of Howard was constructed as positive. Before the compromise with the USA was announced, he was said to have been 'trying to persuade the White House to be more flexible'<sup>11</sup> or, similarly, 'Britain' was said to have been 'playing an active role in persuading the USA to compromise on the global warming treaty'<sup>12</sup>.

Yet disappointment prevails in the *Independent* in relation to climate change politics, together with lack of faith in the conference's general programme.

With a climate convention devoid of meaningful content, the prospects for the Earth Summit are now dismal. This agreement will mortgage the future for the sake of photo opportunities and the façade of consensus at Rio.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Michael McCarthy in another first page article ('Bush agrees to attend Rio Earth summit', 13.05.92).

<sup>10</sup> 'US 'sold out' to coal and oil industry', 25.05.92.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Schoon and Leonard Doyle, 'Tougher timetable for cuts in carbon dioxide emissions', 01.05.92.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Doyle, 'US may compromise on 'greenhouse' controls', 01.05.92 .

<sup>13</sup> Fiona Weir, from Friends of the Earth, quoted by Schoon, in 'Earth pact watered down to win accord' 09.05.92.

Scepticism towards the conference had already been voiced in 'Ripa di Meana dashes Rio summit hopes' by Tim Jackson (06.05.92)<sup>14</sup>. The predominant view was that the summit was a big cloud of rhetorical fumes, and that some of the European countries were also to blame.

Compared with both the *Times*' and the *Independent*'s representations, the *Guardian*'s Martin Walker adopted a radically different viewpoint in his analysis of Bush's announced presence in Rio<sup>15</sup>. The economic impact of measures to combat greenhouse emissions was constituted as the central matter in the politics of climate change. Attempts by American diplomats to have a convention 'bland enough to mollify US industry' were contrasted with a report published 'by a prestigious US think-tank, the Institute for International Economics, [which] argued that the long-term damage to the American economy from global warming could reduce gross domestic product by 6 to 20 per cent'. The article is almost exclusively rooted in this report. In a fundamental re-framing of the economic stakes of global warming, its author, William Cline, presented grounds for an 'aggressive abatement of greenhouse emissions.'

10th of May, page 3 of the *Observer*. Geoffrey Lean and Polly Ghazi<sup>16</sup> chose to write on the coming decision of the European Union to weaken its programme on greenhouse emissions ('Last minute deal dilutes pledge on global warming'). Contrarily to the previous pledge to stabilise carbon emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000, the plan was now to 'abandon binding targets at Rio in favour of an 'aim to return' emissions to these levels by the end of the decade'. This was presented by Lean and Ghazi as the 'latest blow to foundering international negotiations to produce a meaningful treaty for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro'; a 'sell-out' in the words of Ripa di Meana, European Environment Commissioner. Explaining the concrete implications of the changes in Europe's programme, Lean and Ghazi noted that several long-planned directives to make commercial buildings, homes and cars more energy-efficient would be replaced with a single "enabling directive", suggesting that countries voluntarily enact the necessary legislation.' Renewable energy would also suffer a

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<sup>14</sup>Although the title misattributes agency to Meana in ruling out the possibility of a good agreement, the article refers to Meana's *criticism* of a draft treaty being discussed in New York.

<sup>15</sup>'Bush to attend Rio', Martin Walker, *Guardian*, 08.05.92.

<sup>16</sup>Geoffrey Lean was environment correspondent and Polly Ghazi was environmental reporter for the *Observer*.

setback with the budget of a supporting programme being halved. Very importantly the article also advanced a re-interpretation of the international role of Michael Howard:

Several Community countries have expressed anger that British Environment Secretary Michael Howard brokered the compromise with America without consulting his European partners.

While depicted as a diplomatic achievement leading to the rescue of the Rio summit by the *Times*, the unilateral move by Howard is seen in the *Observer* as quasi-treason in relation to other European countries.

Howard's action was transformed into the central object of an article on the next day's issue of the *Guardian*. 'Britain 'weakens' climate treaty. Howard accused of conspiring to aid US over UN convention on greenhouse gas emissions' was John Vidal's<sup>17</sup> headline. Vidal's vocabulary is notoriously strong<sup>18</sup> and the accusations very serious. The framing of this article seems to derive from the statements of 'environmentalists' and the individuals that are quoted are associated with Friends of the Earth. Here are their readings of the situation:

"Britain has been playing a double game, agreeing to targets and deadlines but working to achieve the USA position, which lets them off the hook."  
(Jonathon Porritt, Director, FoE)

"Britain's carbon emissions increased 2 per cent in the last two years despite a recession. If this is Michael Howard brokering to save the world, then God help us. ... A convention that does not include targets and timetables is little more than cant."  
(Andrew Lees, Climate Change Campaigner, FoE)

Generating greater governmental responsibility, the article stressed the high stakes being played for: the Convention aims to 'prevent[ing] catastrophic changes to the world's climate'. The following day, space was awarded to Howard's defence. He claimed that the commitment to aim to reach the target on emissions was "indistinguishable" from an absolute guarantee (!) and that the new agreement with the

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<sup>17</sup> John Vidal was the *Guardian's* environment editor.

<sup>18</sup> Note the terms 'accused', 'conspiring' or 'hiding behind' (the US; the latter expression was in the body of the article).

United States would save the Earth Summit (James Erlichman, 'Howard defends emissions treaty', p. 2).

In a different development, the European Commission announced on 13.05.92 a plan to create a carbon tax to be applied to fossil fuels, which could potentially be an important mechanism to reduce emissions. The *Guardian* praised the tax in a front page article<sup>19</sup>. However, a critique of the conditioning of implementation of the tax to similar measures being taken by the USA and Japan was voiced by Palmer and taken further in a editorial entitled 'Too much gas and too little action' on the same day. In the absence of concerted action by all the countries towards the reduction of emissions, the *Guardian* called for European countries to act alone. In a redefinition of responsibility, the article appealed to the 'moral leadership' of Europe. This relocation of the analysis of international climate change politics in the moral sphere is an interesting challenge to the more 'realist' and simple(istic) readings.

In other *Guardian* articles, however, expectations for the Earth Summit were very low. The hype and publicity around the conference were one of the targeted problems with a reference to the...

... danger that the planet will shortly be choked to death by the staggering increase in green gases emitted by scientists, rock stars, newspapers, television documentaries and, most life-threatening of all, politicians.

Irony and metaphor also prevail in this article's headline: 'Politicians flying down to Rio aboard hot air balloon' (Andrew Rawnsley, 03.06.92). One problem with this kind of pre-emptive construction of the summit is the potential effect on public mistrust and scepticism.

Overall, did newspapers make an appropriate and comprehensive analysis of the summit? Susskind (1994: 136-7) argues that, in most countries, media coverage of the Earth summit was inadequate: it did not provide background to the issues and institutions at stake nor properly discussed the scientific arguments. In the analysis of the *New York Times*, Dalby (1996) found that nowhere did the coverage 'explain the mechanics of negotiations, how lobbyists were included, what the negotiating rules were' (p. 603).

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<sup>19</sup> 'EC plans carbon fuel tax', John Palmer, *Guardian*, 14.05.92.

We find the same problem in the British broadsheets, with no reports on the (technical) details of the negotiations, who was involved, who was excluded, who could decide and how. Such lack of information on the negotiation process has an effect of naturalization of the outcome. The only exception is an article in the *Guardian* by Michael Grubb<sup>20</sup>. Grubb's text is an in-depth analysis of the Rio summit which explores how different countries' negotiating positions evolved. In this article, the Rio conference is seen as the result of a complex negotiation. Grubb engages in detailed analysis of the meaning of some terms in the Convention (or the lack of the definition thereof, as in the case of the concept of 'abatement policy'). This is important because it is in the specific words employed in the text of the Convention that the legal obligations of states are fixed, and where room for abusive interpretations may or not be made. Grubb's final verdict of the Convention is not optimistic: 'In terms of effective commitments that will alter national policy, the Convention is wholly emaciated.'

A critical assessment of the Rio agenda – in general, and not only the UNFCCC – was advanced by the *Observer* on 07.06.92 in 'What in the world they are doing – On the agenda: The Observer guide to what's being done and undone at Rio on the biggest environmental issues of our time' (unattributed). Taking an innovative viewpoint, the article emphasizes the issues that were specifically *excluded* from the Rio agenda, like population control, hazardous wastes, drinking water and erosion.

## 2. Assessing Rio's outcomes

Academics make rather differential evaluations of what was achieved at Rio. The following one, representing the critical side, is worth quoting extensively.

We certainly can consider the agreements reached at Rio as lowest common-denominator results. The countries involved politicized the search for scientific understanding, engaging in some of the worst adversary science ever seen. They minimized the search for creative options by focusing narrowly rather than broadly on the full range of environment and development issues requiring attention. They undervalued the importance of benefit sharing, focusing more on short-term

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<sup>20</sup> An academic at the LSE, specialising in the climate change regime. 'Blowing hot and cold on climate – What can be salvaged from the gutted climate treaty?' (07.06.92).

economic costs than on long-term environmental gains for future generations. There were no innovative proposals for ensuring compliance or dealing with free-rider nations. The final results were dominated by the most powerful states, while nongovernmental interests were left to formulate unofficial treaties at the parallel Global Forum for nongovernmental organizations. (Susskind, 1994: 42)

How did reporters and other individuals writing for newspapers evaluate the conference and its achievements? How did they judge the UNFCCC?

The most striking aspect is the immense divergence of assessments from 10th June. In these very mixed reviews, authors sometimes take in consideration different dimensions of the conference or the Convention. Perceptions of failure or success are then based in different parameters. However, we also find that different authors, looking at the same sort of issues, produce quite dissimilar (or even contradictory) readings of the outcomes of Rio.

Based on a report by the University of Bradford, Nigel Hawkes noted in the *Times* that the Convention lacks ‘effective verification measures or structures.’<sup>21</sup> Without such mechanisms the Convention was no more than a ‘hollow framework, allowing cheating by nations that fail to meet their commitments’.

