Investigating the Journalistic Field: The Influence of Objectivity as a Journalistic Norm on the Public Debate on Genetic Engineering in New Zealand

A thesis
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The University of Waikato
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between journalism as a specific type of socio-cultural practice and the production of meaning in public discussion. Through a case study of newspaper coverage of the issue of genetic engineering in New Zealand (2001-2002), it specifically examines journalists' newsgathering methods, their use of sources and their story-telling frames, and analyses how the news media uses the norm of objectivity to shape public debate on contentious issues.

The study argues that elements and structures of journalistic practice both determine a newspaper's ability to address events and issues in a meaningful way and define a newspaper's potential to create a space for public debate. Drawing on field theory, discourse studies and the sociology of journalism, the thesis develops a new operational framework for investigation of journalistic practice by looking at the ideal of objectivity as a *method* of news gathering, an *account* of representing reality, and an *attitude* towards the reality so constructed. This framework is applied in the case study of newspaper coverage of the GE issue where four components of journalistic practice are analysed: journalistic form, transparency of newsgathering, sources and frame. Using content analysis, discourse analysis, interviews and a survey, the thesis explores the relationship between journalistic norms around these elements of the practice and the discursive potential of the news text to represent, interpret and construct reality.

The findings of this study highlight the tension between outmoded forms of practice and the complexity of issues in the public domain. The analysis reveals how the norm of objectivity, originally developed as a shield for the defence of the autonomy of the profession to mediate reality, became, in the case of media coverage of genetic engineering, an obstacle in extending journalism's potential to contribute to public debate. As a method, objectivity failed to provide a set of transparent protocols for the representation of the issue in the public arena; as an account, it reflected the impossibility of separating 'facts' from 'views' and

positions of detachment from those of partisanship; and as an attitude, objectivity was endangered by the increasing power of economic imperatives in the production of news. Following this analysis, the thesis explores the influence of journalistic norms on public debate by looking at journalism as a text, as a discursive practice and as a field of cultural production. The GE issue, constructed in the New Zealand press as a key component of the 'knowledge economy', drew attention to the dynamics between the economic imperatives and professional standards of the journalistic field. The objectivity norm was reduced in news reports to reporting 'what people say' rather than what the issue or argument meant, which led to a simplification of the genetic engineering issue in the public domain. The study concludes with the call for a re-examination of the journalistic field in light of the press's incapacity to challenge the status quo and map the social world for its readers.

PREFACE

I was a journalist for over 20 years before embarking on a career in the Academy. During my time as a journalist in Europe, I worked as a reporter, a foreign correspondent and as a deputy editor of a leading daily newspaper, and subsequently as the editor of a weekly newspaper. In the transition to academia, I dabbled briefly in public relations with a political party in New Zealand.

During my time in political PR, the report of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification was released. The media covered the story extensively, Parliament discussed the issue heatedly, and people on the street, in cafes, in beauty salons argued passionately about the commercial release of genetically engineered crops.

I often observed how a press release written by a media relations officer would appear the next day, almost word for word, in a news report under the name of a journalist. I also saw how, when some Members of Parliament offered an interview to the press on the need to start labeling GE food, the pro-GE lobby was immediately all over the media the next day, arguing that GE food labeling was a nonsense. The war between PR specialists ran across the pages of all newspapers without any media resistance or any visible attempt to provide citizens with the necessary information required to arrive at a reasoned opinion about GE.

Was this just bad journalism? Or was it an explicit example of New Zealand's news culture? Was it a structural 'defect' in journalism? Or was it the reflection of an outmoded logic of the journalistic field? At first sight, everything seemed to be in order. News reports highlighted the most important issue in the lead, a balance of views was sought from different sources, and the news section was clearly separated from the commentary. Still, something appeared to have shifted: The news stories about the GE issue did not deal with the merits and risks of genetically engineered food. Instead, they told stories about the political battle over GE.

It was then that I realized that the press coverage of the GE issue in New Zealand would serve well as a case study for a long-planned investigation of changes in contemporary journalism. This thesis is the result of that investigation.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Priya Kurian and Dr. Debashish Munshi, both journalists-turned-academics, for their sophisticated guidance, academic help and continued faith in my approach to the subject. Their support helped me find a way to move smoothly from practising journalism to conceptualising journalism.

I am also indebted to journalists and scholars, friends and colleagues, who took the time to discuss the issues raised in this text. In particular, I am thankful to Dr. Tim Bale, who provided academic encouragement at the very beginning of the study, and to Dr. Kevin Barnhurst who helped clarify a dilemma at the very end. I am grateful to anonymous reviewers of the refereed articles extracted from this thesis for their useful comments along the way.

I would like to thank my colleagues at Victoria University of Wellington for providing me with the opportunity to teach the theory and practice of journalism and for providing a period of research and study leave in the final stages of writing this thesis. A big thanks also to Linda Pears, who helped with editing and proof reading of the manuscript.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Objectivity emphasizes qualities and values that reassure readers, listeners and viewers that the journalists are not using their privileged position to push their own agendas and views. Objective journalists have no axe to grind, no personal interest or active involvement in the issue at hand. Their reports are fair, even handed and balanced. They give equal accounts of both or all sides of the story without trying to determine whether any one view is more truthful, accurate or valid than another. They stick to the facts. They report the truth.

Advocates of objective journalism are not blind to their imperfect results in achieving such standards, but argue their failures do not mean those standards should necessarily be changed or lowered. The objective journalist insists that while the standards may be impossible to reach, they are something to aspire to.

(Al Morrison 2002, p.59)

1.1 Introduction

The concept of objectivity, usually summarised as a two-fold notion of professional aspiration and accomplishment, has been a leading norm and a key element of the self-perception of journalists for more than a century. Defined as a "moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing" (Schudson 2001, p.149), objectivity appeared as the main value of American journalism and taking different forms, slowly but gradually during the course of the 20th century, spread to the Western world.[1] Although many academics and professionals agree that 'objective', value-neutral reporting does

[1] In terms of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) categorisation of media systems there is "much in common" between Western Europe and North America "in terms of their history, culture and institutions." (p.4).

not exist, and that the notion of objectivity takes different forms in different news cultures, the discussion about the concept has never stopped: objectivity is an "ideological cornerstone of journalism" (Deuze 2005, p.448) and is the key for understanding the news media's legitimacy and credibility to mediate reality for the public.

When New Zealand journalist Al Morrison**,** cited above, says **"**the objective journalist insists that while the standards may be impossible to reach, they are something to aspire to", he highlights the sharp contrast between aspiring to the value of objectivity and applying it in journalistic practice. The longevity of the objectivity norm among journalists, the way journalists declare that their goal is to stay 'detached' and 'impartial', while being 'accurate', 'fair', and 'balanced' (Lippmann cited in Reston 1991; Cronkite 1997; Woodward 2005) and the extensive scholarship that points towards an absence of 'neutral' journalism (see Glasgow University Media Group 1976; Hallin 1986; Carey 1989; Schudson 1995; Bourdieu 2005, for example) indicate that there is a lack of a shared conversational platform to discuss journalism as an individually and socially created field of cultural production.

The journalistic field's interactions with wider society, influenced by journalism's functions, settings, agents, logic and norms is easily reduced to the issue of whether journalists tell the truth when reporting reality. This simplification illustrates the main enigma that surrounds journalism seen as "the actions that have come to be associated with news work" (Zelizer 2004, p.22): does the newspaper truthfully tell the readers what has happened in the world beyond their own experiences or does the news text simply signify a product of institutionally structured social practice? Prominent communications and sociology scholars (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986; Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987; Bagdikian 1992; Bird 1992; McCeshney 1993; Nerone 1994; Curran and Gurevitch 1996; Schudson 1995) suggest looking at the news in relation to the set of factors that influence its shape: political economy of the society, the cultural context and the social organisation of news work. The question 'what is journalism' becomes the question 'what is news', generating the wide spectrum of scholarly exploration of

issues related to the character of news and the position of the news media in society. This research project aims to bring journalism, both as a text and as a specific type of socio-cultural practice, back to the centre of the inquiry in order to identify how journalistic norms contribute to the production of meaning in the society. The study investigates media coverage of one topical issue in New Zealand society – genetic engineering (GE)[2] – to discuss journalism practice and to identify the links between the norms and debate and the relationship between the press[3] and society.

A simple methodological dilemma in the study of the newspaper coverage of genetic engineering pointed towards an important gap in existing scholarship, namely the absence of an operational framework for investigating journalism in all its aspects: as a field, a profession, a practice, a text and a cultural phenomenon (see Zelizer, 2004). Arguing that 'objectivity' is still the most important concept in a discussion of journalism's mediation of reality, this thesis calls for a re-examination of objectivity and a deconstruction of the elements it entails. Scholarship on objectivity (Schudson 1978, 1995, 2001; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Hallin 1986; Goldmark 2000) confirms how hard it is to identify and explain the norm and the interplay between codes and social practice. Journalism studies are defined as "critical analysis of the various processes involved in gathering, evaluating, interpreting, researching, writing, editing, reporting and presenting information and comment on a wide range of subjects" (Franklin *et al*. 2005, p.128) but the inquiries on objectivity testify to the fragmentation of journalism studies into the 'gathering', 'writing' or 'presenting information and comment' segments of analysis.

[2] Genetic modification and genetic engineering are used interchangeably in this thesis.

[3] Two issues related to the use of the word 'press' need clarification. Firstly, the consistent use of the word 'press' rather than the words 'media' or 'news media' underlines the focus of this thesis on journalists and their contribution to the production of meaning in society. Some authors see the decrease in the use of the word 'press' in journalism studies as an attempt to undermine serious journalism. Rosen (2003), for example, argues that "it was a mistake" to call "the press something else, more modern, abstract, inclusive, elastic, and of course more commercial, *The Media*." For Rosen (2003), "The press has become the ghost of democracy in the media machine, and we need to keep it alive." The second issue is use of the word 'press' with the lower case 'p'. This choice reflects the contemporary usage in journalism scholarship and the variety of meanings developed around the press.

Based on a critical discussion of existing theoretical models that have been used to discuss journalism and the objectivity norm, followed by a critical analysis of my case study of genetic engineering, this thesis offers a new methodological tool to investigate links between journalistic practice, its foundation and outcomes, and the nature, context and interactions of the journalistic field as a whole. The thesis presents an alternative framework for inquiry into journalistic practice by identifying the concept of objectivity as a notion that encompasses the journalistic 'method', the journalistic 'account' and the journalistic 'approach' to reality. The thesis uses a case study of the media coverage of genetic engineering to test how this operational model of objectivity serves the investigation of interactions between the field of journalism and the wider society. It looks at the news text by highlighting a less explored area of the relation between the news media and society, namely the spectrum of judgements journalists make when gathering and presenting information on a subject. These professional judgements determine and shape how and what is presented in the news media as one of the arenas for public debate in society.

The field of journalism is not only a field of production, but also a community of practices created by the interaction between an individual and a group, and between the actual and the historical. Combining empirical analysis with what has been termed the 'field theory' frame (Benson & Neveu 2005), the study discusses the role of the journalist in the production of meaning. It maps the New Zealand journalistic field and the New Zealand newspaper industry and its structural relations, but focuses on the practice and a set of implicit and explicit norms that define the work of professionals in the industry. Taking as a starting point the statement that the "study of technique is the study of process" (Holbert & Zubric 2001, p.50), it identifies and interprets practical options available to journalists in their everyday work when covering an issue such as genetic engineering, and uses that platform to talk about the influence of journalistic norms on public debate. The choice of form, the use of sources, the transparency of newsgathering and the imposition of a frame indicate how journalistic rules are embedded in a news text and how they are related to reality.

This study offers a descriptive and interpretative account of the coverage of the genetic engineering issue in New Zealand by mainstream newspapers in the country. It discusses the state of professional journalism and explains how different strategies of inserting information into news text contribute to the representation, interpretation and construction of reality. The study is focused on professional journalism in broadsheet newspapers as the place where journalists historically have claimed to serve the public interest (see Schudson 1995, Allan 2004, Elsaka 2004). This is not to claim that other forms of journalism, such as public and civic journalism or talk back radio programmes, lack the potential to impact on public debate. They do. But this research project is focused on journalism in mainstream newspapers because of the significant influence of print journalism on the way issues are presented in other media and in the public arena.

The analysis of the genetic engineering coverage shows how news discourse is formed as well as the ways in which news discourse reflects and rationalises dialogue in other fields – political, economic and scientific. It discusses journalism not only because the "wider society depends on the quality of its journalism for the efficacy of its institutions and for understanding in every sphere" (De Burgh, 2003, p.95), but also because discussion about the role of the news media in society is impossible without a detailed discussion about professional ideology as a system of norms and standards that define journalistic work.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The set of norms – rules, tools, textual devices and modes of representation – that journalists apply in their everyday work defines the profession and indicates the autonomy of the field in relation to the wider society. Newspaper coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand was deemed to be biased by those opposed to genetic engineering, but any attempt to question the autonomy of the journalistic field was fiercely rejected by journalists.[4] It is hard to find a journalist or an editor in New Zealand who would say that newspaper reporting on GE was influenced

[4] An initial study (Rupar 2002) included an analysis of letters to the editor where the question of newspapers' stand on the issue had been a subject of dispute.

by political or corporate power. This is not surprising as, in terms of freedom of the press, New Zealand is ranked among the highest in the world by the Freedom Forum Scale (2004). Yet, the New Zealand Press's almost unanimous support for the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification (the document that outlined recommendations to proceed with GE in New Zealand) raises questions about its real freedom.

If we agree with journalists' claims that there are no outside pressures on the press from either the state or from business, how can one explain the phenomenon where three different newspapers published proportionally an almost identical number of articles on genetic engineering in which the two principal sources, the Government and the Green Party, are equally cited? Many media scholars have identified and discussed journalists' reliance on official sources (see Hall *et al*. 1978; Schlesinger & Tumber 1995; Manning 2001; Cottle 2003), but few have explained how an identical news judgement (that the Government's and the Green's point of view should be equally treated, for example) is collectively constructed.

The position of a journalist is that of a mediator in pursuit of truth, who overcomes the effects of the singularity of the event and who, by interpreting the event, transforms reported reality into universal 'experience' and common shared knowledge. The two distinctive visions of the journalist, the position of 'neutral reporter' and of 'participant', are developed in relation to the wider social space: "the first refers to ideas of the press as informer, interpreter and instrument of government (lending itself as a channel or mirror); the second is the traditional 'fourth estate' notion, covering ideas of the press as representative of the public, critic of government, advocate of policy and policy-maker" (McQuail 2000, p.253). The majority of journalists see themselves as neutral interpreters of events (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996), a position that reveals objectivity as the main professional value. In making news judgements, gathering information and presenting events and issues, journalists are led by a set of norms that define how this important work should be done, what is good and what is bad, what should be welcomed and what avoided.

The key questions, however, remain. What are journalistic norms? What are the rules about doing a proper job? How do the rules develop and how do they relate to the outside world? Where does the power of journalistic norms come from? How are the principles of objectivity, accuracy, balance and fairness – the most commonly used terms for identifying journalistic norms – reflected in the news text? For example, in the case of the coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand, what were the internal, journalistic reasons that transformed that complex issue into a 'hot' political topic? How does it happen that the same neo-liberal language, "genetically modified language", can be identified in all three newspapers? [5]

The nature of the issue certainly influences the content of the news report. This thesis, however, assumes that the logic of the journalistic field also has influence on the coverage. In the late 1970s Tuchman (1978) found that giving both sides a chance to have their say on an issue was an act of self-defence by journalists, where they used 'objectivity' to protect themselves from making mistakes. This situation then raises the question of what effects these acts of self-defence have on the status of an issue of public debate. Three decades on, what has changed in the world of journalism? This study tests the hypothesis that there is a kind of professional and intellectual narrowness where contemporary journalism resides. It investigates the norms embedded in the professional standards of news judgements that significantly influence wider discussions in society. The focus on journalistic practice, roots, manifestations and outcomes aims to draw attention to the rules of the game, the "pre-law" or the "customary rules" (Bourdieu 2002, p.16) that exist in a professional group memory and "are themselves the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations" (*ibid.*). The "customary rules" in the journalistic field are the explicit[6] and implicit schemes that both regulate and define the work of the agents in the field.

[5] The social construction of GE debate from a neo-liberal platform has been noted in UK too (see Cook 2004).

[6] Newspaper style guides, used in New Zealand dailies, are focused on stylistic questions, while the Code of Ethics and Press Council's Statement of Principles – discussed in Chapter 7 – provide a broad umbrella for everyday work.

This study then looks specifically at how four elements of journalistic practice – form, source, newsgathering and frame – and their relation to the concept of objectivity – create the notion of 'common sense' in a newspaper. It investigates journalistic norms developed around these elements of practice: the distinction between facts and views in relation to the 'form', the balance of opinions in relation to the 'source', the transparency of newsgathering in relation to 'newsgathering' and the contextualisation of the story in relation to the 'frame'. The media coverage of genetic engineering, given the intensity of reporting and variety of issues discussed (Rupar 2002), signals that there is a need for re-examining the journalistic customary rules. It seems that the 'practice' not only shapes the structure of the journalistic field but also creates its logic. The journalistic field itself represents a very important 'shaping' factor but, as Benson (2004) points out, it has been largely ignored because "models in the sociology of news have tended to either aggregate societal level influences (chiefly political and economic) that are analytically and often empirically quite distinct or overemphasize micro-level influences (news routines, bureaucratic pressures)" (p.275). The challenge is to find a way to identify how journalistic professional ideology defines the "inherent logic of the media system" (Castells cited in Benson 2004) and critically reassess both its appearance and power.

This study reassesses the logic of the field by deconstructing the contemporary attributes of 'detached', 'objective', 'neutral', 'accurate', 'fair' and 'balanced' reporting in journalistic practice. Assuming that the practice is more than the mechanical imprint of socially constructed models and roles, this investigation identifies the features of journalism that "mark the authority and character of news-gathering in ways that still shape the world of reporters and the world of the rest of us who read and listen to the news" (Schudson, 1988, p.228).

Two concepts are central to this study: '*journalism*', understood as a field, with norms, forms, roles, voices, hierarchy, openness and closeness towards other fields, and '*public debate*', understood as an articulated communication between the agents of different fields. The question that this study addresses is: how do journalistic norms, under the umbrella of objectivity, articulate the 'truth' about an issue and how does this 'truth' about an issue relate to the views presented in

public debate? Finding and telling the truth, as the history of journalism has shown, is a complex if not impossible task. It is related, among other things, to a particular news culture. What we know from existing comparative studies is that news culture comes about as a result of an "intervening variable between people – journalists, sources or public – and a given 'objective' situation – media events, organisations, infrastructures, and systems – through which citizens inform or are informed" (Deuze 2002a, p.134). The understanding of objectivity therefore differs around the globe, but not many studies have been undertaken to identify those differences and discuss their implications for the interactions between the fields of political, social and cultural production. According to a 2004 survey (Lealand 2004)[7] New Zealand journalists value their profession for its abilities to "provide objective reportage", "influence public debate and discussion", and "communicate between the various sectors of society" (p.190). But what is 'objective reportage'?