Nevertheless, on the same day, the *Times*’ front page promoted a rather positive assessment of the summit in Michael McCarthy’s ‘Rio accord endorses plan to save Earth’. Adopting a decidedly exalting tone, as the headline immediately indicates, McCarthy talked about the endorsement of ‘a philosophy to save the planet, and a programme to put it into practice’ by heads of state. They ‘sanctioned the worldwide pursuit of sustainable development or green growth, as the only viable response to Third World poverty and global environmental degradation.’ The ‘agreement of the international community was remarkable’ and the various documents and institutional arrangements agreed at Rio constituted a ‘spectacular political endorsement’ of the Brundtland report. Predictably, Michael Howard was quoted: “I really do think it is a turning point in people’s attitudes.” Despite possible shortcomings, *it is widely recognised*<sup>22</sup>, we are told, that ‘the Earth summit does provide a new start for the construction of a different sort of world economy.’

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<sup>21</sup> Lack of checks leaves treaty ‘meaningless’, Nigel Hawkes, *Times*, 10.06.92.

<sup>22</sup> Emphasis added.



The same tone continued in 'Big powers forced to settle for compromise on forests' (15.06.92) where Michael McCarthy referred to 'solid success' on the conventions on biodiversity and climate change. However, on 15.06.92, in an editorial entitled 'Growth and greenery' the *Times* conveyed a rather negative assessment of the summit.

... Rio, heavily over-sold by its United Nations organisers, attempted too much, and in the wrong way ... Its 400-page action plan is a ragbag which conflates the marginally desirable with the vital ...

Pointing to the confrontations between North and South as one of the main faults of the conference, it was suggested that this 'resurrection of North-South quarrels has raised political tempers and, worse, distorted the view of the environmental bargains to be had'.

In the *Observer* issue of 14.06.92, Geoffrey Lean sanctioned the Rio summit's achievements. As defined in the headline – 'British Ministers hail midnight deal: Summit surprise means action on global warming, deserts and wildlife' – this time it is the *Observer* who praised British environmental diplomacy. Michael Howard's legal training is said to have 'played a useful part in working out the final package'. He is quoted saying that the summit was 'a rather remarkable achievement'. The conference is mainly assessed on the basis of the treaties and other institutional achievements and therefore implicitly portrayed as successful which is a somewhat simplistic judgement given that more than agreement, matters what was agreed (and that is not discussed by Lean). Lean claims that it was 'far more than anyone dared to hope for only two months ago when, after 20 weeks of intensive talks, the final preparatory session for the conference collapsed in mutual recriminations in New York'. It seems that the low expectations generated by the long weakening of the planned treaties led to the achievements of the summit coming as a positive surprise.

Previously, a negative reading of the Convention was formulated in the *Guardian* in 'First names put to 'weakened' climate pledge' (05.06.92). Paul Brown refers to a 'pragmatic' agreement which many feel will fail to avert catastrophic change'. The term 'pragmatic' comes from Boutros Ghali who said, in a veiled reference to the sacrifices made to gain the American support, 'it is a pragmatic convention reflecting political and economic realities in the world today. It falls short of the initial hopes of

negotiators.’ A clear opposition is communicated in the article in relation to the perceived value of the UNFCCC, between countries like Germany or the Netherlands and the United States, on the one hand, and between the latter and small island states, on the other. Leggett (2000) explains how Greenpeace helped preparing a press conference by the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, whose statements are mentioned in Brown’s article, on the impact of climate change on his country.

In the *Independent*, as in previous years, we can find highly divergent discourses on the environment. A clear example is provided by the two texts published on the ‘editorial page’ on 15.06.92, under the headlines of ‘A world more aware’ (editorial, unattributed) and ‘Rio and the real world’ (Wilfred Beckerman). The first article proposes a rather favourable outlook into the achievements of the Rio conference, particularly from the perspective of its consciousness-raising effect. The various international agreements reached at the summit are seen as ‘yardsticks by which governments can be measured’. From here the article concentrates on the North-South, Rich-Poor-type divide. Taking up the side of the South (‘Intellectually, the Third World has a strong case’), but understanding the arguments of the North (recession, corrupt and dictatorial governments in developing countries), the article finishes in a recommendation for ‘small steps’ for both North and South<sup>23</sup>.

Across the page, Beckerman, ‘Reader in economics at Oxford, member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (1970-73)’, and the author of well-known ‘anti-green’ and Promethean books such as *Small is Stupid* (1995), accuses the ‘environmentalist lobby’ for having ‘diverted the public’s attention from serious environmental problems to melodramatic, headline-catching issues such as global warming and biodiversity’.

...like evangelists throughout the ages, the eco-doomsters prefer to frighten the public with threats that the planet will be made uninhabitable if we do not change our whole way of life, rethink our values, and abandon our aspirations for improved standards of living.

Shifting the analysis of climate change away from the problem itself and onto its public ‘promoters’, Beckerman’s strategy is to dismiss the former by discrediting the

latter. He legitimates the practices that originate global environmental change: instead of unchecked consumerism, he speaks of ‘aspirations for improved standards of living’ – these are positively connoted terms to refer to what is portrayed as a valid want. Framing those two issues in the strict realm of finances, Beckerman presents the lack of concrete binding commitments in the conventions on climate change and biodiversity – that many others saw as a problem – as successes. The argument is that the avoided ‘hasty and costly action’ to cut carbon emissions or preserve biodiversity should be praised because the money it saved can be better used in other things.

Beckerman is right in arguing for more attention to be paid to issues like population, water, sanitation and urban degradation in the developing world. But the contrast he constructs between ‘genuine’ problems of ‘acid rain, pollution of the rivers, aquifers and the seas from various sources, soil erosion, waste disposal’ and the ‘fabricated’<sup>24</sup> problems of climate change or biodiversity is obviously unfounded.

### **3. Environmental philosophies and models of development**

The UNCED summit was officially and explicitly intended to re-examine societal relations with the environment and patterns of development. Was there any debate in the media on models of development? Are the social, cultural and political causes of climate change, for example, acknowledged and discussed?

In his analysis of the coverage of the Rio summit, Dalby (1996) found that the *New York Times* tacitly assumed that the dominant Western models and philosophies of development were uncontroversial or even desirable. In the British quality press, the scenario was similar. Silence dominates when it came to the deep issues involved in the management of greenhouse emissions and other global environmental problems. Hardly anywhere was the environmental crisis rooted in social and cultural practices.

The UNCED agenda was fundamentally based on the ‘sustainable development’ discourse as formulated in *Our Common Future* (1987) by the World Commission on Environment and Development (chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland). Many news

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<sup>23</sup> The suggested path seems however far from short: ‘The North must move towards great frugality and tighter pollution control: the Americans could reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the burden of their budget deficit at a stroke by raising petrol tax nearer to European levels.’

<sup>24</sup> ‘Fabricated’ is not Beckerman’s word but that is what he insinuates.

articles followed this line, referring to the need of sustainable development. Some attempted to explain what it is. Let us take, for example, ‘Drowning out the alarm bells of global warning’ by (Michael McCarthy, *Times*, 30.05.92). Brundtland’s text is the perfect template of McCarthy’s article. He refers to the global nature of environmental degradation and its impact on ‘the planetary operating system’. And argues that sustainable development means people ‘changing the way they do things everywhere’ – ‘radically new economic policies for the state’ and a ‘change in habits for the individual’.

Despite the apparently deep-seated nature of these propositions, the reality is that at the centre of this model is still the idea of growth. Maybe a ‘green growth’ but still reproducing many of the predominant traits of the present international economy (together with its injustices and biases), as Adams (1995) illustrates in the quote below.

Within mainstream sustainable development discourse ... there are no ideological conflicts with the dominant capitalist industrializing model, only debates about methods and priorities. Thus *Our Common Future* (Brundtland 1987) focuses on the potential for fairly minor reforms of the existing economic system involving new approaches. (p. 90)

One of the few challenges in this period to the economic liberal ideology is an article appearing in the *Guardian* on 18.05.92: ‘Heated debate on road to Rio’ by Will Hutton, appearing in the ‘City’ economics section. Based on the book *Beyond the Limits*, by Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows and Jorgen Randers, this article advances an analysis of the problems of market-type or individualistic measures in relation to the environment and constitutes a strong call for collective action.

What has happened, I think, is that individualism and the culture of “opting out” has gone so far that even on questions like the environment, it is very difficult to win arguments which require collective action.

In the *Sunday Times*, pure market philosophy cohabitates with a fierce critique of expectations of unlimited growth, as championed by Irwin Stelzer<sup>25</sup> in ‘Markets can

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<sup>25</sup> Irwin Stelzer is an American academic and consultant on regulatory policies and a regular columnist for the *Sunday Times*.

marry growth to greenery and save the world' and Teddy Goldsmith<sup>26</sup> in 'No, the real global threat is the relentless demand for growth'.

These articles incarnate radically different models of development. And, like one of the articles written by Nicholas Schoon for the *Independent* and mentioned earlier, Goldsmith's and Stelzer's texts are also expressions of value systems shaping up scientific understanding and views on the relation between science and policy-making. Advancing a scenario of temperatures rising from 1.5 to 4 degrees, leading to 'millions of refugees', Goldsmith proposes a re-assessment of the significance of scientific claims:

It is argued, in particular by George Bush and the oil industry, that there is no scientific evidence that global warming is occurring. But the concept of scientific evidence, when applied to complex biological, social or ecological issues, is largely meaningless.

Goldsmith's text is a strong critique of mainstream models of development. The suggested way forward is the option for a small-scale, decentralised and, I would add, almost utopian pattern of development.

If we are to extract ourselves from this fatal chain reaction, we have no alternative but to create a very different sort of society: one that is highly decentralised, based on the family and the community and in which economic activities are conducted on a much smaller scale, catering for much smaller local and regional markets.

Promoting a discourse of 'economic rationalism' (Dryzek, 1997), Stelzer prefers 'relying on markets, rather than on command-and-control regulation'. His favoured solution is an international market of pollution permits. The strategy of de-legitimation of state regulations in this case involves invoking autocratic rulers and ethically motivated bureaucrats:

... such a market-oriented approach will be a hard sell in Rio. Third World rulers prefer centralised control of economic activities, the main reason for the disasters that afflict their subjects. UN bureaucrats, too, distrust markets that distribute incomes in ways they feel unjust.

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<sup>26</sup> An intellectual and an activist, Goldsmith is the founder of *The Ecologist* magazine and the author of numerous books on ecological issues.

Naturally, the United States' and Bush's opposition to 'growth-stifling targets for emission reductions' is appreciated. And Stelzer makes a categorical refusal of scientific proof of climate change:

The greenhouse doom-sayers have a problem: the facts do not support their theories. At least not unambiguously. ... why the fuss? Because projections churned out by elaborate mathematical models of unproven predictive power threaten apocalypse, soon. And because such forecasts are politically useful to those who, for reasons that have nothing to do with preserving the environment, favour world-wide schemes to redistribute income from richer to poorer nations.

Both Stelzer's and Goldsmith's articles appeared on the front page of *Sunday Times* on 31.05.92 (both continued on page 14).

The disappointingly little talk on environment philosophies and models of development is probably due to the predominantly 'official' coverage that dominated the newspapers. The only reported reference to environment philosophy from official actors comes from Boutros Ghali. At the opening of the conference he attempted to promote a 'limits to growth' discourse with the words 'The time of the finite world has come.' ('Rio summit opens with two minutes' silence for Earth', Michael McCarthy, *Times*, 04.06.92). The observation of two minutes of silence for the (moribund) Earth fitted along the same lines. Boutros Ghali hit an essential point when he referred to lifestyles as a problem: 'global warming [is] largely the result of 'an ecologically irrational lifestyle' in the developed countries' (Rik Turner and Nicholas Schoon, 'The Earth Summit: West's lifestyle under fire', *Independent*, 04.06.92). Choosing a strategy of inclusion, Ghali said that the 'world must be considered as a common home'. In general, however, this sort of judgement was absent from newspapers. In the press, as in real-life 'altruism may [have been] in short supply' (part of a headline by Geoffrey Lean, *Observer*, 31.05.92).

#### **4. 'North', 'South' and 'development'**

The plan to devise an integrated approach to environment and development, in the lines of the Brundtland report, with implications for the relations between industrialized and developing countries was at the core of the UNCED summit. An all-

encompassing debate on these issues could legitimately have been expected and the summit could have been a good arena for the reformulation of these matters. However, it fell short of this aim. As Susskind (1994) expressed in words previously quoted in this chapter, countries focused narrowly rather than broadly on problems of environment and development.

In their coverage of the summit, the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Times* generally reproduced excessively simplistic analyses. Still, the three newspapers offer a diversified picture of the position of developing countries in the climate change debate which is worth paying detailed attention to. Before we engage in the analysis of the media representation of development issues we need to look at development itself as a discourse. As argued by Crush...

... [t]he discourse of development, the forms in which it makes its arguments and establishes its authority, the manner in which it constructs the world, are usually seen as self-evident and unworthy of attention. (1995: 3)

The issue of development tends to be imbued with ideological views. For example, the assumption of social, cultural and political superiority of the industrialized world vis-à-vis developing countries is often built into discourses on development.

Categories of analysis themselves are sometimes biased or inaccurate. In the press coverage of the Earth summit, the globe was conceptualised in terms of two spaces – ‘North’ and ‘South’, often also referred to as ‘Rich’ and ‘Poor’. This construction is the product of a ‘relentless dualistic logic’ (Crush, 1995:14) characteristic of dominant development discourses. ‘[B]inary oppositions between developed (territories that have) and undeveloped (territories that lack)’ (ibid.: 14) are obviously problematic. One of the reasons is that it is simplistic to look at these groups of states as single or uniform actors. There is often little unity or common characteristics within those sets of states (not to mention strong differences within each country). But, as Crush notes, ‘[t]he power of development is the power to generalize, homogenize, objectify.’ (p. 22)

Despite the little space in the institutional arrangements of UNCED, these divergences amongst developing countries came up. Yet, the press did not heed this, preferring instead to homogenize the voices of the ‘South’. Hence, hardly any

discussion can be found in the press of the claims of AOSIS, the Alliance of Small Island States formed in 1990 to represent a set of low-lying countries who may be affected by some of the worst impacts of climate change, such as sea-level rise, severe weather events, and the death of coral reefs. The only reference to AOSIS in the *Guardian* ('Going the way of Atlantis. Global warming could sink low-lying Pacific islands within 30 years', John Vidal, 01.05.92) actually draws primarily on a study of the USA Ocean and Atmospheric Institute about the consequences of the greenhouse effect. In the *Independent*, the Alliance is only mentioned in an article where the main actors are insurance companies ('Insurers refuse to cover global warming risks', Leonard Doyle, 08.05.92).

Many of the faults of the press coverage have to do with unfair, inaccurate or culturally and ideologically biased conceptions. Several articles constructed the 'North-South' issue as a money problem. The 'South' is often represented as extortionist and therefore a threat. Let us look at a few examples.

The first thing the delegates will have to do is resist the efforts of developing countries to dress their old plans for income redistribution in new green clothes. (Irwin Stelzer, 'Markets can marry growth to greenery and save the world', *Times*, 31.05.92)

... to generate the transfer of funds that the Third World had hoped to extract from the rich countries at the Rio conference, [one of the strategies of the 'eco-doomsters' is] to make the advanced countries feel guilty for having been responsible for ... the danger of climate change... (Wilfred Beckerman, 'Rio and the real world', *Independent*, 15.06.92)

In three years of negotiations and 24 million pages of reports leading to Rio, the environment has been consistently used by rich and poor governments as a bargaining chip. The north ... has used the summit preparations to protect and enhance its economic lead while trying to shift the burden of environmental action on to the south. The south ... has used its deteriorating environment to try to extract more money for development. (John Vidal, 'Discord on rise before Rio summit', *Guardian*, 26.05.92)

Although framing the relation between North and South as a matter of interests played on both sides, and not only on the South's, Vidal's article still represents the latter as an extortionist of money.



The relations between ‘North’ and ‘South’ – and many of the intricacies of environment and development – were portrayed in these conflicting terms. The choice of vocabulary is an immediate indication of that. ‘Rivalry’<sup>27</sup>, ‘antagonism’<sup>28</sup>, ‘row’<sup>29</sup> were some of the terms used to describe the relations between industrialized and developing countries. Simplistic assessments led to fundamental issues being reduced in the press to ‘squabbles between rich and poor’<sup>30</sup> or bickering<sup>31</sup>. The strategy of blaming developing countries may have been instigated by specific ‘Northern’ interests. Leggett (2000) describes how the Global Climate Coalition, an organization of oil and other fossil fuel-related companies that participated in the Rio summit, rethought their propaganda after the negotiation of UNFCCC:

Their new strategy was to try to switch attention away from the developed countries as the main emitters ... by pointing to the growth potential for emissions in developing countries.

In any case, oppositional constructions are a typical feature in the media and derive from the preference of journalists (and perceived preference of the audience) for simple narratives. Depicting complex issues in good-or-bad, black-or-white terms eases comprehension but is obviously impoverishing. Yet, clarity and conflict are viewed in newsrooms as selling points (e.g. Gans, 1979; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000).

Many of the faults we can find in the press coverage have to do with silences. As Dalby (1996: 603) notes, there was much ‘unsaid about UNCED’. There was no discussion of crucial dependency issues in the international economic order or the economic implications of official aid programmes. The issue of the rights of developing countries in the international community was almost completely absent. The difficulties of the Third World in getting involved in the international negotiations on climate change due to lack of information, human resources, financial resources and other problems (Rowlands, 1995: 216), such as a significant scientific deficit, were never even hinted in the press.

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<sup>27</sup> Michael McCarthy ‘Counting the trees brings confusion’, *Times*, 02.06.92.

<sup>28</sup> Michael McCarthy, ‘North and South bicker over value of wildlife’, *Times*, 03.06.92.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Schoon, ‘Earth Summit: North-South row cripples Rio summit’, *Independent*, 13.06.92.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Greening of Mr Bush’, unattributed, *Times*, 04.05.92.

<sup>31</sup> Michael McCarthy, ‘North and South bicker over value of wildlife’, *Times*, 03.06.92.

Nevertheless, a small proportion of articles in the three newspapers raised important points, treating the issues of environment and development, and 'North-South' relations, with some depth and insight. Three articles, one in each newspaper, should be pointed out:

- Nicholas Schoon, 'The Earth Summit: 'Last chance' to save Earth', *Independent*, 25.05.92;

- 'Growth and greenery', unattributed, *Times*, 15.06.92;

- Shridath Ramphal<sup>32</sup>, 'Earth Summit Report (View from the South): We must stop fiddling while the world burns', *Guardian*, 07. 06.92.

Schoon crucially noted some of the structural problems with the summit:

... deals struck in Rio will be strictly limited. This is partly because it is the wrong forum. Serious talk about aid and debt write-offs – which lie at the heart of the Rio agenda – happen at World Bank occasions and gatherings of finance ministers. It is also because of the gulf between developed and developing nations [in terms of the perception of what is to be done and gained].

Although somewhat lightly, the *Times* article indicates that there may be a problem with the underlying theories of development played off at the summit. These articles recall that climate change will have differential impacts across the world, a question that raises important issues of equity. It is the poor that get the biggest lesions in the global politics of the environment. The developing world is 'far more vulnerable to global environmental problems such as changing climates and rising sea levels' (Schoon), and has 'fewer defences' against the effects of these problems ('Growth and greenery') such as 'the technology and capital to protect its peoples and economies' (Schoon) that the North owns.

An essential and related issue is the international distribution of the costs of addressing global environmental change. Although generally accepted that responsibility should be assumed by all countries, developing countries obviously are in a very different position from industrialized ones. First, as noted by Schoon, they have 'a strong moral case because the North has caused the bulk of greenhouse gas pollution'. Second, these countries have to face other pressing priorities. So, 'to many

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<sup>32</sup> Former Secretary-General the Commonwealth and author of *Our Country, The Planet. Forging a Partnership for Survival*, London, Lime Tree, 1992.

developing nation leaders, environmental protection is a luxury only the developed world can afford'. (Schoon) The position of Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia, would be logically acceptable.

'There will be no development if the poor countries are not allowed to extract their natural wealth ... If it is in the interest of the rich that we do not cut down our trees then they must compensate us for the loss of income.'  
(Schoon)

But the reality of international relations is much more complex than that. In the majority of the press coverage, Southern claims came across as unreasonable and were dismissed. As noted by Dalby (1996: 608):

... reflected through the lenses of the northern states', the 'demands' of the South are represented as a political bargaining ploy rather than as in any sense a claim to some form of international equity.