Objectivity is a complex notion "when one goes beyond the simple idea that the news should reliably (therefore honestly) report what is really going on in the world" (Hackett, 1984 cited in McQuail 2000, p.320). Donsbach and Klett (1993) speculate that an average American citizen might receive, in a form of objective reporting, "a broader and more impartial picture of what the different interest groups have to say in each news medium", whereas in continental Europe, journalists, in a form of interpretative or evaluative reporting "might go directly to what they might think of as analysis, interpretation or evaluation and skip the common carrier role of presenting fairly the arguments of all sides" (p.80). A European audience "gets a deeper and more complex picture but also one which is affected by the communicator's or news medium's world view," say Donsbach and Klett (*ibid.*), who wonder if Anglo-American journalism better serves the public's understanding of news issues.

[7] The very low rate of survey responses casts a shadow over the findings and prevents the survey from being seen as a national one. The author expressed reservations in relation to the sample size of the survey because there was only 30 per cent response rate (297 journalists responded), but presented some of the results.

This study poses the same question in relation to New Zealand journalism and uses the newspapers' coverage of GE to test the opposite argument: that the Anglo-Saxon notion of balancing two opposing sides might not be sufficient to depict the complexity of the modern world. What is missing in news stories that plainly state different accounts of reality is interpretation and analysis that contextualise the issue and help the reader not to decide between conflicting sides but to understand their arguments. This characteristic of 'interpretative journalism' might correspond more dynamically with the complexity of the contemporary world. If journalism is a 'developing activity' as Morrison (2002, p.70) rightly points out, then it picks up the best from each news approach: from 'objective journalism' comes the doctrine of fairness, independence and public duty, and from 'evaluative journalism' come contextualisation and the right to make judgements. The simple application of having both sides of the story (see Gamson & Modigliani 1989) becomes inadequate when portraying the modern world. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) argue that there is a need for reintroducing the clarity convention in journalism, which specifies the role of the journalist in mediating reality, because it will increase the truth value of the information it conveys. This convention is relevant, as the following study shows, because the social construction of reality no longer comes from the simple interaction between sources and journalists. Rather, it occurs between 'journalists' and a new class of professionals that Schudson (2003) calls 'para-journalists' – journalists working as public relations and press officers in institutions, companies and organisations that are used as news sources. The impact of news sources coming from public relations, a profession that "occupies a central position in today's wider promotional culture" (Cottle 2003, p.6), could be better managed if their communicative power is clear in the text. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001, p.80) warn: "If journalists are truth seekers, it must follow that they should be honest and truthful with their audiences, too – that they be truth presenters … The only way in practice to level with people about what you know is to reveal as much as possible about sources and methods."

1.3 The case for investigation

How does the rule of transparency function in New Zealand journalism? In order to approach questions related to the issue of the interaction between journalistic norms and public debate, this thesis uses newspaper coverage of genetic engineering as a case study. The examples, features and context presented by this case study not only give an insight into reporting on GE but also into more general contemporary trends in journalism practice when covering important social issues.

The topic of genetic engineering dominated the public arena for almost a year (2001–2002) and polarized New Zealand society more than any other issue at the time. Extensive and diverse media coverage of this issue offered a rich selection of material for examining New Zealand journalism and its relation to a wider social context. The New Zealand press first became interested in stories of genetic engineering at the end of the 1990s. Although genetic engineering had been part of the country's bio-medical research, it was not widely discussed in the public sphere until imported unlabeled genetically modified food was found in New Zealand shops in the late 1990s (Weaver & Motion 2002). The pros and cons of GE became a subject of enormous public and political debate,[8] and the issue was later used by some political parties (*e.g*. the Green Party, the Alliance and the Labour Party) to fuel their electoral campaigns in the 1999 general election.

Having won that election, the Labour Party, with the support of the Greens and the Alliance, established the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (RCMG) with the aim of investigating the "strategic options available to New Zealand" (Eichelbaum *et al*. 2001, p.6). The Commission organized wide public debate: more than 10,000 individual submissions were received; public hearings lasted 13 weeks and involved nearly 300 witnesses; 15 public meetings were set up; a public opinion survey was ordered and background papers, workshops and scoping meetings were requested. This extensive consultation raised awareness of the issue and contributed to a wider understanding of the environment. The consultation process showed that while most were comfortable with genetic modification for medical purposes, many strongly opposed other uses. After a

[8] For a more detailed overview of the GE issue see the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification (Eichelbaum 2001).

year, the Royal Commission released its findings in a Report with the theme "preserving opportunities" (Eichelbaum *et al*. 2001, p.359) and the message to proceed with caution. The recommendations opened a new round of heated and polarizing debate that lasted another year. The media coverage of genetic engineering has taken various forms since the release of the Royal Commission's Report. The press initially framed the issue as political, and the principal voices were from the government and a range of political parties. Half a year later, newspapers started looking at GE variously, as a business, environmental, health, and science issue. A year on from the release of the Report, the issue returned to being a political one.

This study looks at articles on GE in three major broadsheet New Zealand newspapers published in three different cities: the *New Zealand Herald*, published in Auckland, the business capital of New Zealand; the *Dominion (Post)*[9], published in Wellington, the political capital of New Zealand; and the *Press*, published in Christchurch, a regional centre of the South Island.[10] The New Zealand press system has characteristics of the 'liberal model' of media system (Hallin & Mancini 2004), a model with a relative dominance of commercial media, high autonomy of journalism and a high level of freedom of the press. The countries that authors refer to are UK, USA, Ireland and Canada, but given its description, the liberal model would also include New Zealand. Unlike the UK or USA, however, where competition dictates trends in the newspaper market, the New Zealand market is carefully divided. It has two big players who own 90 percent of the print media, the press is regional and, in a country with four million citizens and "no push for a national daily" (Norris, 2002, p.48), there is only one newspaper, the *New Zealand Herald*, that shows some ambition to become a

[9] *The Dominion Post* got its name in July 2002 when it merged with the *Evening Post*. It was the *Dominion* before. Articles from *The Dominion* and *The Dominion Post* are analyzed as *The Dominion Post's* articles.

[10] *The New Zealand Herald* (circulation 208,419) is a top quality daily, published in Auckland, with a stronger emphasis on business than politics. It describes itself as a daily that promotes 'a progressive approach to economic and social policies'; *The Dominion Post* (circulation 98,229), published in Wellington, covers national, political and business news, and supports the right side of the political spectrum; *The Press* (circulation 90,828), a regional newspaper published in Christchurch, the biggest city in the South Island, with a strong orientation to local and regional news, promotes itself as a daily that 'targets special interest groups such as farmers and business people' (Circulation source: New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulation, 30/09/2004).

leading national daily. Only the three metropolitan daily newspapers, all three used for this study, have circulations greater than 50,000 and each of them serves different regions around the big cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. The history of the three newspapers is interwoven with the political, social and economic history of the country. All three were fully owned by New Zealand companies until 1975 when the News Media Ownership Act was changed to remove all restrictions on foreign ownership of print media (and also to allow foreign ownership of television and radio). This and subsequent legislation, including the biggest deregulation of the media market in 1988, brought international companies to New Zealand: Fairfax – the owner of the *Dominion Post* and the *Press,* and APN News & Media Limited (APN)—the owner of the *New Zealand Herald*. Fairfax and APN together control over 90 percent of the circulation in the metropolitan, provincial and Sunday newspaper market in New Zealand. Every major media company in the media sector in New Zealand is foreign owned, a situation that some authors find problematic and "without parallel in the modern world" (Norris 2002, p.36).

The case study of the media coverage of genetic engineering in three daily newspapers is illustrative for several reasons. A controversial issue that polarizes society offers the press an opportunity to provide a forum for public debate. The GE issue triggered such a range of sub-topics that it seemed – and was so described in the press – to be the issue that would define New Zealand's future. The "carrying capacity" of the press (Hilgartner & Bosk 1988) to bring a diversity of stories about genetic engineering – political conflicts, economic aspects, science, health, food, medicine, agriculture, alternative movements to name a few – was much higher than for any other issue in the public arena at the time. Both opponents and proponents believed that the 21st century would be defined by the splicing of the gene, in the same way as the 20th century was defined by the splitting of the atom. New Zealand journalists picked up the story about genetic engineering the way their colleagues did all over the world (see Cook 2004; Bauer 2005): they asked if biotechnologists were perfecting plants of the future or sowing seeds of destruction. One of the two simplified versions of these two contested worlds has been described as a world dreamed of by biotechnologists where "fields of sweet corn yield big succulent ears that contain super doses of

vitamins; where children are vaccinated against disease simply by eating bananas; where farmers don't have to use pesticides or fertilizers because their crops are impervious to insects and can thrive in dry, mineral-poor soil" (Gwinz 2000, p.22); the other, feared by opponents, is a world where "human engineered plants spread out of control, overwhelming organic plants and threatening insects and animals; where new diseases emerge; and where global food supplies are compromised" (p.22.).[11]

Traces of this polarization are easy to follow in the media coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand. From the release of the Royal Commission's Report on 31 July 2001 (the starting day for the analysis of media coverage) until Election Day (27 July 2002, the closing day for the analysis), a wide range of issues opened up for public debate.

This study links the newspapers' coverage of the issue with the status of the issue in public domain. For the purpose of this analysis, but with the intent of offering a categorization that can be used in future studies on media coverage of important issues in society, the study uses key moments in the development of public policy to investigate and identify the phases of the coverage. In the case of the public debate about the GE issue in New Zealand, the key moments were the release of the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification, the Government's response to the Report, the announcement of the early general election and Election Day. The coverage between these key moments was classified into three different phases: *expectation*, *evaluation* and *anticipation*.

The first phase, *expectation,* relates to the coverage of genetic engineering between the release of the Report and the Government's response to the Report. *Expectation*-driven stories have therefore an easily recognizable time frame – a time when the question or the issue is raised or opened (the release of the Report) and the moment when it is solved (the Government's response). The second phase, *evaluation*, includes articles published from the moment Government

[11] Gwin cites biotechnologists, agriculturalist, agronomists and farmers and notes that the difference in reactions corresponds with transatlantic lines: consumers in Europe are far more cautious than the USA (Gwin 2000, p.22).

policy was announced to the announcement of the early election. *Evaluation*-driven stories assess the policy through an examination of the patterns of issue occurrence. The stories are focused on an issue rather than an event, the trigger (reason for publishing the story) differs and the time frame is flexible. Although the policy is examined, the evaluation does not necessarily involve a call for action. The third phase, *anticipation,* includes the articles published from the announcement of the early election until Election Day. It is characterized by stories that treat the issue as a sub-topic of a wider subject, an event yet to come; the issue is used as a trigger for a story about something else. In the case of newspaper coverage of genetic engineering, the news articles in the 'anticipation' phase use the issue of GE to discuss political relations, balance of power and different parties' chances of winning the election or forming a coalition.

The case study of genetic engineering, with its clearly defined markers of the release of the Royal Commission's Report, the Government's response to the Report and Election Day, provides straightforward material for the investigation of what journalistic norms develop around 'expectation', 'evaluation' or 'anticipation' stories and how they are related to the concept of objectivity. If objectivity reflects journalistic method, account and approach then the consequent question of inquiry becomes: when is the press more likely to report on the issue – when the policy is still in preparation ('expectation phase'), when the policy is adopted ('evaluation phase') or when it is linked to other issues ('anticipation phase')? Differences in the newspapers' approach to the issue in the three phases highlight the link between professional norms and the status of the issue in the public domain, and indicate ways for the further conceptualization of journalism and its role in mediating reality.

1.4 Theoretical approach

The investigation of journalism, one of the most important social practices in the modern world, is intertwined with the study of news and can be found in many disciplines but most commonly in history, political science, sociology, and the study of language and literature (see Zelizer 2004). The lines are theoretically blurred when it comes to the study of news. From Hartley (1996), who

summarizes scholarship into two broad approaches ('hallism', comprising critical, theoretical scholarship based on Stuart Hall's cultural studies and 'ericsonism', comprising an organizational, empirical perspective based on Richard Ericson's explanation of contemporary news practice) to Franklin (1997), who talks about organizational, political economy and the culturalist approach, scholars have aimed to build a theoretical framework for journalism studies based on a systematization of its scholarship. Allan (2004) identifies three lines of investigation of news—"news as an as object of policy formation", "an object of commodification", and "an object of public opinion" (p.3), and notes how each of those approaches "has proven to be extremely important in generating vital insights into how the news media operate in modern societies" but remain "necessarily partial and selective in what it identifies as being relevant to its concerns" (p.4). Benson (2004) sees this as a problem of "dependent" and "independent variables" (p.275). Discussing the issue of political communication studies, he notes that the majority of studies use media to discuss how news content is influenced by political or economic factors, instead of "understanding media as an *independent* variable, as part of the process of political meaning making rather than just a convenient indicator of the outcome" (2004, p.276). He offers a new categorization of factors that influence (political) news: commercial, political and "interorganizational field" and notes how the interorganizational field, "has scarcely produced a research literature" (Benson 2004, p.281).

The objective of this study is to address this gap in the scholarship and look at journalism as an 'independent' variable in the construction of meanings in public domain. Firstly, this study adopts the concept of 'news culture' to investigate journalism in its setting and "rethink the ideological assumptions, modes of perception and even unconscious expectations which need to be sustained by journalists and audience member alike if a news account's claim to be a factual representation of reality is to be upheld" (Allan 2004, p.4). Secondly, assuming the news culture is a part of the wider notion of the field, it uses the "field theory framework" as a basis for the analysis of the political, social, cultural and economic conventions in journalists' everyday work.

Why does the concept of the 'field' provide suitable theoretical framework for the analysis of journalism in relation to public debate? The concept of the field (Bourdieu 1993; 1998; 2004; 2005) supports the multilayered analysis of the social conditions of the production of the news text. Sometimes characterized as "radical contextualization" (Johnson 1993, p.9), the concept highlights the spectrum of choices available for news production (what events will be covered, in what form, for how long) and explains that production is based on the professional strategies of the agents within the field (e.g. junior reporter, senior reporter, commentator, editor). The field itself is also historically positioned within the broader social, political and cultural environment consisting of semi-autonomous specialized spheres of action (e.g. field of politics, economy, cultural production, science) where the relations of power, not only among the fields, but within the fields as well, structure human action (Bourdieu 2005, p.41). The incorporation of the 'field' provides a framework for the analysis of journalistic norms and their power in the complex process of a newspaper's representation, interpretation and construction of reality. The typical study of journalism focuses on form, values, standards and practice of individual journalists (see Zinsser 1994, for example), and has relatively little to say about the nature of a news discourse, its manifestation and how it reflects and interacts with other social fields. Bourdieu (2005) explains why it is important to talk about the journalistic field and not individual journalists: "… so long as one talks about journalists, one is talking within a logic of personal responsibility", but if one talks in terms of a field there is an opportunity to investigate not only individuals but "the structure of the journalistic field and the mechanisms that operate within it" (Bourdieu 2005, p.41)

The main concept relevant for understanding journalistic practice and the mechanisms that operate within the journalistic field is "socialized subjectivity" (Benson & Neveu 2005, p.3), which incorporates rules on the ways the things are done and should be done. Bourdieu's term for socialized subjectivity is 'habitus', sometimes described as the 'feel of a game' or the 'practical sense'. The concept of habitus allows the journalist to operate inside the field as a unique, creative, sole individual with a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, value systems, cultural background, predispositions, judgments and behaviours that generate and organize

practices and representations. The most important characteristic of the (journalistic) field is that all those characteristics are developed not exclusively but in a long and complex process of socialization both inside and outside the newsroom. Bourdieu does not develop the concept of "socialization" – nor does he develop the complete sociology of journalistic field[12] – but he indicates some questions for further research that will be used in this study.

The study aims to address the question of the autonomy of the field to find out how independent the field is when it comes to internal logics. Many scholars have investigated the autonomy of the journalistic field and found that interactions with other fields leave their marks on the news content (this will be discussed in Chapter 2). But not many of them have investigated how the logics of the journalistic field influence the field's product (the news text) and how this identified influence interacts with other fields of cultural production. Since the two early studies of the 1950s—White's (1950) study of the 'gatekeeper' editor and Breed's (1955) analysis of social control in a newsroom—a sizeable body of research has developed addressing the issue of the factors that influence news content. Zelizer (2004) notes that five different approaches to journalism, namely "journalism seen as a profession, as an institution, as a text, as people and as a set of practices" (p.32), still do not offer a comprehensive platform for a wide-ranging analysis of the relationship between journalism and society. Following her call for more interdisciplinarity in journalism scholarship, this study conceptualizes journalistic practice by analyzing the news text, by looking at the historical formation and current position of the news media in a wider context and by discussing professional issues with journalists.

The central issue in conceptualization of journalistic practice as the constitutive element of the field is the notion of objectivity. Objectivity is discussed here as the basis of journalistic professional ideology but also as a concept that contributes to the differentiation of an autonomous field of journalism (Hallin

[12] Neveu (2005, p.209) explains: "Bourdieu did not formalize a complete sociology of the "journalistic field" or its "structure and genesis". Always attentive to his use of words, he never used such a title. The fact that this sociology of journalism remained at the stage of working sketches rather than a treatise prevents no one from productively applying field theory to the media. The conception of sociology developed by Bourdieu consists in providing theoretical tools for productive work, not in annexing research objects to the master property."

1986, 2005). The routine of balancing both sides of the story, for example, becomes a kind of 'objectivity trap' in media coverage of complex social issues such as genetic engineering. Not only does this routine privilege authoritative sources but it makes a hierarchy of voices in the battle between the agents from different fields. The study uses Hallin's question of "how the development of the journalistic field affects the representation of different social interests in public discussion" (Hallin 2005, p.238) as a starting point for identifying the elements of journalistic professional norms – a segment of the field – that shape the representation of different interests in the public sphere.

The study argues that the concept of objectivity is the 'modus operandi' of the interactions between the journalistic field and the fields of politics, science and economy. The most visible element of the journalistic field that reflects the objectivity norm and the representation of different social interests is the journalistic product, namely the news text. The tools journalists use in their work, the norms they apply, and the principles that lead them leave a mark on their products. The journalist's job is to make things explicit so journalists attempt to "legitimate categories of perception" (Bourdieu 2005, p.37), to set out rules that give legitimacy to their sense-making activity and, more importantly, for the forum-creating capacity of the press. In the newspaper coverage of genetic engineering it became legitimate to perceive the issue of genetic engineering as a topic that could produce at least two opposing opinions, because the 'common sense' of a newspaper's discourse (the rule of the game in the journalistic field) dictates that it is the way to do a proper job. The widespread, colourful debate about genetic engineering in New Zealand – run in public meetings, environmental, political, scientific and economic forums, in Parliament as well on the streets – raised the question about the discrepancy between the 'reality' of GE and its representation, interpretation and construction in the press.

The term 'representation' indicates a process of depicting the genetic engineering issue in the form of a news text. This process involves the construction of reality because 'depiction' is never mirror-like: it requires interpretation. A news text is routinely accepted as a more reliable representation of reality than a movie or a novel, although its process of production indicates a historically, socially and

professionally shaped form of mediation. Not all events related to genetic engineering were selected for the newspapers coverage in the year this study deals with, neither were all elements of the selected events included in reports. Some things were fore-grounded, while other facts were stated at the bottom of the report; some articles were news reports, the others were interviews; where one paper used a direct quote, another interpreted the views in the form of reported speech. The question of how these and other differences in the coverage of an issue are related to its meaning has attracted many media scholars but there are not that many studies that seek an answer by looking at the elements of journalistic practice, and more specifically, journalistic norms and their relation to the process of representation, interpretation and construction of reality.

1.5 Research questions, method and objectives

The question of whether meaningful 'reality' exists outside representation,[13] in the context of the journalistic field, becomes the question of professional adequacy to provide the markers that clearly explain the process of mediation. This study assumes that the concept of objectivity is a key to understanding the authority of journalism to reconcile and give meaning to an event. It uses the newspapers' coverage of genetic engineering to identify elements of journalistic practice that determine the formation of news discourse. The news is defined here as a discourse that includes a form of knowledge, a production of knowledge and public acceptance of knowledge claims (Ekstrom 2002).

The frame for this investigation is the following set of research questions:

- *How did New Zealand newspapers cover the issue of genetic engineering?*

This question is addressed using content analysis, the aim being to identify the recurring patterns and structure of the coverage. The results are used to discuss the

[13] Baudrillard (1984) sees representations as 'simulacra' or copies without originals, a means of hiding the fact that there is no reality without its mediation and Hall (in Jhally 1997) says there is no meaningful reality outside of discourse.

issues of journalistic form, use of sources, transparency of newsgathering and story-telling frame as elements of journalistic practice that are related to the appearance of the issue in public arena (see Chapter 5).

- *How did newspapers contribute to the public debate?*

This question is addressed using discourse analysis, the aim being to identify how the discursive characteristics of one journalistic form, the 'news', influence another journalistic form, the 'editorial', and how the editorial, as a newspaper's voice in public debate, represents, interprets and constructs the issue (see Chapter 6).

- *What journalistic norms determine the coverage of an important issue such as GE in the public domain?*

This question is addressed using a survey, interviews and historical analysis, the aim being to identify conceptual elements of the practice that lead professional work; the results are used to discuss the place of norms, rules and principles in the interpretation of reality (see Chapter 7).

The objective of the study is to conceptualize journalism practice in order to provide a broader understanding of journalism as a field. Its specific aims are:

- to use the year-long media coverage of GE as a data sample that indicates the characteristics of the professional journalistic field in New Zealand and the patterns in news reporting on a complex issue of public debate
- to identify the links between the newspapers' coverage of GE and status of the issue in relation to public policy and thereby discover the means of interactions between the professional journalistic field and the wider community
- to examine the standpoint of three New Zealand newspapers on the GE issue and deconstruct the way the news media raise their voice in public debate

- to discuss the editorial as an example of argumentative discourse in the press and indicate links between journalistic professional ideology and public debate about an important issue in society
- to identify what influenced some journalists when reporting on GE and discuss how elements of New Zealand journalistic practice relate to the forum-creating capacity of the press

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The results of an investigation into journalistic practice in the coverage of the genetic engineering issue are used for a wider discussion on the objectivity norm and its relation to the representation, interpretation and construction of reality in the press. The structure of the thesis follows the logic of the research questions: the material is organized to map the journalistic field, to explain the interplay between the text, practice and context and to discuss norms that determine reporting an issue of public concern.

The thesis has eight chapters. The first three chapters establish the background and theoretical foundation for the research.

Chapter 1 describes what the thesis is about, states the topic and explains why it is important, and introduces the main concepts to be discussed; it then explains why the media coverage of GE is a good case study for investigating the changing nature of journalism and journalistic norms' influence on public debate; it concludes by stating the theoretical approach and research objectives and describes the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 outlines the key theoretical concepts relevant for the study of journalism and the links between journalistic norms and public debate. It first explains why field theory is the most suitable for an analysis of journalistic practice in the light of the different contexts that influence that practice; it then describes identities and relations inside the journalistic field and explains how the features of history, structure, capital and habitus are related to the development of the journalism profession, its structure and its interactions with other fields. The

chapter explores the notion of 'common sense', an idea crucial for understanding journalistic habitus as a driving professional force in media coverage of issues of public concern. Field theory and the sociology of journalism is supplemented by an overview of discourse studies. The theoretical framework used for the analysis of the news text seen as a three-dimensional communicative event: as 'text', as 'discourse practice' and as 'socio-cultural practice'. From those three, 'discourse practice' is extracted to highlight journalism principles and to sketch journalism's professional ideology.

Chapter 3 focuses on the flagship of professional journalism ideology: the norm and the concept of objectivity. The question of what constitutes objectivity and how it is related to political and economic context is approached by developing an alternative framework that looks at notion of objectivity as 'method', as 'account' and as 'approach'. This conceptual framework is used in chapters 5, 6 and 7 as the operational tool for the analysis of the media coverage of genetic engineering and a discussion of the links between journalistic norms and public debate.

Chapter 4 explains why the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis is the most appropriate for this study; it then discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the applied methods of content analysis, survey, interview and discourse analysis, and concludes by indicating the advantages of the applied model.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the results of the investigation carried out in the case study: namely, the media coverage of the GE issue in New Zealand. Chapter 5 deconstructs the concept of objectivity as a journalistic method. It describes the coverage of the genetic engineering issue, presents and interprets results of the research undertaken. It then discusses how journalism elements (news form, sources, newsgathering, story-telling frame) and the corresponding journalistic norm of objectivity relate to more general questions of media and society dynamics by questioning journalism's customs and habits and theorizing about the forum-creating capacity of the press. The method of 'content analysis' allows for a discussion of the news as an individual product and addresses the research objective to identify how the New Zealand press reported on issues related to GE.

Chapter 6 interrogates the notion of objectivity as an account of reality. It uses a discourse analysis of editorials to link the journalistic norm and public debate and discuss the authority of the press to contribute to public affairs as an 'independent' voice in public debate. The investigation of this position and the detachment and independence of journalists is continued in Chapter 7 where the notion of objectivity is analyzed as a professional attitude. The research question regarding what journalism principles determined the coverage of an important issue in the public domain is approached by undertaking a survey among journalists who covered the GE issue and by interviewing journalists, editors and journalism scholars on the topic of news as a professional product.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, is a critical assessment of the research presented. It recapitulates the case study of media coverage of genetic engineering and explains how the proposed operational concept of objectivity as a method, account and attitude provides a set of tools relevant for the analysis of journalism practice and journalism as a sense-making activity. It points towards possible further investigations of journalistic norms as an important and academically underdeveloped segment of the relationship between the press and society.

1.7 Summary of the problem

This chapter has provided an introduction to the investigation of the journalistic field through the study of the influence of journalistic professional norms on the public debate on genetic engineering in New Zealand. It has introduced the case study on the media coverage of GE in New Zealand as a model for investigating the links between journalism and public debate.

Field theory was outlined as a framework for the study of journalistic practice. Different segments of that practice, the distinction between facts and opinions, the balance of views, the transparency of newsgathering and the contextualization of the issue, are elements of the objectivity norm that this thesis explores in order to identify internal patterns in the coverage and to discuss how these patterns determine the field's role in mobilizing, verifying or changing power relations in society. The aim is to reveal how the objectivity norm corresponds with

professional journalism as a historically created field of cultural production with settings, agents, logic and rules that establish its interactions with the wider society. As highlighted throughout the chapter, the objective of the thesis is to investigate the journalistic field as an active factor and a "structural variable" (Benson 2004, p.284) in the construction of reality. The next chapter offers an overview of two theoretical concepts relevant for the study of journalism, the field theory and discourse studies, in order to build a theoretical framework for the investigation of links between journalistic norms and public debate.

CHAPTER 2

INVESTIGATING THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The scholarly literature on journalism includes a wide spectrum of theoretical and methodological approaches. This diversity of approaches is a result of the late appearance of journalism studies as an academic discipline (Schudson 2003), and is a consequence of the clash between the journalism industry and academia, reflecting a deep division between the critical humanities and social sciences (Zelizer 2004).

The variety of approaches to studying journalism, and consequently the journalistic norm, is reflected in the multiplicity of meanings inscribed in the definitions of journalism's key features. Schudson (2004, p.11) defines journalism as "the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance", but admits that the definition is not faultless because media practice demonstrates there are 'interesting' stories in the news that are not always of great 'public importance'. The question of how news contributes to the construction of a shared world interested Habermas (1962), who explained that newspapers were one of the key institutions relevant for the development of the public sphere, and Anderson (1999), who stressed that newspapers and the ceremony of common readership contributed to the development of the concept of imagined communities. The explanation of journalism, as these examples show, is interlinked with the definitions of news, newspapers and the media. The profession and the practice of journalism are so deeply rooted in social, political and cultural contexts that it is hard to extract the elements of journalism that overcome the singularity of its context. The discursive structure of news reflects the complexity of journalism and highlights the fact that journalism is more than a normative system or professional practice. It is a field of cultural production. The cultural studies inquiry, however, tends to exclude, rather than include, journalism. As Zelizer (2004, p.191) explains:

> The centrality of "facts" and a migration toward positivistic knowledge as a way of tamping a fundamental self-doubt about the profession became obstructions to cultural studies' interest in the journalistic world, and journalism's claims to the real — invoking objectivity, balance, accuracy — muted the capacity of many cultural scholars to consider the nuances of journalistic practice. Largely unrecognized as a cultural form in itself, it became positioned as "the other", codified by much of British cultural studies as uninteresting territory and resembling in growing degree what had been claimed originally of it by journalism educators.

This chapter aims to set up a structure for a "more accommodated" cultural inquiry of journalism (Zelizer 2004, p.201). It firstly identifies journalism as a cultural form and an activity vital to a functioning of society (Carey 1989; 1997; 2000; Schudson 1978; 1995; 2003), and then draws on field theory and discourse studies in order to construct a theoretical ground for the analysis of links between journalistic norms and public debate.

2.2 Field theory

Field theory, first developed by Pierre Bourdieu, offers a suitable conceptual tool for the examination of journalism and its norms. It follows on from Weber and Durkheim's sociology by describing the field as "a semiautonomous and increasingly specialized sphere of action" (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p.3). The field is made up of relations between the agents of the field and can be seen as a network, or a structure that shapes individual actions and influences interactions with other fields. Bourdieu gives the following, in his own words "a very inadequate" (2005, p.30), definition of the 'field' in an article that examines the political, social science and journalistic fields:

> A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or

> transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field. (Bourdieu 2005, p.30)

The concept of the field serves journalism studies well because it provides a framework to discuss how this autonomous sphere of action interacts with other spheres of cultural production–politics, economy, science – and, at the same time, develops "distinctive forms of practice, conceptions of (their) social role, and standards for judging cultural production and assigning status to cultural producers" (Hallin 2005, p.230). When Bourdieu (2005, p.30) says the field is "the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experience of the social fields", he does not ignore the position of the field within the wider social formation of many interdependent fields, but stresses the relative autonomy of the field and its agents in relation to this institutional setting.

The interactions inside the field are of particular interest for this study. The interaction between journalists covering the same issue—the issue of genetic engineering for example—is a chain of communicative events and a process of the establishment of the issue's dominant definition. The same applies to interactions between journalists from different sections of a newspaper – business and political pages, for example; between journalists and their editors; between editors and leader-article[14] writers; between journalists and managers: their interactions within the field are characterized by the need to re-interpret and re-define the common standard in relation to the part of reality reported in the news.

The field theory stresses that agents, be they journalists, politicians, scientists or environmental activists, are not passive elements of the field. They not only react to the existing relations of forces and to already established structures, they also represent them and furthermore construct, perceive and form an idea of them. While "being constrained by the forces inscribed in these fields and being determined by these forces as regards their permanent dispositions, they are able to act upon these fields, in ways partially pre-constrained, but with a margin of

[14] The words editorial and leader-article are used interchangeably.

freedom" (Bourdieu 2005, p.30). We will see in Chapter 7 how the journalist who covered the Royal Commission's hearings on genetic engineering struggled to persuade editors to allow the court model of reporting[15] into the coverage of the Commission's work, and how the journalist won that battle, but lost some other fights for keeping high standards of professional integrity.

Bourdieu (2005, p.30) insists on the concept of a field as a "research tool" and explains that other research tools cannot depict all interactions between the agents of the field. Discourse analysis, says Bourdieu, is not suitable because it is focused only on the rhetoric deployed, the procedures, the strategies. This simplification of discourse analysis is unjust: that same year, 1995,[16] one of the discourse studies scholars influenced by Bourdieu's field theory introduced discourse analysis precisely as "the analyses of relationships between three dimensions or facets of that event, which I call *text*, *discourse practice* and *sociocultural practice* (Fairclough 1995, p.57). This definition of discourse analysis brings it close to Bourdieu's research tools and his main point that a field includes more than interaction between individuals: it demonstrates each individual's position inside the field. The concept of the field reveals who is more influential inside the field, a junior reporter or senior Press Gallery correspondent, and whose 'definition' of the issue has more weight when establishing the structure of the relationship between the journalistic field and the fields of science, or politics or environmental activism.

2.2.1 Inside the field: habitus and capital

The positions of individuals inside the field are historically and structurally defined. Any analysis of the news text – analysis of the mobilizing role of editorials published on genetic engineering, for example – has to take into account

[15] What the interviewed journalist (Samson, 2005) refers to is the manner of court reporting where the journalist had to listen to the whole long argument in order to write a short report on the most interesting aspects of the Royal Commission's hearings. The court reporter, as Cole (1967, p.101) explains, "must have a clear understanding of what facts are in dispute and what facts are accepted by both sides" and the reporter "has to sense public interest in the facts; he may have to listen to long, often obscure legal arguments before the kernel of the story emerges."

[16] Bourdieu's article (2005) is an excerpt from a lecture delivered in Lyons, France, on November 14, 1995.

the discursive character of the newspaper's articles: the development of the press in the country, the internal structure and division of roles between journalists and editors in the newspaper under scrutiny, the editorial protocol in writing the leader-article, the relations between the editorial and advertising sections in the paper, the intertextuality of the news text, the journalistic tools, rules, principles and a whole set of other external and internal factors that influence news production.

This thesis undertakes an investigation of the journalistic field by looking specifically at the notions of 'habitus' and 'capital'. 'Habitus' stands for "socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.126), the knowledge and experience that lead journalists in their everyday work. In Bourdieu's own words (2002, p.78), habitus is a "durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" that "produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of generative principle". The word 'disposition' explains what is covered by the concept of habitus: the result of an organizing action (a structure), a way of being (a habitual state) and a predisposition, tendency, or inclination (Bourdieu 2002, p.214). The dispositions are 'durable' because they last throughout the agent's (journalist's) life. Habitus is shaped by the long-term process of socialization, but is constantly being modified.

Bourdieu introduces the term 'capital' to capture the most delicate forms of power crucial for understanding the ongoing struggle within and outside the field. Economic capital includes power based on material assets; symbolic capital includes knowledge, credentials and expertise. What happens in the social world is interaction between those two forms of power.[17] Capital is the field's form of power, and in the battle between two forms, economic and cultural, capital is both external and internal. Each field thus consists of subfields where similar, small-scale battles can be identified.

[17] "Social space is constructed in such a way that agents or groups are distributed in it according to their position in statistical distributions based on the two principles of differentiation which, in the most advanced societies … are undoubtedly the most efficient: economic capital and cultural capital." (Bourdieu, *Social Spaces and Symbolic Space*, p.6, cited in Benson and Neveu, 2005: 20).

Bourdieu argues that the journalistic field, along with the social sciences and politics, has a central location in the wider field of power. Among those who compete to impose "the legitimate vision of the social world" (Bourdieu 2005, p.36), journalism is a crucial mediator. The fields are closely intertwined. The journalistic field, for example, has 'cultural' and 'economic' poles. The first intertwines with the field of 'small-scale cultural production' (journalism belongs to the genre of non-fictional or factual writing and, as the history of both journalism and literature testifies, has some characteristics of the creative discipline) and the second pole is commercial and belongs to the field of 'large-scale cultural production' (such as mass entertainment). Journalism is an important mediator between all fields, and when one pole prevails, for instance the economic pole, the whole journalistic field becomes more commercialized and thus more intertwined with the economic field. This process increases the power of the economic pole within each of the fields that the journalistic field interacts with (real economy, politics, art or science). These interactions lead to a "convergence among all the fields", where commercialization becomes a meeting point in the larger field of power (Benson and Neveu 2005, p.6).

2.2.2 Individual agents in the field

Bourdieu's notions of habitus and capital help in understanding the process of interactions between the fields, but do not fully address the more detailed questions of the daily production of 'meeting points' and the character of the links between journalistic norms and issues in the public domain. Focused on relations among the agents of the field, rather than the agents themselves, the notion of habitus leaves little space for discussion about individual agents and their potential to modify relations within the field. To fill this gap, this thesis approaches the question of journalistic habitus by bringing a "symbolic interactionism approach" (Blumer 1969; Denzin 1992) to the study of journalism. Looking at the journalistic field as an empirical social world, the thesis uses interviews with individual journalists to investigate the relationship between their individual understanding of their profession and everyday practice (see Chapter 7).

The chief proponent of the symbolic interactionist approach, Herbert Blumer, explains that the distinctive character of symbolic interaction between human beings (journalists and sources, for example, or journalists and editors) comes from "the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions" (Blumer 1969, p.79). Seeing the world of journalism as the space, or the field, means to understand that the news text reflects a set of interactions that are in a constant and interwoven process of re-defining reality. The job of the journalist is therefore more than a mere presentation of events and talk – it is always a re-presentation: mediation that includes representation, interpretation and construction.

The symbolic interactionism approach rests on three premises: the first premise is "that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them"; the second is that "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows"; and the third is that "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer 1969, p.2). It implies that knowledge about the event comes from the meaning the individual journalist gives to the event, that the meaning is derived from her interactions with other agents outside and within the journalistic field, and that, the interpretation of events influences the meaning of the event.

It is not only the social system, or the social structure, culture, professional norms or values that determine the press coverage of the issue; and it is not only the individual journalist's motives, attitudes, knowledge or feelings that influence the character of the story that emerges. What matters the most is the journalist's self-indication, the way the individual plans and realizes his own action in the particular social context. Each individual aligns his actions to the acts of others. Scholars (such as Mead cited in Blumer 1969, p.82) describe this process as "generalized other", a process of identification of universal qualities of othering one has to adjust to. That is the crucial point – the meaning as a social product arising in the process of interaction between people – that connects Bourdieu's field theory and Blumer's symbolic interactionism. It is the concept of habitus that

constitutes a bridge between the two theories because habitus generates social structures and is a "historically formed structure of dispositions active in the field of practices" (Halas 2004, p.241). The meaning of an event such as a press conference comes from the journalist's knowledge about press conferences in general—that there will be an announcement of something new or important; that it will probably start with the introductory speech of the host; that journalists can ask questions but the number of questions one can ask will depend on the number of journalists attending; that it will be held at a certain location and probably last not more than an hour (the usual duration of a press conference). In addition to this 'general meaning', the journalist's personal understanding of a press conference is supplemented by meaning gained through interactions with other journalists. This action and interaction, historically formed and structured in a process of socializing subjectivity engraved in the notion of habitus, explain that the source of the meaning (of an event such as press conference) does not emanate from the event itself but as "creations formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer 1969, p.5).