It is true that at least some developing countries were to blame for having reduced the equation of development and environment to a request for more aid. As noted by Rowlands (1995: 217), there often seems to be 'an endorsement, even by most developing countries' representatives, of the liberal economic order'. Another problem with developing countries is widespread corruption, as mentioned by Porritt, who refers to the...

... scandal of "flight capital" – the billions of dollars of aid flitted away by third world politicians, making them very rich while their people remain poor. Which leaves most of us who care about the world's poor and the eco-systems on which they depend feeling angry, confused and powerless.  
(Jonathan Porritt, 'The White House effect. World pollution', *Times*, 30.05.92)

In debating environment and development matters, the inclusion of the views of the countries and people at stake in the politics of the global environment is essential. Only one article in the three newspapers corresponds to this: the above mentioned one by Shridath Ramphal.

The poor are silent, often invisible, and their view is ignored. If we persist in seeing the environmental crisis only through the eyes of the one-third of the world's people who largely cause it, and ignore the perceptions of the rest who are also its victims, we might as well have left the Rio agenda to be disposed of by the Group of Seven industrial countries.

Ramphal's text embodies a democratic 'limits to growth' ideology<sup>33</sup> (Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens, 1972; Dryzek, 1997). He wants to 'stop our onslaught on nature' and 'forge a genuine partnership for survival among all countries and people', with a concern for the developing world and international responsibility. Dalby's (1996) analysis of the *New York Times* points to an 'Americentric' framing, which neglected Southern perspectives and overlooked essential issues like the impact of international aid and loans, or the role of transnational corporations. Despite some remarkable exceptions, most of the texts in the British quality press display the same reductionist construction.

## 5. The 'bottom line': representation of NGOs views

NGOs of all kinds and purposes foresaw the Earth summit as a unique opportunity for discussing the environmental, economic, and even spiritual problems of the world, and for advancing their agendas. Parallel to the UNCED summit, they organized a gigantic meeting in Rio designated the 'Global Forum'. It was attended by over 15000 people, from native Indian tribes to members of marginalized religions and, obviously, a vast array of environmental groups. They represented a wide variety of opinions, ideologies, and strategies (Brown, 1996).

What space and discursive roles did the press reserve for environmental organizations during the Earth summit? Although some analysts consider that, as a result of the UNCED process, NGOs have improved their status and their bargaining power (Finger, 1994: 209-11), this did certainly not owe anything to the press. Like the mainstream American press (see Dalby, 1996), the British broadsheets by and large silenced NGOs during the summit. In the analysis of climate change, NGOs were given very little say. The table below suggests that this was the case especially in the *Guardian* and *Independent*.

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<sup>33</sup> 'Limits to growth' or 'survivalism' is a set of ideas on environment and development that emphasise the limited carrying capacity of ecosystems and the finite nature of resources, and appeal for coordinated international action to avoid the risk of catastrophe. While in this discourse agency is typically awarded

Table 6: Number of references to NGOs in articles on climate change between 01.05.92 and 15.06.92

Refer. to NGOs <sup>34</sup>	Greenpeace	FoE	WWF	Total n. references	Total n. art. with NGOs <sup>35</sup>	Absolute n. of articles <sup>36</sup>
<i>Guardian</i>	1	4	1	6	4	35
<i>Independent</i>	5	3	0	8	8	37
<i>Times</i>	8	10	5	23	17	49
Total	14	17	6	37	29	121

The *Times* may surprise by having a number of articles with references to NGOs that is about four times as big as the *Guardian*'s and twice as the *Independent*'s. Some questions need to be asked: What kind of references to NGOs does the *Times* make? Do NGOs frame the *Times*' representations of issues substantially? Analysis of the structural organization of news articles reveals that in the majority of cases NGOs views tend to be left in the *Times* to the bottom of articles, and are typically accounted for in a mere one or two sentences. We also should note that the *Times* carried a significantly higher number of articles in this period than the other two papers, which lowers the proportional weight of NGO references.

As mentioned before in this thesis, the *Times* seems to aim at constructing an appearance of balance in reporting climate change by quoting NGOs as sources. But in the overall construction of the meaning(s) of climate change in this newspaper, these organizations have a very marginal role. In an exception to this 'bottom line' treatment, and seemingly promoting NGOs' interpretive frames, Michael McCarthy reports in the *Times* on 10.06.92 that Britain was seen as 'one of the most obstructive nations in trying to find a compromise with the developing world over finance' by a representative of Friends of the Earth. He refers to an 'accusatory list of the five worst countries at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro, compiled by the hundreds of environmental pressure groups attending the conference as observers.' The headline 'Green lobby prepares to cast UK in villain's role' constructs the NGOs' move as

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to elites (Dryzek, 1997), Ramphal constitutes people into significant parts. His proposals are more grounded on the grassroots than mainstream 'limits to growth' texts.

<sup>34</sup> Number of articles that quote or mention environmental NGOs.

<sup>35</sup> Total number of articles with references to environmental NGOs (note that some articles mention more than one NGO).

<sup>36</sup> Total number of articles on climate change published in this period.

fabrication or even a farce, and the NGOs as rebels. Terms like ‘accusatory list’ reinforce this reading. From the analysis of the text we obviously cannot say whether this is McCarthy’s opinion of environmental organizations, or this headline (and some of the adjectives) is instead the product of an editor’s intervention. Despite these problems with the ways the *Times* conveys NGOs views, it was in this newspaper that the only article authored by an NGO representative appeared: ‘The White House effect. World pollution’, by Jonathan Porritt from Friends of the Earth (30.05.92, p. SR/4).

In the other newspapers, NGOs tend to be constructed as more ‘serious’ actors<sup>37</sup> as when the *Guardian* writes ‘most companies would barely notice the proposed tax on oil..., a Friends of the Earth study report says’ (‘Firms ‘will barely notice carbon tax’’, unattributed, 05.05.92) or when the *Independent on Sunday* refers to a FoE study on cars and carbon dioxide emissions (‘Earth Summit: Save the world - forget the car’, David Nicholson-Lord, 07.06.92). But these papers too fell short of a comprehensive debate. The media could have debated the ideas about climate change upheld by the thousands of organizations that attended the Global Forum<sup>38</sup>. These organizations put forward a series of alternative proposals for addressing global environmental problems. Yet, they were not presented and explained to the public. The absence of ideas and discourses of the environmental movement in the press is particularly serious, if we think of NGOs as the main agents for articulation of alternative development discourses in the contemporary world (Escobar, 1995).

One problem, it must be acknowledged, was that the multiple NGOs present in Rio held non-uniform views and could not agree amongst themselves (Brown, 1996: 39) on a variety of issues. Nevertheless, this does not entirely justify the silence of the media. The press also overlooked the fact that NGOs played a part in the UNCED process itself and influenced policy-making in many ways (see Finger, 1994). By choosing not to analyse the roles of pressure groups and the civil society, the press opted for a

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<sup>37</sup> However, metaphorical speech can also be found once in the *Guardian*:

“Signing it without immediate action is like putting the ignition key in a car with a flat battery. Now governments must do a jump start by injecting the spark of real commitment and urgency.”  
(Representative of WWF about the climate change convention, in ‘First names put to ‘weakened’ climate pledge’, Paul Brown, 05.06.92)

<sup>38</sup> Duffy (1995) similarly found that press releases of the Global Forum had no impact on American press coverage.

consistent repression of alternative politics. Media coverage of the Earth summit led to the reinforcement of state politics.

## 6. Britain's policies for greenhouse emissions

While the UNFCCC was negotiated and signed, establishing an international regime for dealing with greenhouse emissions, what was the British government doing to address the problem? And how were British policies reported in the press?

At the end of April 1992, Downing Street announced that it had changed the target year for bringing annual output of carbon dioxide back to the 1990 level from 2005 to 2000. Did this pronouncement have any real value in terms of policy-making? Possibly not. As noted by Collier (1997: 91), this change coincided with a realization that emissions would be substantially reduced as a result of the replacement of coal by more efficient natural gas in the newly privatised electricity industry, the so-called 'dash for gas'. Moreover, the apparently progressive decision of the government was conditional. It would only be met 'provided other countries take similar action' (Nicholas Schoon and Leonard Doyle, 'Tougher timetable for cuts in carbon dioxide emissions', *Independent*, 01.05.92). Schoon and Doyle also significantly observed that '[o]fficials declined to say whether Britain would ignore it if only the USA refused to co-operate while the other advanced industrial nations stuck to their targets.'

The government decided to make this statement just before the Earth summit, and while its intention to address the problem of greenhouse emissions could be questioned given the rejection of the EC proposed carbon tax<sup>39</sup>. The timing was thus adequate: as Thatcher had done, Major also adopted a strategy of synchronization of policy decisions with prominent international events. Such announcement was probably no more than an attempt to polish the image of the government in green, without any real commitment. But it allowed the government to make international use of this 'moral basis' (Michael McCarthy in an inaccurately headlined article: 'Major sets new date for car exhaust curbs', *Times*, 01.05.92) and engage in – arguably – green diplomacy.

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<sup>39</sup> 'EC wavers over plan to tax carbon dioxide emissions', John Palmer, *Guardian*, 30.04.92; 'Peers oppose EC energy tax plans', Patricia Wynn Davies, *Independent*, 01.05.92.

The *Times* exalted Major's decision as a 'bold move' and 'evidence of his personal commitment to the success of the Earth Summit' (ibid.)<sup>40</sup>.

One of the few 'real' measures that the government adopted, 'as the centrepiece of Britain's efforts to counter global warming' was the creation of an energy trust in mid-May to encourage energy conservation in the domestic sphere ('Homes will be given energy tip', *Times*, 12.05.92; also reported in the *Independent* on 14.05.92, Susan Watts, 'Energy trust launched to combat global warming'). Again there was a good timing. But this Energy Saving Trust (EST) was far from offering a sufficient answer. Its limited funding and the government's reduced influence over the regulatory system for the energy companies after privatisation (Collier, 1997: 93) has meant that the EST has had a limited impact.

In an article previously mentioned<sup>41</sup>, notice is given of John Major's announced plans to spend an extra £100 million as Britain's contribution to Third World programmes on climate change, funded by the Global Environment Facility. Major's rhetoric would be put into perspective if a similar highlight was given in the media to the fact that British overseas aid, which had decreased substantially under Margaret Thatcher, went even further down with John Major (Brown, 1996: 42). This decrease was mentioned by Roy Hattersley, the deputy Labour leader in the Commons, who was shortly quoted by Arthur Leathley in 'Major praises 'key role' of UK at Earth summit', *Times*, 16.06.92. But except for this passing allusion, the more long-term and wide-ranging analysis of politics remained outside the media construction of the issue.