While Bourdieu takes the perspective that the field's relations and interactions demonstrate how social practices are a reflection of structural history, and "a result of opposing tendencies toward transforming and conserving structures" (cited in Halas 2004, p.241), Blumer leaves aside historical and micro-social perspectives and focuses on (socialized) individuals and on the idea that the meaning comes through the process of interpretation. The individual, the 'actor', first interacts with himself – by indicating to himself the things that have meaning – and secondly, by virtue of this process, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings: "The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action" (Blumer 1969, p.5). What is important here is that the application of meaning is not an automatic process but "a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (Blumer 1969, p.5) The interplay between different journalistic forms such as news reports and editorials (see Chapter 6) gradually modifies the meaning of the story in a way that narrows the subject and does not allow an easy reversal of the process. Changing the frame, after a year's coverage

of an issue, becomes almost impossible – not because there is a conspiracy between the political and business circles and the newsmakers, but because the logic of the field says that the meaning that comes as a result of agents' actions and interactions must prevail. It does not mean that changes are not possible or that everything is pre-determined. It only means that interactions and interpretations play a dominant role in the establishment of the meaning.

2.3 Journalistic field and the establishment of meaning

Field theory locates journalism as a field of action and as a site of struggle. When Bourdieu (2005, p.43) says that the journalistic field is extremely heteronomous, he alludes to both external and internal relations. Within the journalistic field the battle goes on between economic capital, expressed through advertising revenue, and cultural capital, as articulated through accumulated journalistic doxa – the set of norms, standards, values, protocols, and tradition embedded in everyday journalism practice. This struggle inside the journalistic field is historically, socially and economically situated. The business side of the newspaper – advertising, circulation and production – are separate from the editorial side in the organizational structure, but the proportion of revenue indicates the 'capital' weight of advertising and editorial pages (between 60 and 80 percent of the newspaper's revenue comes from advertising and 20 to 40 percent of income is generated by circulation). The struggle between the two poles, "the heteronomous pole representing forces external to the field (primarily economic) and the autonomous pole representing the specific capital unique to that field" (Benson & Neveu 2005, p.4), determines the relations inside the field. The journalistic field can be seen as an arena of struggle between external and internal forces to valorise their forms of capital – for example, advertisers struggle to get favourable news coverage for a new product, and newspapers struggle to protect the right to independently review the product. But it is also a ground for the valorisation of capital between different subfields inside the journalistic field, such as news and opinion pages–the first being 'objective' and the latter being a 'subjective approach to objective reality'. The chain of struggle then expands to individual journalists or agents who compete for a better position inside the field.

When explaining the relations with other fields, Bourdieu (2005, p.33) says that the autonomy of the journalistic field is weak:

> It is a very weakly autonomous field, but this autonomy, weak though it is, means that one cannot understand what happens there simply on the basis of knowledge of the surrounding world: to understand what happens in journalism, it is not sufficient to know who finances the publications, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising, where the subsidies come from, and so on. Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualizes this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another.

This perspective of a weak autonomy of the journalistic field will be challenged in this thesis on two grounds: the first is the need to acknowledge that the journalistic field's autonomy does not exist to the same degree across the globe and that specifics of national news cultures and characteristics of national journalistic fields are relevant for the discussion of the autonomy of the field. The second ground is the question of 'measurement' of autonomy: what are the criteria for assessing quantitatively and qualitatively the following questions: what does 'weak' mean and what degree of autonomy is desirable?[18] Bourdieu (2005, p.41) defines autonomy in relation to the field's interactions with the outside world and explains that the field is not only "subject to the constrains of the economy and politics", but "is more and more imposing its [own] constraints on all other fields, particularly the fields of cultural production such as the field of the social sciences, philosophy, etc. and on the political field".

The interactions between the fields leave a mark on the autonomy of the field and on the news text, as the journalistic field's final product. Bourdieu (2005, p.32) explains that most studies devoted to law, literature or cultural production take one of the two approaches, or ways of a reading: 'internalist' – considering the

[18] For further discussion on 'autonomy from whom' see Schudson (2005).

text in itself and for itself, and 'externalist' – reading that relates the text to the context and society in general. Regarding the 'internal' and 'external' approaches to the text, the latter is preferred and should include questions such as who wrote the texts, and how and why they were written. It is important to identify all the characteristics of the journalistic field and its agents because journalists tend to define the world by making sense of reality, and "the imposition of a definition of the world is in itself an act of mobilization which tends to confirm or transform power relations" (Bourdieu 2005, p. 39).

Bourdieu does not explain how the definition of the world, incorporated into everyday news production, can work as an act of mobilization, nor does he identify the modalities of confirmation and transformation of power relations. Bourdieu's field research requires the simultaneous analysis of social structures and cultural forms because the interplay between them explains and defines the field's institutional logic. This study illuminates the news form as a cultural form and a key tool for the interplay of power inside and outside the journalism field.[19] Like predominant Anglo-American research paradigms – technological, political economy, hegemony, cultural, organizational and new institutionalist[20] – the field theory is focused on the complex interrelations between agents of social change (journalists) and the society. It situates journalism in its larger systemic environment and stresses that interrelations between fields are not static but changeable and not defined once and for all. In field theory, the discussion about the role of individuals in shaping a society moves from the notion of hegemony – the news media reproduce the existing structure of power – to the notion of the divided field. The idea is that journalists not only reproduce but also transform power relations in other fields because the field itself is divided between forms of cultural and economic capital. This is an important and very useful point for media research because the production of "common sense" – a role the press takes across different media systems – is a far more complex phenomenon than the simple transmission of common sense from a position of power, as some other approaches suggest.

[19] The media research triangle includes production, form and consumption (or reception) of a text.
[20] See Benson and Neveu's (2005, pp.7-12) list.

2.4 Interactions with other fields

Journalists are agents in the field with some degree of autonomy. They are not explicitly 'governed' by either the state, their organization, cultural heritage or the market, but at the same time they are considered to be working under the influence of all of those factors. To view the journalistic field as a dynamic and open system of constantly changing values and interpretations is to understand that it is linked to a set of forces that seek to shape its content. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) list five of them: individual forces, routine forces, organizational forces, external (institutional) forces and ideological forces. For the purpose of this study, a study focused on journalism practice and the interplay between journalistic norms and public debate, a more operational three-part system is used: the journalistic field is defined by a set of forces coming from the wider social context (external factors), from the media institution (internal factors) and, thirdly, by the forces coming from the profession of journalism (norm factors).

These factors are implicitly incorporated into the analogies journalists use in describing the job they are doing such as a "window", a "mirror" or a "forum" (McQuail 2000, p.66). Journalists may deny being subject to 'external' or 'internal' set of forces or factors and declare instead that they are driven by 'norm factors' to achieve a high level of professional autonomy. But what is this autonomy? Hallin (1986) says that the journalist's conception of autonomy is a false consciousness, based on the idea that news judgments can be politically neutral. As such, "far from being a mere lie or illusion, it is a deeply held system of consciousness that profoundly affects both the structure of the news organization and the day-to-day practice of journalism" (Hallin 1986, p.23). The rise of professional journalism gave journalists grounds to claim their own authority (Allan 1997; Schudson 1978; 2001) in the sphere in which they communicate primarily to members of their own profession (Hallin 1986; Donsbach & Klett 1993; Weaver 1998; Deuze 2002a). Although there are conflicts between the journalists' and the corporation's authority (Winter 1997), the trend is towards increased journalistic autonomy. When scholars warn that the line towards autonomy is not a straight one, but "an uncertain and changeable process, in which parts of the field of journalism … have sometimes won relative

autonomy in relation to other fields, often then losing it again, or sometimes winning it in one direction while they simultaneously lose it in another" (Hallin 2005, p.229), they expand the scope of discussion towards the issue of the role of the press in society and its capacity to create a forum for public debate.

2.4.1 Forum-creating capacity of the press

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) define the forum-creating function of the press as alerting the public to issues in a way that encourages judgment and makes people start thinking. They stress that "the community becomes filled with the public voice" that is heard by those in positions of power, and whose business is "to understand the nature of the public opinion developing around the subject" (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001, p.134).

The journalist's duty to 'alert the public' is related to the more universal questions of the role of the media in society, questions of power and disparity, social integration and identity, and social change. McQuail's (2000) summary of different theoretical approaches in addressing these issues – mass society theory, Marxist perspectives, functionalism, critical political economy, modernization and development, communication technology determinism, and theory with an emphasis on the information society – highlights the wider context of the interactions between the journalistic field and politics, economy, and other social fields. Mass society theory (Kornhauser 1968; Dahlgren 1995), for example, develops the idea that "the media offer a view of the world, a substitute or pseudo-environment, which is a potent means of manipulating people but also an aid to their psychic survival under difficult conditions" (McQuail 2000, p.74). The Marxist perspectives (Bagdikian 1988; Herman & Chomsky 1988) posit a direct link between economic ownership and dissemination of messages, and emphasize the ideological effects of the media in the interests of a ruling class. Functionalism (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach 1989; Dayan & Katz 1992) claims to explain social practices and institutions in terms of the needs of society and of individuals and depicts the media as essentially self-directing and self-correcting. A critical political economy approach (Golding 1990; Golding and Murdock 1996) focuses

primarily on the relation between the economic structure and dynamics of media industries, on the one hand, and the ideological content of the media, on the other. Modernization and development theory (Tomlinson 1991) assumes the superiority of modern western societies and says that the mass media serves as an agent of development by disseminating technical know-how, spreading democracy, promoting consumer demand, and aiding literacy, education and health. The communication technology determinism school (Innis 1950; McLuhan 1962) argues that communication technology is essential to society and that there is a direct link between communications and social revolutions. The information society theory (Ferguson 1992) says that the new media technology leads to an information society characterized by a predominance of information work, a great volume of information flow, an interactivity of relations and postmodern culture (McQuail 2000, p.88).

Where does field theory stand? It is close to 'critical political economy' in the way that it gives central importance to the embedding of the contemporary media in the market and to 'differentiation' theory (Alexander 1981) because of its interests in the development of normative practice, such as the development of the journalism profession. One of the issues that define contemporary journalism, for example, is its position as mediator between reality and readers. Mediation is unlikely to be a neutral process, because the media provides information that is 'fit to print',[21] and that means satisfying the habitual set of news judgments (starting with the selection of reality that satisfies the criteria of newsworthiness) and the anticipated needs of readers (determined by the common shared interests and values of the readers). Media scholars agree that "the 'reality' will always be to some extent selected and constructed and there will be certain consistent biases" (McQuail 2000, 67), and that the construction of reality is strongly linked to questions of social power, integration and change behind these biases. What divides media scholars is the answer to the question: Why is this selection and construction of reality relevant, and what does it tell us about the media and about society, and about the dynamics between two? Studies in the sociology of journalism (see works in Berkowitz 1997) indicate that the representation, and

[21] Allusion to the *New York Times* logo.

subsequent interpretation and construction of reality in the news media, are relevant issues because the media define and bring to attention important social problems. The news media are seen as one of the 'arenas' for public debate, along with other arenas such as parliament and political parties.

The 'public arenas model' developed by Stephen Hilgartner and Charles Bosk (1988) describes the complexity of public policy where social problems always exist in relation to other social problems and are forced to compete for public attention. The interaction between two public arenas, the media and parliament, is of particular interest to this study because it is the interface between fields, such as the fields of journalism and politics, that creates the forum-creating capacity of the press. Scholars (see for example Norris 2004) have noted that the public policy agenda is influenced by news media and that people who watch more TV news, read more newspapers, surf the net, and pay attention to top campaigns, are consistently more knowledgeable, trusting of government, and participatory. The interaction between the fields, however, does not function in the same way everywhere and the intensity of interactions differ across the globe. Hallin and Mancini (2004) suggest that the way to investigate the relationship between the media (and journalism) and society is to identify the development of media markets with emphasis on mass circulation press, political parallelism (or the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties), the development of professionalism in journalism and the degree and nature of state intervention in the political system. The authors used these criteria to evaluate different media systems across the globe and came up with three distinctive models: 'democratic corporatist', 'polarized pluralist' and 'liberal'. The 'democratic corporatist model' (the media system in northern continental Europe) is characterized by the historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups and by the relatively active but legally limited role of the state. The 'polarized pluralist model' (Mediterranean countries of southern Europe) demonstrates the integration of the media into party politics, a weaker historical development of commercial media, and the strong role of the state. And the 'liberal model' (Britain, Ireland, the US and Canada) is characterized by the relative dominance of market mechanisms and of the commercial media (Hallin & Mancini 2004, p.21).

The ‘liberal model’ corresponds with the situation in New Zealand: a market-dominated press, medium newspaper circulation, early development of mass circulation press, neutral commercial press, information-oriented journalism, internal pluralism, non-institutionalized self-regulation, and almost no role for the state in the media business – though the last has changed over time. This ‘liberalism’ gives a framework for understanding the forum-creating capacity of the New Zealand press.

The concept of the press as a forum for public debate has been widely discussed in the United States, and has some echoes in New Zealand (McGregor & Comrie 2002). The media coverage of genetic engineering triggered the question of the forum-creating capacity of the press because the articles published in the New Zealand dailies showed a challenging interplay between the reports and the editorials. The way the press reported and commented on the issue opened a whole set of issues relevant for the investigation of journalism and public debate.

2.4.2 Journalism and public debate

The perspectives on the role the news media play in structuring public debate about social problems can be classified into two broad positions – the ‘liberal pluralist’ and the ‘political economy’ (see Allan 2004). Both identify a spectrum of the social factors relevant for the everyday practice of journalism. The ‘liberal pluralist’ approach understands the news media as being in the position of a ‘fourth estate’ and the journalist as being in the centre of public life “with the crucial mission of ensuring that members of the public are able to draw upon a ‘diverse market place of ideas’ to both sustain and challenge their sense of the world around them” (Allan 1999, p.49). The news media have a set of roles they are supposed to play: facilitate the formation of public opinion, foster public engagement with the issues of the day, allow clashes over decision-making, have a ‘watchdog’ function in relation to the government and are in general arenas of arbitration. The fact is that the journalistic field itself consists of a plurality of

viewpoints, and clashes between different interests (owners, editors, journalists, managers) ensure that a single set of interests will never prevail.

The other more critical approach to news media uses a 'political economy' framework to explain how news media ownership, and the process of concentration, conglomeration and integration of companies, influences the journalism content and transforms news into a commodity driven by efficiency gains. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that commercial news media develop an 'institutional bias' that "defend[s] the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state" (p.298). They go on to explain that the system of filters for the news prevents a diversity of views in news media and, even when they act as a forum for public debate and report on controversial issues, the discussion falls inside the clear limits about (desirable) elite disagreement (Herman & Chomsky 1988).

Both approaches are relevant and valuable for understanding journalism practice. The liberal pluralist view corresponds with journalism ideals and is incorporated either as a formal declaration in a code of ethics or developed as a professional principle in everyday journalism practice in western democracies (Merrill 1974). Still, the reality shows that the mainstream media represent mainstream views. They play the role of a forum for public debate but the limits of the debate are defined in the complex process of the articulation of interests between the political, economic and cultural elite in the society. This study argues that the place of journalism in relation to public debate is actually the place of the journalistic norms in the articulation of those interests. The norms and the logic of the field that keep journalists in the position of mediators between reality and perceptions of reality – established in the era of early, liberal capitalism – are questioned along the way, but never really challenged.

The position of journalism in defining issues in public debate, a position of a mediator, prevents the journalistic field from becoming a public sphere in Habermas's (1984) definition of the concept. Although it satisfies the first part of Habermas' definition – the public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" – it misses the second part:

"Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (Habermas 1964, p.49). Habermas argues that party politics and the manipulation of mass media have resulted in a "refeudalization of the public sphere" where representation and appearances outweigh rational debate (Habermas 1989, p.162).

Similar observations can be heard elsewhere, from highlighting attempts to reduce the political discourse to ready-made sound bites (Franklin 1997) and the prevailing genre of infotainment in contemporary news (Hartley 1996) to Bourdieu's critique on the use of 'fast thinkers' on television (Bourdieu 1996). Those critics have something in common: all of them stress the fact that the news media operate in relation to reality but are more occupied with distraction and disorder of reality than its order or regular appearance: namely news media are more interested in the events than they are in the issues.

2.4.3 Events and issue-driven stories

The distinction between 'events' and 'issues' is relevant for the study of journalistic norms and public debate for several reasons. Events are distinct, fixed happenings that are limited geographically and temporally, whereas issues can be defined as "matters of concern involving repetitive news coverage of related happenings that fit together under one umbrella term" (Johnson-Cartee 2005, p.57).

Johnson-Cartee (2005) focuses on the claim-makers' activity and the need to identify the transformation of social problems into issues, and gives a comprehensive list of points to be explored in relation to the media-agenda-policy process. She cites studies that define "issue" as "a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" (Johnson-Cartee 2005, p.57), and 'triggering devices' as the unforeseen events that often bring issues to the forefront. Once the issue comes to the forefront, it is explored by the news media

and other agents of public debate, until the next trigger brings the next issue to public attention.

Other researchers investigated the 'rise' and 'fall' of issues in public arena, noting how the "issue attention cycle" consists of periods of intense activity and periods of dramatic drops in activity level (Downs 1972, p.38). Analyzing cycles in the media coverage of environmental problems, Downs (1972) identified five stages of public attention to the issues: a "pre-problem", an "alarmed discovery", a stage of "euphoric enthusiasm", a stage of "solution cost acknowledgment", then a "decline of intense public interest" and finally a "post-problem" stage, in which attention to the issue settles down (Downs 1972, pp.39–40). Downs argues that there is no solution to the problem of cyclical attention to environmental issues because they don't possess qualities that keep the news media interested. Downs's hypothesis has been challenged by Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) who argue that social problems co-exist in public space, simultaneously seeking and getting media attention. What influences cycles in covering the issue are institutional factors such as 'carrying capacities', competition for space, and the need for sustained drama. Other scholars investigated issue cycles by focusing on issues and dynamics of social interactions (Hansen 1991), narrative structures (McComas & Shanahan 1999) and inter-media agenda setting and claims of sources (Trumbo 1994; 1996). In a study of a ten-year-long news coverage of global warming, Trumbo (1996) found that scientists were quoted most often as sources about the causes and problems of global warming; in comparison, politicians and special interest groups were quoted most often about judgments or remedies (1996). He indicates that the transition in source dominance corresponds with Downs' (1972) problem-solving phase.