The following sentence, whose meaning is not further explored in the article, opens up a series of interpretive possibilities and suggests an interesting meta-analysis of the international politics of climate change: 'In [the] role [of mediators and 'realists'], [the British delegation] believe[s], they may have been helped by the hard line taken by America' (Robin Oakley, 'Middle-man Major takes role of realist', *Times*, 02.06.92).

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<sup>40</sup> The *Times* also made a subdued critique of Major's new target for stabilization of emissions based on the perceived economic impact:

The agreement [with the USA in relation to the UNFCCC] also casts doubt on Major's announcement last week that Britain would stabilise its carbon dioxide output at 1990 levels by 2000 rather than 2005 as Margaret Thatcher had favoured. ... Some sectors of industry are likely to argue that they will be put at a disadvantage if they have to invest in tougher pollution controls than their American rivals.

(David Hughes and Sean Ryan, 'Bush offer edges Rio closer to pollution treaty', 03.05.92)

<sup>41</sup> 'Major promises £100m more for green projects', Robin Oakley and Michael McCarthy, *Times*, 13.06.92.



What sorts of (discursive) gains did the British government derive from the American reactionary attitude? Would Britain still have been pushing the negotiations forwards if it had to commit itself to a more stringent target? The UK gained the prestige of international mediation and of helping forge an agreed convention. But the approximation to the American position also led to gains in terms of avoiding deeper international commitments through the UNFCCC.

## **7. Newspaper character or characters in newspapers?**

Although newspapers maintained, in the coverage of the UNCED summit, many traits observed before in this thesis, some original or unconventional standpoints can be found in some articles. The author may be the main – albeit not the sole – explanation.

### ***Independent and Guardian***

The role of the author in the *Independent's* representation of climate change in this period seems quite important. Environmental concern in this newspaper seems to have been heightened by Nicholas Schoon, as already noted in chapter four. Besides the articles previously mentioned, let us look at the articles he wrote for the 25th of May edition<sup>42</sup>. 'A climate of dangerous uncertainty' is a vivid call for action building on the assumption of human interference in climate. '[Heads of state] should agree to reduce emissions immediately', Schoon wrote. Revisiting the science(s) of climate change Schoon acknowledged the existence of uncertainties but goes beyond the recommendation of a precautionary approach, proposing a reinterpretation of the meaning of uncertainty:

Faced with all this uncertainty, and with the fact that scientists are tending to revise their temperature forecasts slightly downward, the public and politicians might be tempted to conclude that we no longer need worry. But the really alarming point is that there is no end to the warming in sight. If we froze emissions at today's levels,

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<sup>42</sup> The *Independent* carried a remarkably large set of five articles on climate change on that day.

the concentrations of the various greenhouse gases would carry on rising throughout the next century....

Admitting the possibility of unexpected phenomena in nature, he noted:

‘We cannot rule out the possibility of surprises,’ says the IPCC’s latest report. One possibility is that global warming could switch the deep ocean currents into a new pattern. They play a key role in climate, and the switch could make the globe, or large parts of it, suddenly much colder...

Schoon also advanced some reflections on the practice of journalism and the role of the media in shaping perceptions:

By now a little scepticism has rubbed off on many people, deposited by the kind of journalism that delights in debunking a theory by presenting the dissenting minority as the only people who know what they are talking about.

Nicholas Schoon certainly played a significant role in reframing the value and the stakes of the environment in the *Independent*.

In the *Observer*, environmental advocacy is for the first time under attack in articles by Simon Hoggart, who considers ‘hardline environmentalism’ a ‘religious phenomenon’ (‘Columnist’, 07.06.92). Claiming to favour the protection of the environment he says that the ‘doomsday barkers’ or ‘doommongers’, with ‘their absurd hyperbole’, ‘don’t help’. The United Nations, ‘the world equivalent of ‘Repent Now’ sandwich-board man’, does not either. And advances his own assessment of media coverage of the politics of climate change:

Reading the papers, you’d imagine that global warming was a proven phenomenon, and that unless the USA agrees to a date for reducing greenhouse gases at the Rio summit next month, the planet will be a ball of dust before our children have children. Not so. The evidence is at most ambiguous and may even point the other way. ...

However, Hoggart’s one-off critique of environmentalism is, assumedly, a satirical piece that cannot fairly be compared to the repeated *Times*’ leading articles (or other ‘serious’ articles) conveying similar pictures.

## Critical *Times*?

Notwithstanding the representations discussed above, not all the articles published in the *Times* stuck exactly to governmental lines. The two articles I will refer to next constitute significant challenges to the frames promoted by official sources. An important critique of the Conservative government (but also of other political parties) for leaving the environment to a very secondary realm was formulated by Jonathan Porritt, from Friends of the Earth, in 'The White House effect' (30.05.92). This article is a strong call for government's intensified regulation.

A strong critique of Bush came through the voice of Peter Stothard, identified elsewhere in the *Times* as US editor, in 'Why the greens are poison to President Bush', p. LT/1 (28.05.92). He referred to Bush's personal lack of interest in the environment and described the variety of interests and lobbying processes in the USA around the climate convention. 'Pressured by both greens and industry, America will take a meaningless formula to the Earth Summit'. Quoting an American official, Stothard wrote that if "Britain and Germany and the American press had pushed harder, the treaty might have meant a lot more than it does today." Stothard made one of the most pertinent remarks about Britain's action in relation to the climate change convention.

Britain, however, did not make much of a fuss. Indeed, British negotiators tried to make it harder for the treaty to come into force, demanding prior ratification not just by a specific number of signatory countries, but by those countries responsible for the greatest greenhouse gas production.

This aspect of British foreign policy went unnoticed in all the other articles. So, again, these two articles lead us to believe that discursive and ideological standpoints are not uniform inside a newspaper, instead varying according with who writes for the newspaper. We should note that the above-mentioned article is the only one by Porritt in the *Times* between 1985 and 1997. Peter Stothard is not a common contributor to the *Times* coverage of climate change, either; overall, he wrote only five articles on the topic (between 1989 and 1992). Moreover, despite their assessments of the British government the headlines of both articles concern American politics.

Authorship could also have a role in explaining the discursive position of two articles by George Brock about Ripa di Meana, the central figure in media

representations of the confrontation between the EU and the USA. The alterations of the climate convention's draft text to accommodate the American wishes received a quite angry look from di Meana. His negative reaction to the new formulation of the climate convention was reported by Brock in 'Global warming 'sell-out' feared' (06.05.92). But the reader was assured that it 'found few echoes among EC ministers debating Europe's measures'.

Ripa di Meana kept a high-profile in the awakening of the Rio summit with his frequent – and often provocative – attacks on the USA, Bush and the summit itself. The *Times* dedicated a very long article to his views and personality and stated that he had 'watched in despair as the event descends to what he predicts will be a "fairground of rhetoric"' (George Brock, 'Licensed to interfere. Carlo Ripa di Meana', 30.05.92).

There are some articles in the *Times* – written by Michael McCarthy together with another author – that appear to challenge the authorship consistency 'rule'. But on a second examination they do not. At least not significantly. As we saw above, environment correspondent Michael McCarthy had amplified official discourse in several articles. However, he adopts a more critical tone in the analysis of international environmental politics in 'EC gives way to US over Earth summit' (Michael McCarthy and James Bone, 11.05.92), saying that EC countries had 'caved in to American pressure'.

Suggesting that environmental discourses can be revised in the *Times*, Michael McCarthy and Jamie Dettmer wrote an article on a World Bank report that viewed the EC carbon tax as a having an 'important role in a precautionary strategy' to prevent environmental catastrophe ('World Bank backs EC's carbon tax', 18.05.92). The report held that 'economic growth and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive' and that 'productivity will suffer in the long run, unless action is taken on pollution'. On 01.06.92 the *Times* carried an article on the front page which conveyed a criticism of the reluctance of the British government to sign the convention on biodiversity (Michael McCarthy and Nicholas Wood, 'British doubts threaten Rio treaty signing').

Is this all a sign that the *Times* is changing its lines on global environmental change? Not necessarily. Let us look at contrary signs. First, we should observe that the re-conceptualisation of the role of the EC tax is promoted by an 'authorized power' – the

World Bank. And the *Times* is also the only broadsheet to care to report on the same day on the (obviously unfavourable) views of the Saudi oil minister on the EU energy tax ('Nazer attacks EC proposal', unattributed, 18.05.92). Secondly, in McCarthy and Wood's article the most widely quoted source is Michael Howard, uttering the reasons for the British 'doubts'. And a few days later the *Times* allows for the government's further justification in 'Howard rejects 'blank cheque' for Rio treaty' (Jill Sherman, 04.06.92). Very importantly, John Major gains in the *Times* an agency unequaled by any other figure towards the end of the Rio summit, as can be immediately confirmed by the numerous headlines where his name is foregrounded:

- 'Major promises £100m more for green projects', Robin Oakley and Michael McCarthy, 13.06.92, front page;

- 'Major signs treaties on biodiversity and climate', Michael McCarthy, also on 13.06.92;

- 'Major praises 'key role' of UK at Earth summit', Arthur Leathley, 16.06.92<sup>43</sup>.

The first article is an extensive reproduction of Major's speech at the time of signing the treaties and a sanctioning of the government's policies. The latter says that the 'prime minister conceded ... that the Earth summit had failed to meet some of its objectives' but (obviously) 'insisted that Britain had played a leading role in creating a benchmark for future environmental action.' Alternatively, it is the 'UK' (meaning 'the UK government'), instead of Major, that gets the highlight as in 'UK wants laggards shamed into action', Michael McCarthy and Jamie Dettmer, 15.06.92. Earlier in the *Times*, John Major and other members of the British government, like Howard and Baroness Chalker (Overseas Aid minister), had been depicted as the 'realists' of the summit who '[a]mid the increasingly frantic international posturing' are 'brokering deals between the sceptics and the idealists' (in 'Middle-man Major takes role of realist' by Robin Oakley, 02.06.92). The general line is that Britain had the only solid stand in the summit, acting sensibly and reliably, as when Howard's compromise with the United States helped 'preserve environmental diplomacy from disappearing into a rhetorical never-never land' ('Greening of Mr Bush', unattributed, 04.05.92).

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<sup>43</sup> Previously, the same type of construction had already appeared in the *Times*, for example: 'Major sets new date for car exhaust curb', Michael McCarthy, 01.05.92.

Counting references to the leading politicians also sheds light on the *Times*' alignment with the government. In all the articles analysed in this period John Major's name appears 51 times in the *Times*, 11 in the *Guardian* and 9 in the *Independent*; Michael Howard is mentioned 37, 16 and 9 times respectively. A significant difference between Thatcher and Major concerning climate change is that the latter is almost never extensively quoted and his words are by no means as dramatic as Thatcher's. Kavanagh's (1997: 194) remark about the lack of Thatcher's tendency for hyperbole in Major's discourse is here confirmed.

The hegemonic official framing does not mean that alternative interpretations are completely excluded of the *Times*. As Allan (1998) notes: 'The hegemonic frame's tacit claim to comprehensiveness dictates that it must be seen as 'balanced' and 'fair' in its treatment of counter-hegemonic positions' (p. 121). Instead of omitted, contestation is selectively managed and predictably squeezed into a few lines. The following paragraph shows how quickly critical voices are brought in and set aside.

The compromise was suggested by Mr Howard during a visit to Washington two weeks ago. Environmental pressure groups said the change made the treaty toothless. The criticism was dismissed by Mr Howard yesterday.  
(Michael McCarthy, 'Global warming treaty agreed', 11.05.92)

A similar treatment of that given to NGOs is awarded to political parties in the opposition. Comments by Labour or Liberal Democrats representatives tend to also be given little space and/or deposited in the final lines of articles (see, for example, 'Major promises £100m more for green projects' by Robin Oakley and Michael McCarthy, 13.06.92).

All in all, we can say that the *Times* coverage of the Earth summit was predominantly official-sources based and complimentary of the British government. Its representation of the achievements of Rio is in general positive and optimistic, often bordering on exultation. It appears to conform to old imperialist views of Britain's role in the world. The strategy of personalization of policy around John Major's name is in tune with the news values of eliteness, attribution and personalization itself (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Bell, 1989). In terms of style, the *Times* tends to build 'grand' depictions of politics – the tone, the vocabulary and the actors all emphasize the 'illustrious' side of politics. References to NGOs and to other alternative views

typically appear in a simplistic collage that seems to be there to merely fulfil the claim of balanced reporting. *Times*' articles remain very much at the 'surface'-level of problems, with their treatment of the complex matters under discussion in Rio being typically more superficial than in the *Guardian* or *Independent*. There is, for example, a general absence of detailed (technical) information about the UNFCCC and articles tend to have very little critical interpretation of policy options.

The *Times* adopts a similar pattern to the *New York Times*', as researched by Dalby (1996), to the extent that its discursive construction of the summit follows official lines. As the latter, the first newspaper presents the Rio conference as a matter of political performance by the conventional powers (mainly the American President, the British Prime Minister and Environment Secretary). Yet, there are occasional expressions of dissonance in the *Times*, as seen above, and the global environment seems to have a bigger prominence than in earlier phases. An important change from previous periods is that the strategy of discrediting and dismissal of pro-environmental discourses, although not totally absent, is no longer prominent in the *Times*. This suggests that once environmental problems were institutionalised and got under governmental control (INCs, UNCED, UNFCCC, etc) they became legitimate matters of concern for the *Times*.

## APPENDIX 2

### 1995: THE (SPARSE) COVERAGE OF BERLIN'S COP1

#### Introduction

The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994, after fifty countries ratified it. In March 1995, the first Conference of the Parties (COP-1) which took place in Berlin gave the parties to the Convention their first opportunity to strengthen the treaty since signing it at the 1992 Earth Summit. In a decision dubbed the 'Berlin Mandate', the parties agreed that existing developed countries' commitments to curb GHG emissions were not adequate to meet the Convention's goals and set a schedule for negotiating a protocol to toughen them after 1997. The fact that the final document included the reference to 'quantified limitation and reduction objectives within specified time frames' (UNFCCC, 1995) was the most important achievement. The 'Mandate' also established measures designed to monitoring and reporting progress. How did the press construct the summit? How were the risks at stake evaluated? What action-roles were assigned to different institutions and personalities? How were outcomes assessed?

The amount of coverage did not vary radically amongst the newspapers. Between 19.03.95 and 12.04.95 the *Guardian* published 15 articles, the *Times* 13, and the *Independent* 11 on the summit. During this period, these papers published five, nine and five articles respectively on different facets of climate change. Yet, there were some significant differences in the readings newspapers and journalists made of the summit. Let us look at some of the most important strands in the press representation of Berlin.

#### 1. Constructing the stakes

At the outset of the summit, the *Guardian* awarded it a much bigger highlight than the other two newspapers. Morphological characteristics such as page number and article category are a good indication of the construction of risk made by the *Guardian*. Page 1 of the issue of 25.03.95 carries an article by Paul Brown 'Global warming



summit at risk'. On the same day, an editorial entitled 'A warning on warming' (unattributed) appears on page 26.

In the *Guardian's* front-page Paul Brown calls attention to the risk of the Berlin summit being spoiled by the effective vetoing power of the OPEC countries, and speaks of 'desperate diplomatic efforts' to break the deadlock. He grounds political arguments in favour of climate change on recent scientific findings from the Hadley Centre for Climate Change. The editorial has a dramatic opening paragraph:

The worst news of the year so far comes from Antarctica. The 40 mile crack in the Larsen ice shelf is a much more significant indicator of global warming than the giant iceberg which recently broke away. The shelves guard the ice cap like plates of armour: remove one and the whole suit is vulnerable.' ....

Our global climate depends above all upon the air and sea currents generated by the difference in temperature between the tropics and the poles. It is such a complex equation that the effects are hard to predict but almost certain to alarm.

The ice crack had already been the subject of an article the previous day in this newspaper ('40-mile crack in Antarctic ice sheet', Reuter in Buenos Aires). The political commitment of certain 'scientific' views are exposed:

The professional sceptics (often driven by a Thatcherite political agenda) who argue that global warming has not been "proved" are a diversion on whom we can no longer afford to waste time.

Tackling climate change is considered 'an extremely political question. Effective control means encroaching on huge vested interests.' The same sense of urgency and deadlock is conveyed the next day in the *Observer* by Polly Ghazi: urgency on acting on climate change and deadlock due to divisions in the international power politics played on the onset of Berlin ('Heat is on to stop the slow thaw', 26.03.95).

The day of Brown's front-page call, the *Times* gave voice to Matt Ridley under the headline 'Beware of the greens who cry wolf'<sup>1</sup>. Ridley had recently published a book entitled *Down to Earth*<sup>2</sup> and, in the vein of authors such as Wilfred Beckerman and Richard North, had been displaying a 'sceptical' position in relation to the 'extremists'

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<sup>1</sup> Although not referring explicitly to the summit, Ridley's article ought to be mentioned here given its timing and the fact that it frames readings of the state of the environment and of what should be done about it.

<sup>2</sup> *Down to Earth. A Contrarian View of Environmental Problems*, London, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1995.

in the environmental cause. Discrediting green discourses, by referring to matters where past environmentalists were supposedly wrong and disclosing their ‘true’ motives – funding – is Ridley’s favourite strategy. This goes together with a radical right-wing call for abolition of governmental regulation on the environment and the self-proclamation as ‘an environmentalist’.

A sign of the healthy divergence of views within the *Times* is that support for political action in Berlin is expressed in a short article on the same day ‘Oil states threaten summit’. However, the *Sunday Times* from 02.04.95 charged again. On pages 3 and 4, Norman Macrae, a journalist with a Promethean track-record (as can be understood from his auto-biographical account in the article and from Ridley’s words about him in the article above), signed an article headlined ‘Save the world: vote for an econut’. As can be immediately inferred from his choice of vocabulary, Mcrae adopts a strategy of scorning all ‘extreme greens’. Name calling can have a strong impact in profiling certain actors in a story (Vincent, 2000).

Macrae’s positioning strategy is also quite telling: ‘We sane people have seen off the econuts...’; ‘We have scotched so many ecolunacies more.’ The pronoun ‘we’ aggregates all those that believe in continuous economic growth in a community of righteous people that combat ‘them’, the ‘wicked’ and dangerous ones. Referring to the seminal book *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972)<sup>3</sup> as an ‘appalling American booklet’, Macrae recommends the reading of *Small is Stupid* (by Wilfred Beckerman), *Life on a Modern Planet* (by Richard North), and *Down to Earth* (by Matt Ridley). These books ‘show what mega nonsense both extreme greens and obsequious politicians habitually tell at ... conferences’ like the one taking place in Berlin. The summit and the issues discussed therein are thus invalidated.

In the *Independent*, Frances Cairncross is the author of a long analysis appearing on 27.03.95: ‘Global warming won’t cost the earth’. Author of *Costing the Earth* and

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<sup>3</sup> Sponsored by the Club of Rome (a group of industrialists and academics concerned with sustainability), *Limits to Growth* argued that exponential growth cannot continue forever in a finite system like the Earth. Given that nature’s resources are limited, limits have to be set for population and industrial output. This book has been very influential in reframing the relation between humans and the environment (some term this discourse as ‘survivalism’ – see Dryzek, 1997) and has inspired a vast range of other works (e.g. Brown, 1978; annual *State of the World* reports by the Worldwatch Institute).

*Green, Inc*<sup>4</sup>, and part of the staff of the *Economist*, known for its neo-liberal views, Cairncross advocates governmental inaction to prevent climate change since, she claims, it will be more adequate financially to adapt to it.

The most rational course is to adapt to climate change, when it happens. On past trends, most countries will by then be richer, and so better able to afford to build sea walls or develop drought-resistant species of plants. Money that might now be spent on curbing carbon-dioxide output can be invested instead, either in preventing other kinds of environmental damage or in creating productive assets that will generate future income to pay for adaptation.

We should all wait, get rich, and then adjust to climate change. This ‘rational’ position is obviously oblivious to the human and environmental damages that climate change may meanwhile cause. It does not account for the value of lost species and lost environments, disrupted lifestyles and economies and all the unsolvable dangers that climate change may bring.

In a concession to the environmental cause, the *Independent* let Charles Secrett, director of Friends of the Earth, publish a reply on the next day: ‘Another view: Global Warming’.