None of these studies deals with journalistic norms that might have an influence on cycles of news media coverage. McComas and Shanahan (1999) found that the media tend to repeat narrative strategies in a way that, once a cycle ends, the media are likely to use the narrative outcome of that cycle as a presumption upon which to found the next cycle. Once the issue comes to a news medium, it is challenged by a new set of institutional principles before being thrown back into a public arena. McComas and Shanahan's (1999) study does not go on to explain

the clash between a public issue and journalism's institutional setting. In other words, how do journalistic norms, which are a part of the setting, relate to the status of the issue for public debate? The concepts of 'public arena' and 'issue cycles' are useful, but not sufficient. When discussed in the light of the general concept of the journalistic field, Hilgather and Bosk's (1988) 'public arenas model' allows the detailed analysis of a specific news outlet and comparative news media analysis, but does not provide an operational framework for understanding the transformation of the "issue" in the news topic, its structure and potential to interact within and outside of the journalistic field.

To investigate the process of presenting reality in the form of event-and issue-driven stories, this thesis draws on discourse studies.

2.5 Discourse studies

Discourse studies has roots in the discipline of linguistics where it was first developed as a coherent conceptual framework for analysis of the text, language and structure, but soon expanded into a range of different disciplines from sociology and anthropology to political science, philosophy, and communications. Led by an interest in investigating the news text as a system of written language that shapes and is shaped by people's experience of the world, and based on the work of two discourse studies scholars, Teun van Dijk and Norman Fairclough, this study investigates the issue of the discursive character of news. Fairclough (1995) draws on Foucault's notion of discursively shaped and endorsed practices (Foucault 1972) and on Bourdieu's idea that "our social practices in general and our use of language in particular are bound up with causes and effects which we may not be at all aware of under normal conditions" (Bourdieu 1977, cited in Fairclough 1995, p.54).

The theoretical framework of discourse studies defines the text as a "socially and historically situated mode of action in a dialectical relationship with the surrounding social features" where "dialectic relationship" should be understood as "socially shaped and socially shaping" (Fairclough 1995, p.55). The task of discourse analysis is to investigate the tension between the two sides of language

use: the socially defined (socially shaped) and the socially constitutive (socially shaping). The analysis of news discourse therefore should encompass inquiry into the blended environment of social practices that produce the text, and not only the text itself.

2.5.1 News as a discourse

Traditional definitions of news acknowledge the importance of the social setting but are focused more on content and mode of representation than on the link with reality. Lippmann (1965) discusses the relationship between events (reality) and their representation (media) and explains that "news is not a mirror of social conditions, but the report of an aspect that has obtruded itself" (p.216), while Stephens (1988) says news is "new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public" (p.9). Summarizing the diversity of definitions of news and journalism, Zelizer (2004, p.25) notes that journalism guidebooks are precise when it comes to instructions on how to write news, but stay vague when it comes to the definition of news. For example, one such guide book (Stovall 2005) says "news is the major product of journalism; news is information that journalists believe is important or interesting for their audiences" (p.2).

Teun van Dijk's notion of discourse analysis (1987; 1988; 1991; 1998) overcomes the narrowness of the traditional 'important and interesting' approach to news. The concept of 'discourse' indicates language in use, the communication of beliefs and social interaction in social situations. Such a notion opens a space for analysis beyond the sentence structure, semantic representation, style rhetoric and schemata (van Dijk 1997) towards the social practices behind the features of mediated language. The news media are operating within a social system, and the news is both a 'language in use' and a form of knowledge. This two-fold nature of news means the news can be seen as a discourse that not only represents or reflects reality but conveys its interpretation and construction at the same time. In his multidisciplinary introduction to discourse studies van Dijk (1997, pp.13–14) explains that "discourses do not only consists of (structures of) sound or graphics,

and of abstract sentence form (syntax) or complex structures of local or global meaning and schematic forms", they "also may be described in terms of the social actions accomplished by *language users* when they communicate with each other in *social situations* and within *society* and *culture* at large" (emphasis in original). This definition of discourse is developed further by Fairclough (1995) in his study of media discourse. He offers a comprehensive analytical tool for the analysis of the news text by suggesting looking at news as a text, as a discourse practice and as a socio-cultural practice (Fairclough 1995, p.16). Any analysis of media text should include three sets of questions about its outputs: how the world is represented, what identities are set up for those involved in a story and what are their relations, a set of questions on "representation, identities and relations" (Fairclough 1995, p.5). The answers to these questions play an important role in the ideological work of media language. Fairclough (1998) examined news reports and political speeches and stressed how the journalistic practice of incorporating other texts in news reports (press releases, for example), a phenomenon reflecting the intertextualiy of news, becomes a way of concurring with particular ideological viewpoints.

2.5.2 Communicative events and intertextuality

The issue of the intertextuality of news, a "dependence on texts from other contexts" (Zelizer 2004, p.125), is related to the fact that the news text incorporates a "chain of communicative events" (Fairclough 1995, p.37). The news report, for example, embeds the interview between journalist and source, the conversation between journalist and colleagues, and journalist and editor, and extends – through the process of 'consumption' – to the new chain of communicative events related to the reading of the text (now in the private as well as the public domain). Fairclough (1995) stresses that different communicative events embedded in a single social activity that events represent become "a form of social practice" and the "question is, then, which [fields of] social practices and which communicative events are represented" (p.41). A journalist reporting from a press conference does not present all the answers to the questions of who, what,

where, when, why and how, but an extracted and summarized version of these answers.[22]

The question of transformation of communicative events as they move along the chain has interested several scholars. Fairclough (1995) paraphrases Van Leeuwen and looks at the question "how one type of communicative event 'recontextualizes' others – what particular representations and transformations it produces, and how this differs from other recontextualizations of the same events" (p.41). The central position in the chain of communicative events belongs to the 'recontextualization' of the event, both as an element and the outcome of journalism practice. This thesis argues that norms developed in relation to the sources, transparency of newsgathering process, selection of genre and selection of frame determine recontextualization of events in the news text. The text reflects the process of making a choice from a variety of options available in relation to the event seen as "the social repertoires of discourse practices" (Fairclough 1995, p.61).

2.5.3 Text

The term 'text' in journalism studies refers to a news item produced by journalists in accordance with journalistic practice. The text, therefore, is not only a logically composed group of sentences but a hybrid of genres and discourses (Fairclough 1995, p.33). The difference in approaches between Fairclough's and Van Dijk's work on the structure of news and overall organization of the news text is that Van Dijk is focused on 'microstructures' (in terms of themes and topics) rather than a wider context of the interplays between different discourses and genres in the establishment of social identities, relationships and process, and Fairclough is more interested in socio-cultural contexts.

[22] For example, at the Prime Minister's press conference journalists get hard copies of the press releases, but the act of distribution of these releases – followed by half-teasing chat between press officers who distribute the papers and journalists who get them – is never reported. The social practice developed around the Prime Minister's press conference excludes this communicative event as less relevant for the representation of the main communicative event.

Both scholars recognize the importance of discourse practice but leave this segment of communicative event in the shadow of the textual (Van Dijk) and contextual (Fairclough) analysis. This study is focused on the highlighted gap – on discourse practice and journalistic norms relevant for the production of the news text. The aim of discursive textual analysis is to identify the representational and interpretational function of the text in order to find out the interplay between journalism practice and the text's potential to communicate in the public domain. The potential to communicate in the public domain reveals the interactivity of media discourse in relation to a wider socio-cultural context.

2.5.4 Socio-cultural practice

One of the most developed sub-streams in media studies is the analysis of the links between the media and socio-cultural practice, particularly the question of ideology and media output. The Marxist tradition in media studies is focused on news and its ideological importance in defining the social world. Stuart Hall (1977) argues that the media operate with the maps of cultural meanings, and those maps establish hegemony and promote the dominance of a ruling-class ideology. McQuail (2000) summarizes the work of the most prominent neo-Marxist scholars by explaining that the news contributes to the promotion of a single, hegemonic view of things by 'masking' aspects of reality ("ignoring the exploitative nature of class society"), by producing a 'fragmentation' of interests and by imposing an 'imaginary' unity of coherence – "for instance, by invoking concepts of community, nation, public opinion and consensus" (McQuail 2000, p.307).

The approach of discourse analysis is more sophisticated: the issue of media text and ideology is seen as an issue of implicit rather than explicit representation. Those representations "are embedded in ways of using language which are naturalized and commonsensical for reporters, audiences, and various categories of third parties – presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions upon which the coherence of the discourse depends, or the ordinary ways in which interviews are conducted" (Fairclough 1995, p.45). Fairclough warns that the complicity between the media and the dominant social classes and groups should be assessed

case by case, because the links are not always direct and may take different forms. The key element in the assessment of the relationship between news media and social environment is discourse practice.

2.5.5 Discourse practice

Discourse practice connects the 'text' and 'socio-cultural practice' in order to show social relationships and processes (Van Dijk 1997) and how "shifting language and discursive practices in the media constitute social and cultural change" (Fairclough 1995, p.29). Although 'discourse practice' includes not only the ways in which texts are produced but also the ways in which texts are distributed and received by the audience (Fairclough 1995, p.16), this study focuses on production of text to investigate journalism practice and the potential of its product to contribute to public debate.

2.5.5.1 Journalism practice

Using the notions of habitus, trajectory and strategy, the field theory framework provides the tools for analysis of journalism practice. This study approaches practice as the way of operating or doing things, the way the journalist represents and constructs reality (content) and the way he or she goes about doing so (core journalistic activities: selecting, researching, processing, writing and editing news). For example, selecting news is based on news judgment. This is an important skill of individual journalists gained through the long process of socialization that everyday journalism practice acknowledges as 'a nose for news'.[23] As the collective construct of habitual interactions between the agents in the journalistic field, 'news judgment' changes over time and across the globe, but when triggered by the same event, shows signs of uniformity. The theoretical question of this construction of unity will be addressed in the next chapter, but it has to be noted here that there is a disagreement between the industry and academia over the question of whether the unity of news judgment is desirable or

[23] In one of the many guides for future journalists a 'nose for news' is explained as "an instinct about what makes a good story" (Browne, 1999, p.5).

not. While Elliot (1977) argues it should be analyzed in the light of professionalism and as a sign of professional excellence "valued as much as by executives and administrators as by the craft group" (p.150), Schudson (2005) thinks that "the possibility that the "news judgment" of a corps of media professionals who are beyond the influence of state and market is not necessarily a prize one should want for the best interest of a democratic society" (p.219).

The phenomenon of a distinctive journalistic set of criteria that define news judgment and the way events will be represented in the news, are worth investigating because they constitute the corpus of journalistic norms and "norms have replaced ideological frameworks as guides to the presentation of news" (Hallin 2005, p.229). The question is not only how this replacement works – the Glasgow Media Group (1976, 1980) has been at the forefront of such investigations – but what has caused such a shift and what are the possible consequences for established journalism practice. In his "Outline for the theory of practice" Bourdieu (2002, p.73) admits that it is not easy to define rigorously the status of the semi-learned grammars of practice, and therefore it is better to abandon all theories that treat practice as a mechanical reaction to 'models' or 'roles'. The everyday practice in the journalistic field is far from a mechanical reaction to a set of models and operational combinations that are passed from generation to generation. The 'model' and 'roles', an occupational knowledge expressed in the set of journalistic norms, are there but so is the individual predisposition to challenge them.

2.5.5.2 Journalistic norms

Journalistic norms develop as a particular set of rules on how to do a proper job. When the cadet comes into the newsroom, as one journalist interviewed for this study explains, he learns by example, by seeing and imitating the work of others.[24] The most colourful characters in a newsroom almost become mentors who teach young journalists entering the field how the work is done and how it should be done.

[24] Alan Samson, interview 1 February 2005.

What constitutes journalistic norms is a matter of academic dispute. This study examines journalism by approaching the 'norm' through an analysis of text, context and practice. The 'norm' in this study is wider than the rule articulated in documents such as a Code of Ethics. It includes shared standards of journalism practice, principles that guide journalists in their everyday work. This study is interested in the norms that are not prescribed but assumed as a part of the everyday routine. These norms are the last to be changed in the newsroom. Occasional interventions of ambitious editors to change the rules of the game usually cause a stir among journalists (see Matheson 2003). The norms are conservative: they regulate, not anticipate, the practice – maybe even more so when they are not written. The existence of professional norms, distinct to the news culture, is related to the autonomy of the profession. Across the world "there are important variations in the degree to which distinctively journalistic norms have evolved, the degree of consensus they enjoy among those who practice journalism, and their relative influence on news-making practices" (Hallin & Mancini 2004, p.35).

The influence of norms on news-making practice is visible in journalistic rituals (everyday activities that include many repetitions, 'repetitiveness' being an element of ritual) has significance and is shared among the group members. Journalistic rituals are the application of journalistic norms. For example, doing an interview is a journalistic ritual that includes several norms: to introduce yourself and give your name and the news organization you are working for at the beginning of the interview, to ask questions clearly, to accurately state the name, status and position of the interviewee, to allow the interviewee to provide answers, to accurately present answers – to name just few of them. As this list shows, the influence of norms on news-making practice can be significant. Norms differ from medium to medium (from the TV interview to the print interview, for example), they differ across time (in the 19th century, the interview was a hidden part of the newsgathering process, and there were no interviewees' names in the press) and differ in ritual (the style of interview differs on BBC and ITN, as it does on TV One and TV 3 in New Zealand, for example).

Schudson (2001) says that four conditions encourage articulation of norms: forms of ritual solidarities, cultural contact and conflict, institutional settings and socialization, and political control. He reminds readers of Benjamin Franklin who "insisted in his 'Apology for Printers' (l73l) that the printer was just that – one who prints, not one who edits, exercises judgment, or agrees with each opinion in his pages. In the same passage, however, Franklin also declares that newspaper contributions must exhibit good taste and refrain from character assassination. Clearly, "he exercised editorial judgments even as he denied he was doing so" (Schudson 2001, p.150).

2.6 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the theoretical frameworks that will be used to approach the concept of the journalistic norm and its relationship to public debate. Unlike traditional scholarship that contextualizes the 'norm' only in terms of journalism 'professionalism', this research considers the norm as a reflection of the development of the journalistic field and as an active, constitutive element of that field. The 'norm' in this study includes shared standards of journalism practice, a set of tools, rules, and principles that guide journalists in their everyday work.

The thesis draws on field theory and discourse studies in order to construct a theoretical framework for the investigation of the elements of the journalism practice of producing information for public discussion about contemporary affairs. Assuming that the field is the site of struggle for the imposition of the governing principle of vision and division, and that the positions inside the field are historically and structurally shaped, this chapter has introduced habitus and capital as elements of the field relevant for the establishment of the norm. Questions such as what constitutes the journalist's habitus; how does it influence the text that emerges; what is the particular historical route or "trajectory" by which journalists arrive at a certain position; and what is the journalist's individual 'strategy' for dealing with a complex reality constitute the framework for the analysis of journalism practice and re-examination of Bourdieu's claim about the weakness of the journalistic field's autonomy.

The overview of the history of journalism suggests that the characteristics of national news culture should be taken into account when discussing the autonomy of the field and its interactions with other fields. Studies in the sociology of journalism rarely focus on the 'norm' as an indicator of representation, interpretation and construction of reality in the news media, being more occupied with questions of interactions between the fields, questions of the role of the media in the society, the forum-creating capacity of the press and the media coverage of the issues that illustrate how the mainstream media represent mainstream views. The place of journalistic norms in relation to public debate rarely moves beyond the questions of the accuracy, fairness and balance in news reporting; and the investigation of the 'rise' and 'fall' of issues in the public arena has rather been linked to different explanations of the 'issue attention cycle' than internal journalistic principles that define the strategies for approaching the issues.

This absence of substantive academic literature on the relationship between the journalistic setting and the issue in the public domain is addressed in this study: how journalistic norms, part of the setting, relate to public debate. By using the tools of field theory and discourse studies, this research investigates the chain of communicative events inside the journalistic field and looks into the're-contextualization' of the event as a cause, as an element and as an outcome of journalism practice. The role of journalistic norms is discussed by looking at the traces of discourse practice in the text. The wide umbrella for the location of the journalistic norms is the notion of objectivity, discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

OBJECTIVITY AS A JOURNALISTIC NORM

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter indicated that field theory provides a structure for the analysis of the knowledge-producing function of journalism. Drawing on the body of work on the sociology of journalism, this chapter presents a critical overview of the theoretical perspectives on the concept of objectivity. It also focuses on the agents of the field (journalists), and the norm of objectivity as the element of their habitus. The aim is to establish a theoretical framework for objectivity research that can be used as an operational tool for the discussion of journalistic practice.

The existing literature on journalistic norms positions objectivity as the defining idea of the profession[25] and the essential concept in relation to the quality of information. Objectivity is defined in terms of a "particular form of media practice, and particular attitude to the task of information collection, processing and dissemination" (McQuail 2000, p.172). The large critical literature on objectivity (Lippmann 1965; Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman 1978; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986; Reese 1990; Donsbach & Klett 1993; Curran and Gurevitch 1996; Allan 1997; Dunlevy 1998; Graber, McQuail & Norris 1998; Schudson 1978; 1988; 1995; 2001; 2003) links this principle with the role of the press in society. The objectivity norm, both glorified and demonised in journalism studies, holds the key to address journalism as a cultural practice in a historical context. The objectivity norm is also crucial part of the current discussion on journalism and its future in the representation, interpretation, and construction of reality.

[25] A 1974 survey among American journalists showed that 98 percent of journalists define journalism as adherence to the objectivity norm (Phillips 1977). Twenty years later it dropped to 91 percent but is still very high (Donsbach & Klett 1993).

More than a decade ago, Hallin (1992) noted that the days of serious, professional journalism – he calls this the era of "'high modernism' of American journalism" (p.14)—had largely passed. Looking back to this text for the readers of the *Political Communication Report* (*PCR)*, a newsletter that serves the political communication division of the American Political Science Association and the International Communication Association[26], Hallin (2006) says that the "high modernist" model of journalism – "a culture of professionalism, centered around the norm of "objective" reporting and rooted in the conviction that the primary function of press was to serve society by providing citizens with accurate, "unbiased" information about public affairs" (Hallin 2006)—was a short episode in journalism history. It was an episode based on very specific conditions which are now passing away: ideological consensus centred on corporatism, the welfare state, and Cold War policy. But in the revised essay for the *PCR*, he notes : "Journalistic professionalism is not breaking down from the inside, by journalists becoming less committed to it; instead I think professionalism is being squeezed into increasingly smaller niches within the media field" (Hallin 2006). While some authors note that that journalists' strong commitments to ethical norms such as balance and fairness exist and will continue to be vital for exercising journalism's sense-making role, providing context for making well-informed decisions (Singer 2006), others have no doubt that "professional and high modern journalism can be considered to have been clinically dead for a long time – but it is unable to die" (Deuze 2006). The issue of professional journalism and objectivity, as this discussion shows, still generates a heated debate without any serous attempt to deconstruct its contemporary elements in order to see what part of the culture of journalism it belongs to.[27]

[26]The *Political Communication Report* (*PCR)* in 2006 asked the question 'What is going to happen to the news' and invited prominent American scholars to write essays on the future of news in post-modern times.

[27] Stovall (2005, p.33) says: "Part of the culture of journalism is that journalists will not pursue a political or social agenda; rather, their professional agenda is one of gathering all relevant information from all relevant sources. That information should be presented accurately and fairly. Sometimes, this orientation is referred to as objectivity, and it is the subject of continuing debate within journalistic circles. Despite the debate, objectivity in some form is a shared value of journalists, and it is in operation in all parts of the journalistic process."