Despite the superficial attraction of this laissez-faire market approach ... it is a deeply selfish and dangerous response. By the time we know global warming is certain, it is likely to be too late to implement many adaptive responses.

Secrett presents some perceptive and incisive arguments.

The wait-and-see response won’t help many developing countries either. Their wealth-creating capacity, and the needs of their people, mostly depend on living natural resources such as soils, forests and the oceans....

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will help to solve other environmental problems and bring economic and social benefits today.

Cutting back on energy use saves money for householders and firms alike, reduces global warming and acid rain pollutants, and encourages industrial competitiveness.

... Such ‘win-win’ gains benefit the present generation and are most likely to improve life for future generations: the essence of sustainable development. We can have them if we act now. Surely that is the most rational response to global warming?

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<sup>4</sup> *Green, Inc. Guide to Business and the Environment*, London, Earthscan, 1995; *Costing the Earth*, London, Business Books, 1991.

Other contributions to creating a sense of risk and mobilizing concern in the *Independent* had been given by Nicholas Schoon and Geoffrey Lean. Schoon had reported that according to then-recent calculations of the Meteorological Office's Hadley Centre climate change would accelerate in the future ('Threat of global warming to grow faster', 21.03.95)<sup>5</sup>. Lean's article in the *Independent on Sunday*, 'Global warming puts Britain's climate down the plughole: Oceans. Gulf Stream under threat', from 26.03.95, alerts for the possibility of Britain's climate becoming much colder due to changes in ocean mechanisms that are essential for regulating the world's climates. In contrast, an editorial headlined 'Sharper, clearer, greener, better' from 25.05.95 had suggested that the environment should not be a preoccupation for the readers as it was now well under the control of politics.

In the best sense greenery is becoming political. It is no longer reliant upon the shock effect of millenarian predictions to gain attention, but has entered the real world of cost-benefit analysis.

Like the *Times* has often done, it is now the *Independent* that uses a strategy of 'rationalization', speaking of 'scrutiny, maturity and carefulness' with regard to the environment and of the need of 'clear heads and sharp minds'. Apparently reformist, (the article advocates 'no-regret' measures), this standing is conservative with regard to the present status quo, and can sustain environmentally damaging practices as the 'real world' of 'cost-benefit analysis' is full of biases and ideological assumptions (Jacobs, 1997; Spash, 1997; Davies and Demeritt, 2000).

The articles mentioned in this section clearly indicate the importance of ideological standpoints in discursive constructions of the politics of climate change.

## **2. A pre-emptive view**

The only article on the Berlin summit to appear in the first page of the *Sunday Times* (continued on p.15) was 'Meltdown for Berlin Earth summit' by Patricia Clough (19.03.95). Clough recounts the unfulfilled plans to set up a group of parallel 'events' in Berlin, including an ice pyramid that would melt throughout the conference

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<sup>5</sup> A few days later Schoon also writes an article on the disappearance of ice shelves: "God-like

reminding viewers – politicians and public alike – of what is happening to the polar ice caps; a mountain of garbage in the centre of Berlin to show how much rubbish is produced every hour in big cities; and scale models of the five continents that would sink in a Berlin lake illustrating the effects of sea level rise. None of this did take place in the end, we are told, due either to lack of sponsorship or to the fact that Germans ‘overdo it’ with their ‘great environmental awareness’. There is a general tone of criticism of the Berlin summit organizers for not having implemented these projects, qualified by Clough as ‘spectacular’. This is an ironic standing for the *Times*, that so often voices strong criticisms of ‘environmentalists’ and their direct actions. The lack of confidence in the summit’s achievements is immediately evoked by the headline that intends to have both literal and metaphorical readings. ‘The conference looks likely to be a flop’, we are warned.

This pre-emptive construction of the conference is also found in the *Independent*. In ‘Global warming gets cold shoulder’ (27.03.95), Nicholas Schoon believes that the ‘leaders gathering in Berlin for the world climate conference, lacking both information and unity of purpose, will merely play for time’.

Climate change remains, then, a largely unknown threat which will come to pass well outside most current senior politicians’ terms of office.

Willingly or not, Schoon legitimates the inertia of Western countries in relation to climate change with this anticipation of failure and by presenting action as an impossibility. Schoon continues the same line of analysis in ‘UN summit fuels global warming debate’ (29.03.95): ‘very little concrete progress is expected in Berlin despite stern warnings from Miss Merkel’<sup>6</sup>.

### **3. Ideological re-interpretations of scientific knowledge**

Like politics, science is powerfully filtered through ideological lenses in press reports of this period. Sean Ryan’s long and prominent article on pages 3 and 6 of the *Sunday Times*, ‘Global warming: why scientists are feeling the heat’ (26.03.95),

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hammer’ falls on Antarctic ice shelves’ (27.03.95).

<sup>6</sup> Angela Merkel was the German Environment Minister and the conference’s president.

explores the scientific grounds for action. While some ambiguity can be found in the article, the message is of general suspicion towards the thesis that climate change is happening and of opposition to political measures to tackle it. Here is how the article is closed:

Lindzen fears the Berlin summit could set governments on a course that would be wrong but legally unalterable before the year 2010. “If science in a few years can no longer sustain these forecasts, nothing will stop the policy. They are deciding what the policy will be regardless of the science.”

Together with Richard Lindzen, an American scientist known for his ideological and institutional commitment to conservative politics (see Gelbspan, 1997), a rank of other scientists are quoted by Ryan, including John Houghton, joint chairman of the IPCC, to support Ryan’s ‘doubts’.

Sir John Houghton ... *frankly acknowledges the uncertainties*. The IPCC predicts warming of at least 0.2C a decade endorsed by 400 scientists *but he admits*<sup>7</sup>: “We’re not saying we’ve seen it because the signal is still hidden somewhat in the noise. We are feeling more confident that we might be there.”

In what contextual circumstances was Houghton’s statement made? Was there an interpellation of the journalist that motivated this answer? And should we see in Houghton’s words a basis for postponing action or simply an indication that the climate sciences, like all others, operate within certain limits of certainty? The words of Houghton in the *Guardian* (‘Global warming summit at risk’, Paul Brown, 25.03.95) clarify where he stands.

“There is no doubt that global warming is happening. It is inevitable. The question is whether we can slow it down enough to avert the worst effects.”

And in an article totally devoted to Houghton’s views (‘Our man in the greenhouse’, Paul Brown, 29.03.95), he is introduced as someone ‘who helped to alert the world to global warming... managed to convince Margaret Thatcher, and most of the world, that global warming was a real threat’. A consistent discourse appears in Polly Ghazi’s already quoted article (26.03.95):

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<sup>7</sup> Emphasis added.

[A target of a 10% cut of CO<sub>2</sub> by 2010, proposed by the UK], says Sir John Houghton... is both easily achievable and the minimum needed to avert the worst consequences of warming ... 'If we don't act now, greenhouse gas emissions will rise uncontrollably, with incalculable consequences.'

In the *Times* issue of 27.03.95, it is the turn of William Burroughs to suggest that climate measurements are not reliable (in 'A climate of confusion'), with all the consequences this implies for policy. In another example of divergent readings and discursive uses of science by journalists, Burroughs cites research of the Meteorological Office to raise doubts about climate change while both Polly Ghazi (26.03.95) and Paul Brown ('Bird-watching helps clinch warming theory', *Guardian*, 25.03.95) cite the Hadley Centre for Climate Change, which belongs to the Met Office, to support the idea that global warming is a reality.

Together with articles that deny or cast doubts on the greenhouse effect, several texts can be found in the *Times* which refer to indicators of climate change. They are all authored by Nick Nuttall: 'Wayward iceberg comes to a halt on seabed' (23.03.95), 'Arctic trees show signs of life as temperatures rise' (25.03.95), 'Geese ruin Arctic wetlands as climate change boosts flocks' (30.03.95), and 'Rainfall pattern confirms climate fears' (31.03.95). Nuttall also advances a moderate strategy of confidence-building with regard to science elsewhere: 'scientists trying to decide whether global warming will become a reality are growing more confident about their predictions' (e.g. 'Insurers support green reforms at Berlin summit', 27.05.95).

#### **4. Confrontation of interests**

Like Rio, Berlin was the stage of opposition of governments representing highly divergent standings in relation to climate change. A substantial part of the articles published in this period frames the politics of climate change as a conflict of interests. Paul Brown's 'Environment: The percentage game' (*Guardian*, 29.03.95) describes the 'power blocks' present in Berlin. Brown suggests that this is a 'gloomy picture' where agreement will be difficult. The association of the oil producing countries (OPEC) was presented as one of the major starting stumbling blocks, with their stringent opposition to any cuts on greenhouse gases ('Global warming summit at risk. West tries to force

Opec nations to drop CO2 veto as first proof of climate', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 25.03.95; 'Oil states threaten summit', unattributed, *Times*, 25.03.95). However, in the first day of the conference they conceded their vetoing power, as John Holland and Nigel Hawkes tell in the *Times* ('Oil states concede veto at UN climate conference', 29.03.95)<sup>8</sup>. In the midst of the 'downbeat mood' the agreement to the OPEC countries of not blocking the summit's proceedings is qualified as a 'small success'. Refreshingly within the *Times*, large part of the article builds on Angela Merkel's views of the summit, who attempts a strategy of moralization by referring to the responsibility towards protecting today's and future generations from the harms of climate change. Other 'pro-action' sources are also quoted.

Another crucial confrontation opposed industrialized and developing countries ('First World in the hot seat', Reuter in Berlin, *Guardian*, 04.04.95). Developing countries were strongly opposed to committing to any limits in GHG emissions. At the same time, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) was making some pungent calls for major cuts in emissions of Western countries, with the newly acquired support of countries like China and India.