This study approaches the question of what constitutes objectivity and how it is related to the political and economic context by developing an alternative framework that looks at the notion of objectivity as 'method', as 'account' and as 'attitude'. It addresses the question of objectivity as a 'method' by looking at three elements of journalistic practice: use of sources, process of newsgathering and imposition of a story-telling frame. It then discusses objectivity as an 'account' by using the question of the interpretation of reality to critically review the issues of journalistic form, the distinction between facts and views in the news text, and the two-sided nature of the epistemology of journalism: provision of knowledge and provision of opinions. The third part of this alternative framework discusses objectivity as an attitude and focuses on the most articulated elements of the journalistic field: journalistic values such as accuracy, fairness and balance, and journalistic mission incorporated in different descriptions of the role of the journalist in society. The examination of objectivity as an 'attitude' is then used to introduce the ideology of journalism and discuss the links between the ideology and the production of common sense. This conceptual framework is used in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 as an operational tool for the analysis of the media coverage of genetic engineering and discussion of the links between journalistic norms and public debate.

3.2 Historical development of the objectivity norm

Scholars have been more interested in addressing the question of how 'objectivity' became the professional norm for journalists than discussing the discursive potential of its constitutive elements. This set of rules has been developed in the process of the professionalization of journalism, a process marked by John Stuart Mill's (1859 republished 1997) essay on the liberty of thought and discussion, one of the most important texts for the development of liberal journalism. Mill explains why a healthy democracy requires a free exchange of different arguments and he establishes the principle that has guided journalists ever since: "On every subject on which difference of opinion is possible, the truth depends on a balance to be struck between two sets of conflicting reasons" (Mill 1997, p.24).

The idea of multifaceted truth and the need to achieve a balance between conflicting reasons would enter the journalistic field at the end of the 19th century and has since remained one of the profession's key principles. The objective system of reporting – truthful, unbiased, full and fair – is present in almost every code of media ethics in the world, although the question of what those principles really mean rarely crosses the boundaries between the academia and journalism. From the legendary editor of the *Manchester Guardian* C.P. Scott,[28] who believed that the newspaper "implies honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, a sense of duty to the reader and community" (Scott 1997, p.108), to *The Times* editor Harold Evans (1982) who said that the bureaucracy and the politicians send signals to each other through the press, and journalists are there to moderate the messages and keep the game alive, there have been many attempts to identify the core principles of the journalistic representation of the world.

The history of journalism reveals that the emergence of the professional identity of journalists was reflected in the "claims to an exclusive role and status in the society, based on and at times fiercely defended by their occupational ideology" (Deuze 2005, p.442). Questions such as what influenced its appearance, when it happened, how the role of journalists in the society was described, what status was gained, and what the occupational ideology consists of are inseparable from the history of the news media. They have been addressed mainly in the national histories of the press. Although the links between journalism and the making of an international community are strong, there is no comparative historical account of journalism that can help us identify the structural elements of the profession, its key norms and the features of those norms. Michael Schudson (1978, 1988, 2003), whose study of the history of the American press is one of the most comprehensive of its kind, notes that one should take account of the differences in sociological conditions that affected the development of journalistic norms in order to discuss particular journalism practices. Deuze (2002; 2005) explains that although it is possible to extract the universal, basic principles of the journalism profession, it is the historical and social context that brings the different meanings and applications of those principles into national news cultures.

[28] Scott is well known for articulating one of the most famous journalistic doxas: "Comments are free but facts are sacred" (*Manchester Guardian* centennial edition , 5 May 1921)

The history of the press in the United States indicates the main line of the development of norms in American journalism. In the 18th century, printers were businessmen first, not journalists, and "little indicated that the newspaper would become a central forum for political discourse" (Schudson 2003, p.72). Foreign news dominated the press, controversies were avoided, and the printers advocated neutrality. The conflict with Britain[29] brought politics into the newspapers and with politics all the dilemmas of how to maintain the principles of 'fairness' and neutrality of the press. The American newspapers soon became the voice of political parties and divisions. Few papers had professional reporters at that time and journalism was far from an identifiable occupation. A radical change happened in the middle of the 19th century. The emergence of the penny press, a new type of newspaper oriented to commercial success and a mass readership, along with the invention of the telegraph, revolutionised the press market. Schudson (2003, p.77) explains:

> Technology was available, and the competitive, news hungry, circulation-building penny papers made quick use of it. The penny papers brought a broadened, robust sense of what counts as news to American journalism, and added dedication to using news to make profits rather then to promote policies or politicians.

It would take few more decades before both journalism norms and the news form could be articulated. Schudson (2003) notes how interviewing was unknown till 1865 and how journalism's status, income, self-awareness and mythology rose at the end of the century. By 1923 the first professional association had been formed and objectivity became a fully formulated occupational ideal. The history of 20th century American journalism, characterised by the glorification of objectivity as a part of its professional mission and simultaneous recognition of its limits, shows further strengthening of the independence of journalism and its development of autonomy from the state, politics and economy.

[29] After 1765.

The development of journalism in other parts of the world followed different routes. British journalism, although similarly separated from the interference of the state, has never completely given up its partisan notions. The British broadsheet newspapers "do employ a more interpretative style of writing than is typical in North American papers" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.211) and keep distinct political identities (*ibid.*). French journalism developed around its literary and intellectual mission, and although the notion of 'objectivity' entered the world of French journalism in the middle of the 20th century, a certain degree of 'views' incorporated in the reports is allowed – a cardinal sin in American journalism. This difference in approach to reality, which comes from the position of the journalistic field in relation to other fields (literary and political, for example), leads some academics to say that journalism is an Anglo-American invention (Chalaby 1998), an exaggeration that serves the purpose of highlighting the difference between national news cultures.

New Zealand journalism shares the characteristics of Anglo-American journalism. Although the history of national journalism has still to be written,[30] Patrick Day (1990), who pioneered the teaching of media studies in New Zealand, gives some insights into the development of the profession that are useful for the study of the objectivity norm and the analysis of media coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand in the next three chapters of the study. Day (1990) follows the framework established in the Stephens' (1997) history of newspapers in *Collier's Encyclopedia* and explains that newspapers in the first half of the 19th century in New Zealand, like the press in the USA and UK a few decades earlier, generally reflected the point of view of one person – their publisher. Newspapers acted as political advocates for individual politicians until the 1860s, when, with establishment of the *Otago Daily Times*, New Zealand newspapers began a circulation growth as "the increase in population made it possible for the first time for newspapers to be profitable commercial concerns" Day (1990, p.235).[31]

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[30] The most recent attempt to profile the historical development of the journalism profession is Nadia Elsaka's PhD study *Beyond Consensus?: New Zealand Journalists and the Appeal of 'Professionalism' as a Model for Occupational Reform*, University of Canterbury, 2004.

[31] Day's study puts an emphasis on economic factors that have influenced newspaper development in New Zealand and, following the classical "political economy approach" to the media,

Two points about the New Zealand journalistic field, indicated in Day's work, are further elaborated in this study. The first is an explanation of the rise of the journalism profession. Day says that the position of a journalist was highly regarded in a young New Zealand society. Journalists belonged to a respected profession with "publicly recognized political influence and power" (Day 1990, p.168). The path of New Zealand journalism at the end of the 19th century in this sense resembles the French path more than the British. Day lists similarities with the French in the practice of journalism, particularly political journalism: journalism practice was given status and respect, there was close association between journalism and politics, newspapers acted as partisan advocates (common with British and other European newspapers), and writing for newspapers was regarded as a normal step in a political career. That situation changed with the appearance of daily newspapers in the second half of the 19th century, when political activism disappeared from newspaper pages.

Day does not go into more details about the French-like position of journalists in New Zealand society but it seems that traces of the respect for the journalism profession can be still found in this country. Various contemporary political columnists[32] have the status of highly influential political analysts. They not only publish their articles, but give public talks, join television panels, and are invited to make a contribution on public matters in ways philosophers were called upon to do in ancient Greece – as people who know more than others and are able to interpret and predict, a role French journalists still have in the public sphere. Still, it seems that the similarity starts and stops with the social position of the journalistic elite. When it comes to the news form, the structure, content, and design of the newspapers – as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5 – the New Zealand press clearly belongs to the Anglo-American model of journalism with the British influence prevailing.[33]

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investigates the pattern of wider political and economic changes in society in order to explain the position of the press.

[32] Colin James and Brian Easton, for example.

[33] Norris (2001) labels the prevailing British influence as a kind of "enduring hangover from the days of the British Empire" (p.85).

The second characteristic of the 19th-century New Zealand press that still has resonance in modern times is the absence of competition in the newspaper market. Day (1990) explains how the United Press Association (UPA), founded in 1880, became the voice of the New Zealand press. The newspaper market was divided, each paper reported only on local events, and the task of UPA was to collect and redistribute all the news across the country. Each newspaper had the editorial power to select or reject copies of reports from other newspapers, but could not belong to any other news association. The consequence of such newspaper cooperation – relevant for the rise of the autonomy of journalism profession – was editorial uniformity, similarity in news coverage in all the newspapers in New Zealand, and an absence of any alternative perspectives or approaches. Day (1990, p.238) clarifies that this original model offered a newspaper protection from competition, which made each individual newspaper's long-term survival more likely: "While each individual newspaper was able to direct most of its attention to its own local region, the sharing of national and international news gave them both a national focus and a distinctive national character." The distinctive national character was relevant for the founding of New Zealand's national identity. The absence of competition in the 19th century provided an opportunity for the arrival of the international newspaper corporations in the 20th century.

Both notions – respect for the journalism profession and the absence of real competition – are related to the concept of objectivity. They position journalists as neutral mediators of reality, whose method of obtaining news stands as a guarantee of an objective representation of reality. The question of reality and its representation is one of the fundamental questions in the sociology of journalism, media and communication studies. Different perceptions of the media's mediation roles, such as a 'window', a 'mirror', a 'filter', a 'gatekeeper', a 'guide', an 'interpreter', a 'forum', a 'platform', an 'interlocutor' or 'informed partner' (McQuail 2000, p.66) can easily be applied to the role of the journalist in society.

Used as a communication image, a 'mirror', for example, signals a faithful representation of reality; an 'interpreter' assumes the role of a journalist as a

meaning-maker; and a 'forum' indicates the position of the press as a public arena. The following sections take a closer look at the elements of the objectivity concept, and reveal that the press seen as a 'mirror' of reality indicates understanding of objectivity as a method, that the 'interpreter' operates with objectivity seen as account (description and explanation) and the 'forum' implies the status of journalists as objective professionals with a mission to provide a platform for public debate.

3.3 Objectivity as a method

Although the description of news as a 'mirror' of reality still can be heard,[34] most journalists and scholars agree that it is an illusion to expect mirror-like pictures of reality in the news. The word 'represent' signifies that all re-presentations are selective and therefore distorted. The distortion in journalism, explored in the letters to the editor and specialised 'media watch' programmes and columns,[35] is not individually but socially organised and, as some scholars argue, "built into the structures and routines of news gathering" (Schudson 2003, p.33).

The idea that professional routine can be seen as a source of distortion comes from the early ethnographic studies in the 1970s. Based on observation of practice in a newsroom (Tuchman 1972; Sigal 1973), these studies showed that media bias was not a consequence of some intentional, ideological falsification but a result of organisational pressures such as deadlines and space constraints. The issue of journalists' response to organisational pressure focuses attention on the journalistic norms established, applied, developed and changed in and around that practice. Seen as a response to a situation that put obstacles in the way of the representation of reality, this reaction carries the journalist's knowledge and experience about her work, a whole set of habitual reactions (Bourdieu 2002) relevant for the everyday operations in the journalistic field. The habitual reactions come from the journalist's 'socialised subjectivity' the newsroom structure (for example, if there is a breakthrough scientific announcement, the

[34] The practical aspects of the 'mirror' function have been explored in Stoval (2005).
[35] More in the USA than in New Zealand. Specialised programmes includ Radio New Zealand Sunday morning's programme *Media Watch* and TVNZ's *Eating Media Lunch*; there are also columns in the *National Business Review* and the *North and South* magazine.

'science beat' reporter will attend the press conference), a way of being (the journalist follows the rules about researching, newsgathering, structuring and writing a news report) and a predisposition or inclination (the journalist's individual potential to improvise inside those rules). This study approaches a 'way of being' by looking at objectivity as a method. The elements of everyday journalistic practice that constitute an objective approach in gathering news are who to ask for further information (sources), how to obtain that information (newsgathering) and how to tell the story (story-telling frame).

3.3.1 Sources

The journalistic norm to use sources when representing an event is one of the most researched topics in both the sociology of news and in journalism studies. Sigal (1973 p.69) notes that "even when the journalist is in a position to observe an event directly, he remains reluctant to offer interpretations of his own, preferring instead to rely on his news sources" because for the reporter "news is not what has happened, but what someone says has happened".

The answer to the question 'who can talk' in the news defines the journalistic norm in relation to 'sources'. The standard criteria include "reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness and articulateness" (Brown, Bybee, Wearden & Straughan 1987, p.46) and everyday practice demonstrates that the easiest way to find people who satisfy those criteria is to look for official sources in the institutions. Reporters rely on bureaucratic sources because the bureaucracy produces facts that "are assumed to be essentially correct and disinterested" (Tuchman (1981, p.89).

The frequent appearance of official sources in the news leads some scholars to ask whether it is the source or the information journalists are seeking these days (Negrine 1996). The practice of heavy reliance on official sources, such as government, trade unions and professional associations, can be seen as a "perpetuation of the status quo" (Soley 1992, cited in Johnson-Cartee 2005, p.236) because the legitimate institutions with privileged access to the news are

sources with economic or political power. This influence of the powerful on the content of news reports (Shoemaker & Reese 1990) has further consequences for life in democratic societies because it limits the critical debate of public issues. The decision on whose voices and viewpoints would inform and structure the news discourse "goes to the heart of democratic views of, and radical concerns about, the news media" (Cottle 2003, p.5). The extensive scholarship on the position of the elite who have privileged access to news and an advantage in defining reality (Golding & Murdock 1979; Gitlin 1980; Hall 1978; Herman and Chomsky 1988) indicates how the news media serve ruling hegemonic interests and legitimise social inequality. Hall et al. (1978) argue that the pressures imposed upon journalists to meet deadlines, and the professional demands of impartiality and objectivity, allow those in powerful and privileged institutional positions to have a systematically structured accessibility to the media. As a consequence, the media reproduce existing power structures where those sectors that have privileged access to the news, such as business and politics, become "the primary definers of topics" (Hall *et al*. 1978, p.58)[36].

Studies that deal with the interactions between journalists and their business sources (McQuail 1977; Harrison 1985; Tiffen 1989; Ericson et al. 1989; Tumber 1993; Philo 1995) show that despite the fact the corporate sector has been the largest employer of professional public relations, business sources have frequently failed to become dominant sources in mainstream news. Davis notes that "the only time business sources are likely to be reported in mainstream news is when they are involved in wrongdoing or economic or environmental crisis" (Davis 2003, p.36). The relatively high presence of business sources in the GE news stories in the New Zealand newspapers, discussed in Chapter 5, confirms Davis' remark that at the time when British politics[37] has become very 'pro-business' and the press has supported the trend, the tendency not to give a dominant access to corporate sector is not that strange: "Corporate PR has in fact benefited the business sector most by keeping corporations and their practices out of the public

[36] Hall *et al*. explain: "The important point about the structured relationship between the media and the primary institutional definers is that it permits the institutional definers to 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" (Hall *et al*.1978, p.58 – Hall's emphasis).
[37] Davis studied the rise of professional public relations in Britain.

eye – while simultaneously keeping the focus of economic responsibility on government" (Davis 2003, p.41). The question is: what norm develops around this practice and how is newsgathering related to the other elements of the objectivity norm?

The typical pattern of the relationship between politicians (as sources) and journalists is a relationship of collaboration rather than conflict, because the "mutuality of interests drives and sustains the relationship" (Franklin 2003, p.46). From the journalists' point of view, a good relationship with political sources brings certainty into their work. A 'good source' in government, parliament or political party provides information that is likely to be newsworthy (their institutions are powerful as such) and already tailored in an accessible media format (their public relations are very well developed). It helps the news process in two ways: it speeds up the newsgathering procedure and makes the writing easier[38].

3.3.2 Newsgathering

While the universal concept of 'objectivity' or more specific sets of rules such as 'attribution', 'sources' or 'frame' have received reasonable attention and healthy concern, 'newsgathering' has often been considered as a method meant to produce good, unprejudiced, evidence-based reporting (Van Dijk 1987; Holbert & Zubric 2000). Unlike methods in other political, social and cultural fields, where the traces of creating a 'product' are subjects of serious academic scrutiny, the newsgathering method in the journalism field rarely gets recognized more than just as a technique (Bell 1991). This study calls for a re-examination of the concept, arguing that the transparency of the way information has been obtained alters our knowledge about the subject. Based on the premise that the news story is a social construction (Tuchman 1978) and 'a reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse' (Schudson 1995, p.14), it discusses

[38] The consequences of already tailored media formats are less impressive: it privileges the powerful in a routine and systematic way. Manning (2001) signals that spin doctors are among the most important people in every party because "*how* things are presented often appears to be more important than *what* the policy is" (Manning 2001, p.44 – Manning's emphasis).

newsgathering as a segment of journalism practice that represents journalism's authority to construct news events. The journalistic practice of explaining news-assembling processes is related to different styles and standards of journalism, particularly the principle of objectivity. Giving the time, place and context of statements from a variety of sources, and sustaining the line between reporting and reported voices, clarifies the position of journalist as a moderator of reality. This clarity defines the role of the press in providing information that encourages opinions and decision-making (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001), in other words in creating a forum for public debate.

The transparency of the newsgathering process is important because it clarifies the mediating character of communication in the news media by reminding the reader that there is a journalist between reality and representation of reality. It makes it apparent that journalism is not just a matter of presenting 'facts as they are', an objectivity principle flagged by journalism positivists in Anglo-American schools of journalism, but also a matter of assembling truth beneath and around 'facts as they are told'. This practice, a key characteristic of the more interpretative continental European schools of journalism, is more suitable for addressing the challenges of a media-centered landscape where, as Manning (2001, p.44) explains, "private and public organizations now feel the need to hire press officers or public relations consultants and even marginal campaigning groups to try to develop more sophisticated media strategies".

Scholars have identified journalists' dependence on public relations material, asking what the consequences of this newsgathering practice are. The analysis of three leading Australian dailies found how 37 percent of stories published over a week were "directly influenced by some form of public relations activity" (Tidey 2002, p.95). Comrie (2002) cites an American study that shows half of the stories in the *Wall Street Journal* were based solely on press releases, and says that New Zealand studies provide a similar trend of over 50 percent of press releases used, across all the news sections and not only business pages. She explains public relations' impact on the news media by the fact that there is a rise in public relations personnel at the same time as the news media have cut back on journalists. The practice that develops around this new way of newsgathering is

the omission of the full explanation of how the information has been obtained. Chapter 5 will use examples of the articles published on genetic engineering to discuss the alteration of meaning in the news, and the issue of transparency of newsgathering in relation to sources and story-telling frames.

3.3.3 Story-telling frame

Frame is a consistent pattern of thought that journalists and readers regularly use to make sense of events (Gamson & Modigliani 1989). It is a tool that helps journalists make speedy decisions about what is worth their attention as news, what to emphasise and what to exclude (Griffin & Dunwoody 1997).

The story-telling frame is based on news values and the order of newsworthy elements in the news story. Extensive scholarship on news values (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Fuller 1997; Masterton 1998; McGregor 2002) describe the newsworthiness of events as a set of criteria used to select the part of reality that will become news. Hall (1978) stresses that the journalist's "sense of news values" (p.53) structures the process of professional ideology. To find out more, Masterton (1998) surveyed journalists across the world and found that the vast majority of professionals use the same set of measures when deciding what is news. The judgment about newsworthy reality is based on several characteristics of the event: consequences, proximity, prominence, human interest, conflict and oddity. These criteria along with timeliness, which Masterton acknowledges as a pre-condition for any interest, are used in this study as a basis for judging how the events were selected and represented in the news. Judgment about the newsworthiness of reality, as well as choice of sources and newsgathering are integrated in the process of choosing a story-telling frame. Based on values, a frame is a form of structuring information in order to define what is known of a topic. Gitlin (1980) stresses that "frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognise it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences" (p.7). These persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation or selection, emphasis, and exclusion (Gitlin 1980; Norris 2003) are

the ways by which journalists routinely organise discourse. The conventional frames in mainstream media interpret the 'news' by including contextual clues. Norris (2003) discusses the news frames of terrorism to explain that what dominate the news are conventional news frames that "furnish consistent, predictable, simple, and powerful narratives that are embedded in the social construction of reality" (p.4).

Journalists learn to select items that already 'make sense' in terms of their own personal knowledge and experience. Manning (2001) says that these "inferential frameworks which experienced journalists have already acquired in the course of their work may evolve or be modified over time but at any given moment they influence both the selection of news stories and the way in which the particular news ingredients of the story – the bits of information to be included – are assembled" (p.6). This use of old frames has considerable consequences for the articulation of the issue for public debate. The analysis in Chapter 6 shows how the reproduction of frames goes both ways: from news, a genre that represents the informative function of the news media, to editorials, a genre that represents a newspaper's voice in public debate, and the opposite way, from editorials to news, affecting the way genetic engineering was represented in the press.

The research done in political communication indicates that news frames also influence the individual's issue preferences and decision-making. Such influence is possible because a journalist selects facts that explain the issue, but also tries to make sense of the issue by locating it within the range of known social and cultural identification. Those facts, hierarchically arranged to emphasise those with 'greater' relevance and importance, are cultural maps (Hall 1978; Van Dijk 1998) that help the reader to understand the social world.

Three elements of journalistic practice – sources, newsgathering and story-telling frame – are based on a system of professional beliefs about the best way to establish what Hall *et al*. (1978) call the "maps of meanings":

> The social identification, classification and contextualization of news events in terms of these background frames of reference is the

> fundamental process by which the media make the world they report on intelligible to readers and viewers. This process of 'making an event intelligible' is a social process – constituted by a number of specific journalistic practices, which embody (often only implicitly) crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works. (p.54)

This system of beliefs is incorporated into a chain of strategic rituals that constitute the objectivity norm seen as a set of ritual steps comprising the method of everyday practice. Objectivity seen as strategic ritual highlight a set of journalistic procedures "which protect the professional from mistakes and his critics" (Tuchman 1972, p.678). A detailed examination of journalistic practice shows tools that are used to reduce the risks of making mistakes. Tuchman (1972, pp.665–671) identifies use of quotation marks to signal the distance between the news subject's account and the journalist's detached neutrality; inclusion of supporting evidence in the form of other people's judgments; and careful attention to the sequencing or ordering of material, with the most 'important' information included at the beginning of the report. These same rituals are what Franklin (1997) calls "editorial protocols" (p.36). He explains that it is true they "give the journalist's work credibility by suggesting a degree of objectivity in news reporting" but "in reality they are simply routine ways of coping with the risks inherent in producing news under the severe constraints of time" (Franklin 1997, p.36).

These habitual ways of reporting are deeply rooted in the journalist's understanding of the field and her own position in it. They are based both on the knowledge about standard practice, such as choice of sources, newsgathering method and story-telling frame and the journalist's own strategy in dealing with the issue. The question of the individual strategy in interpreting reality, the strategy that brings an 'objective account' of reality, challenges scholars to investigate the nature of, and the interactions between, objectivity and the status of the issue in political and public arenas.

3.4 Objectivity as account

There is a link between the 'objective' account of reality and public opinion: Hallin (1986) says that the news coverage tends to appear more objective to readers the closer it falls within the prevailing political consensus of the moment. To illustrate different standards of reporting in relation to politics, Hallin draws a map of three concentric circles where the circles correspond to the spheres of 'consensus, controversy and deviance' in society (Hallin 1986, pp.116-117). Within the 'sphere of consensus', he explains, exist social issues that journalists regard as non-controversial. When dealing with such issues, journalists "do not feel compelled to present opposing views or to remain disinterested observers. On the contrary, the journalist's role is to serve as an advocate or celebrant of consensus values" (Hallin 1986, p.117.). In the 'sphere of legitimate controversy' (such as electoral contests or legislative debates) exist social issues that journalists consider as suitable subjects of partisan dispute. When that is the case, objectivity and balance are the ruling journalistic principles. The 'sphere of deviance' as a region occupied by "political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard". In this sphere, journalism throws away the mask of neutrality and "plays the role of exposing, condemning, or excluding from the public agenda those who violate or challenge the political consensus. It marks out and defends the limit of acceptable political conflict" (Hallin 1986, p.117). The boundaries between the three spheres are not fixed but fluid and changeable. What does not change, however, is the connection between the source's position in the sphere and its access to the media: the highest credibility is accorded to the source coming from the consensus sphere and the lowest credibility to the source from the deviance sphere.

The position of the source in the public sphere determines its access to the media, and its access to the media leads to the possibility of providing and shaping knowledge about the issue in the public arena. Therefore, the question of the relationship between journalists and sources, and between newsgathering and frame are entwined with the question of the fundamental principle of an 'objective' interpretation of reality – the division of 'facts' from 'views' in the news. This division starts with the choice of journalistic form and is the basis of

journalism epistemology.

3.4.1 Journalistic form

The definition of journalistic 'genre' reflects the diversity of approaches in journalism studies. The reach and influence of the word "news", to start with, is reflected in the multiple ways in which it is used and understood. 'News' can be used as a generic noun for all texts created by journalists ('today's news' or 'yesterday's news'). It can also be used as a synonym for the news media in general (such as newspapers, television, or radio): 'it was in/on the news'. Sometimes, it can be used in reference to a particular news item ('according to the news') or in reference to the basic information about a current event ('let's get the news out first and then work on a feature for the weekend').

Media scholars distinguish 'factual' and 'fictional' media genres,[39] and within the 'factual' genre scrutinise the news as the most prestigious of the daily media genres, a status gained from "its role at the centre of the exercise of power in modern societies" (Garrett & Bell 1998, p.4). Those who look closely into news texts identify different genres, or forms, of journalistic output. McNair (1998) recognises five basic forms: news report, feature article, commentary or column, interview and editorial, and stresses that these journalism products are discursive types with "distinctive rhetorical styles, aesthetic conventions and communicative functions" (p.10).

It is the 'communicative function' of the journalistic form that is the most relevant for the journalistic field's interaction with other fields. The two main communicative functions of the journalistic field are providing 'information' and 'interpretation'. Although they are intertwined – the mere fact of selection of information is the beginning of its interpretation – they are separated in

[39] The term 'genre' is used in literary and media theory to refer to a distinctive type of text. Although the lines are blurred in the age of mixed media culture (Kovach & Rosensteil 1999) 'fictional genres' are the products of the author's imagination (movies, novels, soap-operas), while 'factual genres' belong to the world of journalism, documentaries, travel writing. Scholars note that classification of genres should be seen as a process of systematisation, not as a system itself (Neale 1980).

journalistic discourse along the lines of 'facts' and 'views' that compliment the two basic genres among journalistic products: 'news' and 'opinions'. The term 'news' in this study is used as a synonym for any informative news article, being hard news, interview, feature, reportage or backgrounder, and the term 'opinions' covers all published columns, commentaries, editorials and other opinion pieces.

This broad classification is dictated by the logic of the journalistic field and the two communicative functions of the news media. It is also expressed in the two different dimensions of the objectivity norm in relation to the genre: in the 'news' the stress is on objectivity as a method of newsgathering that brings 'facts' into the representation of reality; and in 'opinions' objectivity is seen as the authority of the newspaper to give different 'views' and provide an exchange of ideas in order to reveal the 'best for all' meaning of reality (as discussed in Chapter 6). The investigation of 'facts' and 'views' in the news text belongs to the discipline of journalism epistemology, the inquiry into the social construction of meanings in the news media.

3.4.2 Epistemology of journalism

The process of giving social meanings to events both assumes and constructs society as a 'consensus' where members have access to the same maps of meaning. Hall *et al*. (1978) explains that "not only are we all able to manipulate these 'maps of meaning' to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect" (p.55). Three fundamental areas of the epistemology of journalism that Ekstrom (2002) suggests are a form of knowledge, production of knowledge and public acceptance of knowledge claims. They correspond with the communication triangle: sender, message and receiver. When it comes to a form of knowledge, the analysis of a news text identifies what characteristics of knowledge journalism produces; the investigation of a production of knowledge addresses the question of journalistic norms, rules, routines, and procedures; and public acceptance of knowledge claims is related to the conditions that are important in the acceptance or rejection of knowledge claims.

Journalistic text is an "event-oriented form of knowledge" (Ekstrom 2002, p.266) and this preoccupation with events, instead of issues or process for example, means that journalists are on the constant look-out for a particular segment of reality – events that are new, unexpected, and out of ordinary. Events that are suitable for representation in the news satisfy news values criteria and have one significant universal characteristic: they are appropriate for easy contextualisation. The concept of typification (Tuchman 1973) demonstrates how the efficiency of journalism comes from the fact that meanings are ascribed to certain types of events. If the press release comes from the Prime Minister's office, it is firstly classified as a 'political event' and consequently covered by the Press Gallery reporter, although the real topic can, for example, be art (the invitation for an art exhibition that will be opened by the Prime Minister). Journalism's relationship to classifications, ready-made typifications, means that it reproduces an already 'classified' reality but it also enthusiastically "contributes to producing, reproducing and naturalizing collective conceptions of reality" (Ekstrom 2002, p.269).

To understand this 'naturalisation' of collective conceptions of reality, one has to understand the interplay between facts and views in the news text. Everyday language and thought make a distinction between knowledge and opinion. 'Knowledge' stands as justified beliefs, beliefs that satisfy socio-culturally variable and shared truth criteria, while 'opinions' are generally defined as those beliefs that do not pass the test criteria of knowledge (Van Dijk 1998). It is 'common knowledge' that genetic engineering, confined to the laboratory, might help the advancement of medicine, but it is 'opinion' that commercial production of genetically engineered plants might bring prosperity to society would be an opinion. Van Dijk (1998, p.5) stresses that 'opinions' are beliefs that have an evaluative dimension, implying that something is good or bad, right or wrong. Opinions reflect those who express them: the evaluators, their norms and values; whereas the factual beliefs (knowledge) are focused on the 'objective' or the intersubjectively accepted properties of things. The distinction between 'knowledge' and 'opinion' resonates very well within the field of journalism. It

corresponds with the distinction between journalism's two basic genres: 'news' and 'opinions'.

3.4.3 News and opinions

The news is regarded as an expression of factual, justified beliefs, accounts or summaries of events that satisfy a commonly agreed set of criteria for the 'truthfulness' of representations of reality. Opinions evaluate in subjective ways but do not necessarily reflect the views of all members of a society. This distinction causes many frustrations in contemporary journalism. The shift in journalism practice, where 'facts' reporting includes opinions, and editorials (identified in this study, for example) use 'objectivity twists' to call for balance, middle-road and common sense,[40] challenged some authors (Postman 1985; Bourdieu 1998) to discuss how some news media formats, such as 'round tables' on television, present a threat to journalism. Bourdieu (1998, pp. 28–29) uses the case of experts most frequently invited onto television programs to discuss the relationship between time pressure and thought, and concludes that journalism is characterised by an exchange of banal ideas:

> In fact, what we have to ask is why these individuals are able to respond in these absolutely particular conditions, why and how they can think under these conditions in which nobody can think. The answer, it seems to me, is that they think in clichés, in the "received ideas" that Flaubert talks about – banal, conventional, common ideas that are received generally. By the time they reached you, these ideas have already been received by everybody else, so reception is never a problem.

If we accept Bourdieu's point that when it comes to television, the journalism field is characterised by the reproduction of common ideas related to the new events (subjects of reports or television debates) then one can ask where is the

[40] This analogy has to be taken with caution because the same belief may be an 'opinion' in one context (for one person) and knowledge in another context. Any assessment of beliefs as knowledge has to take into account the social and cultural context of the story.

space for the creation of new ideas, and the individual journalist's contribution inside the routine, her habitual response to new events and processes? Ekstrom (2002) argues it is important to first identify the original features of journalism, without which journalism is no longer journalism but something else. His own answer defines the epistemology of journalism: "A characteristic of journalism is its claim to present, on a regular basis, reliable, neutral and current factual information that is important and valuable for the citizens in democracy" (Ekstrom 2002, p.274).

News, as a form of knowledge, is considered as important and of value to society because it offers 'factual information' through a process of objective reporting. The New Zealand Press Council, the only regulatory body for the New Zealand print media, stresses that "it is important to the Council that the distinction between fact and conjecture, opinions or comment be maintained" (*Statement of Principles* 2003). The Council clarifies that newspapers "should be guided at all times by accuracy, fairness and balance, and should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers by commission or omission" (*Statement of Principles* 2003)

The stress on accuracy, fairness and balance – the three principles that comprise news reporting – shows how the concept of objectivity can be seen as an approach to reality, that is, the attitudes that guide journalists in their everyday work.

3.5 Objectivity as attitude

The everyday journalist's work is affected both by her own beliefs, cultural and educational background and by the occupational norms of the group. The collective or 'institutional' set of rules that influence journalistic practice comes from the news organisation, the journalistic field as a whole, and other fields in the environment, such as politics or law. Scholars recognise journalists' individual beliefs as a factor that has an impact on news discourse (Morgan 1998) but more systematic analysis shows that the dominant influence comes from institutional settings (Patterson & Donsbach 1996). The investigation of journalistic professional values shows some universal features of the relationship between the agents and the field. Journalists across different news cultures define their own

profession in terms of getting the news out "as quickly as possible" (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, p.263) but differ in how they explain the core professional value such as the notion of objectivity. The 'objective' or 'neutral' journalism practice defines American journalism and has dominated its press for over a century. Donsbach and Klett's (1993) comparative survey of professional values of journalists in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and United States of America offered five qualities of news to choose from: "no subjectivity", "fair representation", "fair skepticism", "hard facts", and "value judgment" (pp.63-64). For American and British journalists, the first four items are equally important parts of quality news, while German journalists prefer "hard facts" and Italians, an "avoidance of subjectivity" (p.64). The study reveals that American and German journalists are at opposite ends of the spectrum in regard to 'objectivity'. For the German journalists, the most favourable notion of objectivity is to "go beyond statements and report the hard facts" (p.65). For American and British journalists, "good news reporting expresses fairly the position of each side in a political dispute" and "requires an equally thorough questioning of the position of each side in a political dispute" (p.65) American and British journalists stress '"he news media's function to act as a common carrier between interest groups and the public" while the continental-European journalists are more oriented to "investigating these interest groups' assertions and get to the hard and 'true' facts of the political scene" (Donsbach and Klett 1993, p.78). The principles that help obtain the "true" facts are accuracy, fairness and balance.

3.5.1 Values: Accuracy, fairness and balance

Journalistic professionalism and commitment to the norm of objectivity is defined by the set of unquestioned professional principles that McQuail (2000) summarises in a sentence: "The height of professional skill is the exercise of the practical craft, which delivers the required informational product, characterised by a high degree of objectivity, key marks of which are obsessive facticity and neutrality of attitude" (p.257). 'Facticity and neutrality of attitude' indicate the factual and evaluative dimension of 'objective' reporting. Similarly, using the Swedish broadcasting system and their journalists as a case study, Westerstahl

(1983) identifies two constitutive elements of objectivity that follow the distinction between 'facts' and 'values' in reports: 'factuality' and 'impartiality'.

Factuality is a form of reporting that provides facts as units of information that can be "checked against sources and that are presented free from comment" (McQuail 2000, p.73). This scheme is further refined on 'truth' criteria, such as completeness, accuracy and good faith and 'relevance', based on the news value and newsworthiness of the events. On the 'values' side of objectivity is 'impartiality' that is further refined as 'balance' and 'neutrality'. This framework is based on the question of how journalists have to operate if objectivity has to be achieved. Journalistic practical wisdom, expressed in the accuracy, fairness and balance norms, are so deeply integrated in the concept of objectivity that they are often used synonymously with it. Even Schudson (2001), who has comprehensively analysed the objectivity norm, uses the terms 'objectivity' and 'fairness' as synonyms[41] and describes modern objectivity as "modern analytical and procedural fairness" (p.161).

The facts, and their "validity, attribution, and accuracy" are seen as the basis of objective journalism (Holbert and Zubric 2000, p.55). The process of checking the accuracy of information, usually called verification of the facts, is one of the most important rituals in news production (Erickson *et al*. 1987) because it guarantees the events are reported 'as they really are'. The notion of a faithful representation of reality gives journalists authority to map the world for their readers, and it gives credibility to the news outlets to make sense of that map. To keep a high standard of accuracy in news reporting means to cross-check the facts and to fully attribute sources. This initial procedure is considered to be the responsibility of the author of the text.[42]

The importance of accuracy in news reporting has led some scholars to claim that the chief goal of journalists is producing and presenting accurate news and

[41] When explaining the appearance of the 'penny press' in the 19th century, he says: "This newly aggressive commercialism in journalism was an important precondition for modern notions for objectivity, or fairness …"(Schudson 2001, p.155).
[42] "All journalists must take full responsibility for accuracy, and must also consider tone, fairness and the general impression left with the reader" states Dunedin Journalists' Union Guide to Journalism (1965) – reprinted in Elsaka (2004, p.35).

information (Stoval 2005). Being related both to 'facts' and to 'views', accuracy is always seen as a plain representation of reality. McQuail (2000) describes accuracy in terms of "conformity to independent records of events, whether in documents, other media or eyewitness accounts" and "consistency within the news text" (p.320). It is the faithful reporting of the source that clearly indicates the separation of journalists from sources they cover. It leads to another value that is considered as a precondition to achieving the ideal of objectivity and that is 'fairness'. The International Federation of Journalists' Statement of Principles on the conduct of journalists (1954, amended 1986)[43] defines fairness in terms of these requirements: "The journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news and of the right of fair comment and criticism" and "the journalist should use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents" (point 4, online). The journalistic norm is therefore conceptualised both as a method (fairness in obtaining news) and a license (to comment upon the news).