The press put a big emphasis on these collisions and generated an intense sense of crisis regarding the conference<sup>9</sup>. Again, together with Germany, the UK attempted to take a leading role in international negotiations on climate change through the voice of John Gummer, Environment Secretary. The challenge of Britain and Germany to the USA concerning commitment to cutting greenhouse gases was reproduced both in the *Times* ('America urged to back new attack on global warming', Nick Nuttall, 06.04.95) and in the *Guardian* ('US challenged on global warming', Paul Brown, 06.04.95). In the latter article Gummer is quoted: 'It is for the European Union, the biggest trading group in the world, to take a lead at these talks, with the UK at the centre of events.' Steve Crawshaw's short article in the *Independent*, 'Kohl turns heat on world's polluters' (06.04.95), focused on Kohl's call for 'urgent action to prevent catastrophe as a result of climatic change.' In his dramatic appeal Helmut Kohl, German

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<sup>8</sup> Still, oil-producing countries tried to combat the negotiations with a variety of strategies, such as the denial that CO<sub>2</sub> resulting from human activities was interfering with the climate, as suggested by a Kuwaiti climatologist representing the Oil Ministry ('Kuwait takes global heat off CO<sub>2</sub>', Agencies in Berlin and Kuwait, *Guardian*, 29.03.95).

<sup>9</sup> 'Discord threatens summit to counter global warming', Nick Nuttall, *Times*, 05.04.95; 'Gummer attempts to break climate conference impasse', Paul Brown, *Guardian*, 05.04.95.



Chancellor, referred to the 'climate killer' carbon dioxide' and to 'national egoism' and said that climate change would 'destroy the efforts ... to increase prosperity'. The most central individual figures in the press representation of COP-1 were Angela Merkel, Helmut Kohl and John Gummer who get a favourable depiction in their attempts to 'rescue' the negotiations and achieve international agreement.

## **5. A new major actor in the media discourse**

The insurance industry had a high-powered, high-visibility participation in Berlin. The leaders of this business publicized their enormous concern with the losses resulting from a spur of extreme climate events, stated that they believed it was due to the greenhouse effect, and claimed for strong political action. All three newspapers reported on the standing of the insurance industry. The *Times* issue of 27.03.95 carries two articles by Nick Nuttall on the standing of the insurance industry vis-à-vis climate change. Headlined 'Insurers support green reforms at Berlin summit' (page 8), one of the articles conveys the idea that different sectors – scientific, political and economic – were coming together in the acknowledgement that action for combating climate change was necessary and viable. It is a quite progressive article in the discursive context of the *Times*. Along with insurers, Nuttall cites one study that shows that 'there would be a small but significant gain in economic performance if the level of tax was shifted from labour to natural resources such as oil, gas and coal.' This is the first and only reference in all the three newspapers to such a crucial economic reordering. A second study reveals that a 'well-designed tax reform package could perhaps create a million jobs a year by 2005 without adding to inflation or the public debt.'

Nuttall's second article, 'Insurers to set up catastrophe funds' (page 41) has a predominant financial framing as he points to the need insurers have felt of creating special funds to meet the costs of natural disasters resulting from climate change. But scientific knowledge also permeates the analysis: 'At least two of the world's big reinsurance firms, Munich Re and Swiss Re, had stated that they believe global warming is a reality.' The engagement of the insurance business, a highly conservative institution, with the 'pro' action side in the climate change debate may have conferred the required legitimacy to the issue for a revision of standings within the *Times*.

On the same day, the *Guardian* carried an article by Roger Cowe on the insurers' claims: 'Insurers sound alarm about rising cost of global warming'. Besides pressing governments for 'tougher action', 'industry experts ... made it clear they did not want to wait for conclusive proof that global warming was leading to serious climatic changes' in a promotion of a precautionary approach to the problem. The *Independent's* article on the topic, 'Insurers back greens' pleas' by Steve Crawshaw (07.04.95), reports on the meeting where one of the 'insurance bosses' said 'I'm not happy at all. There's not enough clarity. We need a clear political statement.' This kind of assertiveness, together with a pragmatic 'no-nonsense' attitude contrasts with intense 'manoeuvring, arguments, and back-room compromises' between the 160 governments.

Although having previously appeared in the press coverage of climate change (Carvalho, 2000a), never before had the insurance industry taken up such a prominent and openly political agency. Touching the financial nerve, climate change thus appears as a very concrete and immediate threat. In this vein, insurers also pushed for a revision of the relation between scientific knowledge and policy-making. As argued by Stripple (2000), the insurance industry played a significant role in the securitization of climate change. The presence of insurers in Berlin and an important meeting they staged towards the end of the summit had been arranged by Greenpeace, in the follow-up of a strategic decision of allying with this branch of business. Leggett (2000) offers an interesting insider view of the proceedings and personal contacts leading to Berlin and to the mentioned meeting. The discourse coalition with insurance companies and some financial institutions was thus a winning strategy for Greenpeace, that is also referred to in all three papers, and for promoting the cause of climate change. The intervention of insurance companies may have brought a significant 'clout' (Crawshaw, *Independent*, 07.04.95) with regard to governmental negotiations.

## **6. Evaluating the outcomes**

The day after the summit's closure Paul Brown's article was headlined 'Way open for cuts in greenhouse gases' (*Guardian*, 08.04.95). The overall tone was one of satisfaction with the deal. Although considering the document 'a fudge', Brown says

that ‘for the first time it clears a way for hard worldwide negotiations on targets for reducing CO2 emissions’. Positive reactions come from the UK and US governments, and an NGO (Greenpeace) and, for opposing reasons, dissatisfaction comes from the small island states and the OPEC countries (‘represented’ by the Global Climate Coalition). Another short article on the same page gave the details of the agreement (‘Berlin Mandate’ starts countdown to the cutting of emissions by 2005’, unattributed). Brown’s critical endorsement of the summit’s achievements goes on in ‘No funeral in Berlin’<sup>10</sup> (12.04.95), where he refers to Richard Benedick’s<sup>11</sup> views on the international pressure that will come from the Berlin Mandate, but also to the ‘anguished statements’ of AOSIS and to ‘growling and angry Donald H Pearlman’ of the Global Climate Coalition.

In the *Independent*, ‘Berlin Climate Summit: Critics cold-shoulder deal on global warming – Door left open for tougher curbs on greenhouse gases by 1997’ is the headline for Steve Crawshaw’s article from 08.04.95. Most of the article reproduces negative views of both AOSIS delegates and OPEC. NGOs were said to be ‘cautious, but not dismissive’. Crawshaw’s analysis continues the following day in the *Independent on Sunday*. With the title ‘Global warming: High pressure forecast but hot air wins the day’, the article contests the little achievements and all the political ‘razzmatazz’ of the summit. Crawshaw argues that NGOs ‘played a key role in defining the agenda’ and ‘set the tone’ of the conference. Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are few references to environmental NGOs in the press in this period. This may be associated to their ‘integration’ in the institutions that negotiated the Berlin document. As Crawshaw remarks:

The German government had even invited representatives of environmental NGOs to form part of the official delegation. The NGOs, worried about losing their credibility, said no.

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<sup>10</sup> This headline is a reference to the funeral of gangster Ronnie Kray, which took place in the same week and received widespread media attention.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Benedick was the US’s chief negotiator on the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer and participated in Berlin in representation of the ‘International Academy of the Environment’ and World Wide Fund for Nature.

Still there was an increasing participation of NGOs in the formal negotiating process (see Rahman and Roncerel, 1994) which may have decreased their antagonistic profile that the media aim for (see also Shackley, 1997).

Nick Nuttall's 'Last-gasp deal agreed to curb greenhouse gases' makes an ambiguous assessment of the summit's achievements in the *Times* (08.04.95). On the one hand, the final document is considered 'positive'; on the other hand, the final word in the article (which is significant in terms of the structural organization of the text) goes – uncontested – to the Global Climate Coalition. Its executive director is cited saying 'failure to tie in developing nations put American jobs, economic activity and international competitiveness at "grave risk"'. One may ask whether this is more relevant or pressing for the UK public than the consequences of a free growing greenhouse effect.

Starting with a cynical look into international environmental politics the *Times* editorial 'A climate for bargains' from the same day then takes up the role of the realistic, rhetoric-denouncer agent.

...the silly season of environmental diplomacy may with luck be fading. The besetting sin of UN conferences is that they set inflated goals which governments have no intention of meeting.

The *Times* also constructs itself as a promoter of the environmental cause by saying that '[s]ound environmental stewardship is too important to be held hostage to the politics of gesture and the pseudo-decisions which go with it'. It acknowledges that 'the climate convention signed at Rio is worth building on' and that 'reducing output of man-made "greenhouse" gases is sensible as a precautionary measure'. Yet, the *Times* blames developing countries for not making commitments on greenhouse emissions. The subtitle of the editorial – 'Developing countries have responsibilities too' – reframes the main headline: the word 'bargain' means not necessarily 'agreement' but 'good value', 'cheap' and 'easy'. Shifting responsibility towards the developing countries follows naturally.

At this rate, the Maldivé Islands will sink beneath the rising waves before poor nations learn that conservation is not just a novel excuse for blackmail.

Not surprisingly the editorial defends emissions trading as ‘the best idea floated in Berlin.’

Overall, the press made a low valuation of the Berlin summit, as indicated by a relatively small number of articles. The *Guardian*<sup>12</sup> advances a critique of other newspapers’ coverage of Berlin in ‘Too hot to handle’ by Robin Russel-Jones (05.04.95).

In the week when global warming was at the top of the world’s agenda, newspapers chose to cast their eyes elsewhere. During the four days that five newspapers could not find space for any mention of global warming or ozone depletion, those same papers devoted 163 pages to sport and an incredible 19 pages to the funeral of Ronnie Kray. Do people think that the burial of a malevolent old gangster from the East End is of greater importance than the integrity of the ecosystems that sustain life on this planet?

‘No funeral in Berlin’ (Paul Brown, 12.04.95) offers more of the *Guardian*’s reflexive analysis about the way the press ignored Berlin:

‘News editors of the world over yawned last week when history was being made at the World Climate Conference in Berlin... Not that there was a lack of passion at the conference; at least millions and probably billions will live or die as a result of the action which will follow the Berlin Mandate.’

As with the Rio conference, the press excluded (or awarded only a minor space to) crucial issues from debate. One such case is ‘Joint Implementation’, a proposal for technology transfer and similar measures that would allow industrialized countries to take credits for their participation in reducing emissions in developing countries, and which was a central part of political discussions in Berlin (see Brown, 1996)<sup>13</sup>. Unlike Rio, Berlin did not even catalyse news editors to properly amplify environmental problems and awareness.

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<sup>12</sup> The *Guardian* had more articles than the other newspapers but the nine out of 15 were rather short.

<sup>13</sup> Brown’s latter article is the only one in all three papers to discuss some of the implications of this plan.

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