The attempts to develop guidelines for journalists and editors reveal the ambiguous nature of the principles themselves. The principle of 'balance', for example, is inscribed in the old journalistic rule to always hear the 'other side of the story'. It aims to ensure impartiality of reporting (Westerstahl 1983), but – as the discussion of professional norms in New Zealand journalism (Chapter 7) demonstrates – it does not aim to open the process of evaluation of journalistic work to agents from other fields. It is more a part of the internal procedure used by journalists to achieve several pragmatic goals. The 'balance' norm helps them to build up the drama of the event (very well explained in Hall *et al.* 1978); it helps journalists to meet the deadline even if they haven't finished the verification of facts (Session 2003); by presenting fully attributed competing claims, they absolve themselves from responsibility (Tuchman 1978, p.91); and it gives them grounds for claiming fairness in reporting (Weigold 2001).

The notion of objectivity and the idea that it is possible to extract the 'real' facts about the event if one just follows a method of newsgathering that includes

[43] Source: http://www.ifj.org/docs/ETHICS-E.DOC/.(accessed 21 august 2006)

accuracy, fairness and balance, carries both elitist and egalitarian ideals. There is a kind of elitist belief about the roles everyone plays in the society – journalists to provide precise facts, and leaders to govern responsibly.[44] But there is also an egalitarian trust in reporters who search for the truth and, by following the principles of accuracy, fairness and balance. Both approaches are attempts to define the essence of the journalistic mission.

3.5.2 Journalistic mission

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2001), two leading American journalism scholars, undertook four years of research to define the profession of journalism and came up with the following definition of journalistic work:

> The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society" (CCJ, *The Statement of Concern*, 1997, para. 2, online).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) state nine core principles that journalists have developed over time to meet the demands of their task (pp.36-50). They comprise what might be described as the epitome of journalism and include the following (summarised) principles: journalism's first obligation is to the truth; its first loyalty is to citizens; its essence is a discipline of verification; it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; it must serve as an independent monitor of power; it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant; it must keep the news comprehensive and proportional; and its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their individual conscience .

In New Zealand, the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union EPMU Code of Ethics for journalists defines the principles of the profession as "respect for truth and the public's right to information" (Journalist Code of Ethics, para 1,

[44] Lippmann says: "This notion that everybody is to decide everything destroys the sense of responsibility in the public men and deprives public opinion of responsible leadership" (Lippmann 1963, citied in Holbert & Zubric 2000, p.60.

online). The perceived role of the journalist in society has been debated among journalists since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, it was stressed in the draft of the New Zealand Journalists Association Creed for Journalists 1945:

> The journalist at the same time as a citizen and the servant of the public, has a duty to reveal and oppose, within the bounds of fair reporting, instances of danger to the people's fundamental right of self-government and security.[45]

Regardless of the national news culture's preferences towards the status of the journalist in the society, it seems there is "a lot of common ground in what journalists in different countries formally accept as the appropriate standards" of their everyday practice (McQuail 2000, p.152). The list of the most frequent principles in journalism codes[46] includes the 'standards of gathering and presenting of information' – the concept of objectivity this study aims to develop. By stressing 'method', 'account' and 'attitude' as elements of objectivity, this thesis positions the concept of objectivity inside journalism's professional ideology. Mancini (1986; 1996), who was among the first to note the difference between proclaimed standards of objective journalism and the actual standards, suggests that journalistic norms be considered as a particular professional ideology ('practice'), rather than as a body of shared knowledge ('theory'). The concept of journalism ideology is discussed in the next section, 'professional ideology'.

3.5.3 Journalism ideology and common sense

The objectivity norm is considered as the basis of journalism ideology, related to the principles that guide journalists in their everyday work. The concept of objectivity is linked to the idea of 'common sense', a set of implicit beliefs about

[45] Source: *The New Zealand Journalists*, July 15, 1945, p.1 (reprinted in Elsaka 2004: 349). Elsaka point that the Creed has never been formally adopted.
[46] These are: truthfulness and clarity of information, defence of the public rights, responsibilities in forming public opinion, standards of gathering and presenting information, respecting the integrity of sources (McQuail 2000, p.152)

the links between objects that exist in the world, their relationships and the outcomes of their interactions. Fowler (1996 pp.10–11) lists 'categorization', 'causation' and 'general propositions or paradigms' as elements of common sense and suggests this ordinary logic provides a normative base to discourse. The notion of common sense is socially and culturally situated. Anglo-American cultural production, journalism included, demonstrates a strong orientation toward empiricism and practical achievements. Hall finds roots of the notion of common sense in traditional English ideology, where the notion of common sense and middle ground is a type of anti-intellectualism. He says that common sense is a form in which that ideology is carried: "The world bounded by 'common sense' is the world of the subordinate classes; it is central to that subordinate culture which Gramsci, and others following him, call 'corporate'" (Hall et al. 1978, p.154).

Common sense in journalism, like common sense elsewhere, is more a matter of social practice than a function of individual cognition. In one of the rare works published on common sense and journalism, Glasser and Ettema (1989) note that common sense, like other forms of knowledge, is an historically constructed system of thought with its historically defined systems of judgments. The content of common sense naturally shifts across cultures and across times, but its basic properties remain comparatively unchanged. Geertz (1983) lists five of these, all of which are relevant for this analysis of the journalistic norms and their influence on public debate. They are: 'practicalness' – common sense is a response to particular needs and serves those needs; 'methodicalness' – common sense highlights the importance of common wisdom; 'accessibleness' – common sense has egalitarian appeal because it does not require esoteric knowledge or special technique; 'thinness' – the facts are obvious and mostly unambiguous because common sense deals with the world simply, typically graphically, and often quite literally; and lastly the 'naturalness' of common sense, "its most fundamental attribute", posits an unproblematic view of the world. That is to say, the content of common sense is "depicted as inherent in the situation, intrinsic aspects of reality, the way things go" (cited in Glasser and Ettema 1989, p.20).

The 'naturalness' of common sense is linked in this thesis with the objectivity norm, and it is argued that the principles of gathering, processing and presenting

information are aimed at providing the 'commonsense' meaning of the news text. This process is part of a more universal practice that Bourdieu (2002, p.8) calls 'orchestration of habitus', which he explains as:

> the production of a commonsense world endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world, in other words the harmonization of agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (common places, sayings) of similar or identical experiences.

There is a fine line between consensus of meanings that comes from common experience and consensus generated by ideology.[47] The first comes from the autonomy of the field and is a ground for the establishment of journalistic norms; the second is seen as an intrusion from the outside world and an attempt to impose some other norms. When discussing professionalism and partisanship among journalists, Schudson (2003, pp.43–44) cites two journalists whose opinions illustrate this distinction of understanding in the notion of 'common sense' in journalism. Robert Darnton, who worked for the *New York Times*, says reporters are "hostile to ideology, suspicious of abstractions, cynical about principles, sensitive to the concrete and complex, and therefore apt to understand, if not condone, the status quo"; and Paul Taylor, from the *Washington Post* explains: "By aiming for the golden mean, I probably land near the best approximation of truth more often than if I were guided by any other set of compasses – partisan, ideological, psychological, whatever".

[47] Fairclough cites Kumar's study (1977) on the BBC and explains: "… in the more unstable and competitive climate which has obtained since the beginning of the 1960s, the BBC has had to abandon its claim to be the voice of a natural cultural consensus. Its voice – personalized in its announcers, newsreaders and presenters – has evolved in a populist direction, claiming common ground (the 'middle road' and a shared 'common sense') with audiences, and often adopting a cynical, challenging and even aggressive stance to a variety of official institutions and personalities, including, for instance, government ministers. But the common-sense assumptions and presuppositions which the discourse of these key media personnel is built upon often have a heavily ideological character – naturalizing, taking as obvious, for instance, basic design features of contemporary capitalist society and its consumerist values" (Fairclough 1995, p.46).

The ambition to find a 'golden mean', or middle road, reveals the evaluative dimension of objectivity and illustrates objectivity as an attitude – proclaimed adherence to accuracy, fairness and balance in reporting. However, the complexity of everyday journalistic practice requires a more comprehensive framework to capture the full spectrum of the norms' appearance and influences in the wider social sphere. This study offers an operational concept that perceives objectivity in three dimensions: as method, account and attitude.

3.6 Operational concept of objectivity

Objectivity seen as a 'method' designates a system of journalistic practice in gathering and processing information. It relies on a set of rules developed in everyday interactions between journalists and the outside world. It includes three specific questions in journalism production: the choice of sources, the way news is gathered and the selection of the story-telling frame.

The 'account' dimension of the norm indicates the ideal form of a journalistic product, and that is an 'objective' news text. As the most debated aspect of the concept of objectivity, the 'account' segment has been discussed in terms of social construction of reality (Tuchman 1978; Norris 2003) and as an obstacle to investigative and critical reporting (Glasser and Ettema 1989). Journalists, journalism scholars and news critics agree that absolute objectivity is impossible to achieve, but some of them state that it is also an undesirable goal because "objective news tends to reaffirm and restrict the legitimate range of debate to the established, the well-organised, and the powerful" (Raphael 2000, pp.130-137).

Instead of valorizing the notion of objectivity as an account of reality, this study approaches the question of the objective 'account' as a question of journalism epistemology. It identifies elements of journalistic practice relevant for understanding the form and the production of knowledge in news articles: facts and views provided as information about the events and processes in society.

The 'attitude' aspect of the objectivity norm points toward the system of professional ideals that guide journalists in their everyday work. It consists of the

set of values that characterise good, credible and reliable journalism. Professional values such as accuracy, fairness and balance are integrated in the news text though a system of tools that provide desired standards of practice. 'Attitude' is also defined by journalists' self-reflection and their own understanding of the role they play in society. This 'mission' element is followed by the developed conceptualization of the status and character of journalists' work that can be called the professional ideology of journalism.

All the elements of the concept of objectivity are intertwined: the spectrum of sources might influence the choice of journalistic genre, the frame of the story is linked to the proportion of facts and views in the account of reality, the 'mission' aspect of the objectivity norm has an impact on the frame. This study establishes the following framework that illustrates multidimensional aspect of the concept:

THE CONCEPT OF OBJECTIVITY

METHOD		**ACCOUNT**		**ATTITUDE**
Sources	↔	Genre	↔	Values
Newsgathering	↔	Facts	↔	Mission
Frame	↔	Views	↔	Ideology

This concept will be used in the analysis of the influence of journalistic norms on public debate about genetic engineering in New Zealand in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has provided a critical overview of the main theoretical perspectives on the concept of objectivity and a critical analysis of platforms used to discuss its constitutive elements. By looking at the historical development of the objectivity norm and different meanings assigned to the profession's long-held ideal of journalists as 'neutral' mediators of reality, the chapter offered a new, comprehensive framework for discussion of the notion of objectivity: as method, account and attitude. It was suggested that objectivity could be discussed as a method that includes investigation of journalists' habitual reactions in relation to

their choice of sources, a way of newsgathering and the imposition of a story-telling frame. The chapter highlighted problems with seeing objectivity as an account of reality, and suggested investigating the news 'genre' as a relevant segment of journalistic practice that reveals individual strategies in interpreting reality. A strategy developed around the choice of genre and inclusion of 'facts' and 'views' in the news text indicates the relationship between journalistic and other fields of cultural production and determines the status of the issue in public domain. The chapter then discussed the concept of objectivity as the journalist's attitude. Using this platform, further investigation included discussion of journalists' values, perception of their role (or mission) in society, and the occupational standards that define journalists' professional ideology. These three elements of the objectivity norm are offered as a new operational framework for objectivity research and theory.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The methodology for the study of the influence of journalistic norms on public debate requires a flexible line of investigation. Using multiple methods highlight different aspects of the complex relationship between the media and society and offers framework for a discussion of journalism and the mediation of reality.

The starting point for the research was the question of how to choose a method that would capture the dialogical character of the field, the form of balancing accounts and ongoing dialogue within the text in its production and in its conversation with the reader. The problem reflects the essence of the discipline of journalism: it is rooted in 'positivism' and it claims to represent 'facts as they really are', but each segment of its practice, from selecting events to giving the news a headline, clearly demonstrates a deep embeddedness in 'constructivism'. The proposed method that captures this ambivalence – the socially constructed nature of reality that seeks the answer to the question of "*how* social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.8)—is a combination of quantitative and qualitative investigations. It borrows explanatory frameworks from sociology, as well as cultural and language studies, to conceptualise journalistic practice. It seems to be the most appropriate strategy for highlighting the field's opposing characteristics: journalism's social and professional roles; its formal autonomy and deep dependence on daily interactions with other fields; the power of unwritten norms and the absence of their conceptualisation, to name a few.

The case study for the examination of the concept of objectivity and the influence of journalistic norms on public debate in this thesis is the newspaper coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand. The task is to identify the patterns in news reporting about GE and discuss the interactions between journalism practice as a segment of the journalistic field and issues in public domain. The analysis of the

case study is done in three steps: the patterns in news reporting and the objectivity norm as a way of gathering news are identified by using content analysis; the construction of the news media's voice in public debate is explored by undertaking discourse analysis of editorials; and an inquiry into journalists' reflection on their own work and the norms they apply in everyday practice are uncovered through interviews and a survey.

The previous two chapters provided a theoretical foundation for the conceptualisation of the journalistic field; the notions of the field, habitus, capital and agents of the field explain the links between journalists, their everyday practice and the wider social and cultural environment. The leading journalistic principle in these interactions—the concept of objectivity—is explained and discussed as a method of newsgathering, an account of reality and as the journalist's attitude towards reality. This three-part operational model of objectivity is offered as a platform to explore text, context and journalistic practice.

This chapter explains how this methodology will be used in investigating the case study – media coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand. The chapter aims to place the more universal question of research forms, techniques, and strategies of the investigation of journalism practice, within the wider framework of the social sciences that are in "the business of not just interpreting, but changing the world" (Denzin 2000, p.898). The chapter first introduces the 'case study' as a strategy of inquiry, then presents research questions in the study of the influence of journalistic norms on public debate about genetic engineering in New Zealand, and then elaborates on each segment of the upcoming investigation of the media coverage of GE: the objectivity norm understood as method, account and attitude and its links to the representation, interpretation and construction of reality.

4.2 Case study

The research includes a 'case study' as a particularly suitable form for detailed investigation of both the concept of objectivity and its application in practice. The patterns, features and context provided by a case study on genetic engineering

provide an insight into contemporary trends in reporting about significant social issues in general, and newspaper coverage of the GE issue in New Zealand, in particular. A 'case study' allows a researcher to generalise from the specific but also supports an in-depth investigation of a social phenomenon. Stake (2000) identifies three types of case study: "intrinsic"– the aim is to better understand the particular case; "instrumental" – the objective is to redraw a generalisation and build a theory; and the "collective" case study that seeks better understanding and conceptualisation of a larger collection of studies (p.440). Stake (2000) stresses, however, that the lines between these types are blurred because the case is always "situational and influenced by happenings of many kinds" (p.440).

The media coverage of genetic engineering is used as a case study to identify how the press covered genetic engineering, and to recognise the features that build links between reporting and the newspapers' involvement in a discussion about an issue of public concern. The study uses the case of newspaper coverage of GE to discuss the elements of journalistic practice, namely the norms that constitute the notion of journalistic objectivity, and their relation to more universal social phenomena such as the media's role in the articulation of public discussion in society.

The main reason for scrutinising the press – and not television or radio – is that the print media still have a significant influence on the way public issues are covered in the public domain. Newspapers are often indicators of, as well as triggers for, the stories that emerge the same day on the evening TV news or afternoon current affairs radio programmes. Despite this, there has been a decline in the number of academic studies that deal with professional norms and standards in the print media. Addressing the need to build scholarship in this area, this thesis focuses on current trends in the print media through an analysis of the media coverage of genetic engineering.

Three daily newspapers, the *New Zealand Herald, The Press,* and *The Dominion (Post)* are selected for this case study because, being the oldest news media in New Zealand, they are suitable for an investigation of journalistic practice

formulated and modified by generations of journalists. These three metropolitan dailies have the biggest circulation in New Zealand (Table 1).

Table 1. Newspapers' circulation[48]

NEWSPAPER	**Circulation at 30.09.2001**
New Zealand Herald	211,117
The Press	91,024
Dominion	68,571

The analysis of three newspapers means the investigation of three different newsrooms and three diverse professional backgrounds, which helps to identify both universal and specific elements of journalistic practice related to the public debate. As newspapers based in different communities, the three dailies are suitable for the comparison and interrogation of the relationship between the news coverage of a controversial issue in public domain and the community the paper is based in. All three papers are dailies, published Monday to Saturday. The *New Zealand Herald* is published in Auckland, the major population centre (1,134,600) and business capital of New Zealand. The *Herald* has the largest circulation in New Zealand and has an ambition to be a national daily. It is published by APN News & Media. *The Press* is published in Christchurch (population 345,100), a regional centre and the main city in the South Island). *The Press* is published by Fairfax. The *Dominion Post*, also published by Fairfax, in the capital of New Zealand, Wellington (population 348,000), the political centre of New Zealand.

These three newspapers are also useful for the 'verification' of trends. If, for example, all three newspapers have proportionately the same number of articles for which the newsgathering process is not explained, it may be reliably concluded that New Zealand journalism practice is characterised by an absence of newsgathering transparency.

[48] Source: New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2001.

4.3 The methods for investigation

This study focuses on three broad research questions: how New Zealand newspapers covered the GE issue, how newspapers contributed to public debate, and what journalism norms determined the coverage of an important issue in the public domain such as GE. The discussion that follows describes the methods used to collect and analyse data for investigating research questions. It is organised into three sections that follow the research questions and the logic of the journalistic field expressed in the notions of news media representation, interpretation and construction of reality. The first section presents the methodology for the investigation of 'representation' articulated in the question of how New Zealand newspapers covered genetic engineering. The task is to identify the set of journalistic norms used to report on GE, using content analysis to identify patterns of news coverage. The second section on the 'interpretation' of reality presents discourse analysis as the most suitable method to address the question of how newspaper editorials contribute to public debate. The third section explains how a survey of journalists can be combined with interviews with editors, reporters and journalism scholars in order to identify the norms that guide both journalists in the construction of reality and the forum-creating capacity of the press.

4.4 Representation of reality: Content analysis of the news articles

The study approaches the question of the representation of reality by scrutinising journalistic practice and the notion of objectivity as a method of gathering news. The study does not attempt to compare the genetic engineering 'picture in the news' with the appearance of GE issue in 'real' life – this would be a hard if not impossible task. Indeed, is it possible to separate 'real' and our perception of 'real', or identify 'real' that stands as a point of comparison with its 'picture in the news'? For example, even if we imagine that the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification is a 'truth about GE', a firm 'reality fact' that serves as a reference point, the questions of who establishes the 'truth' remain important for

those who 'read' the truth in newspaper. To take the Report as a fixed 'reality' means to ignore the very nature of journalistic work, which is the interpretation of reality, in this case the Royal Commission's Report and the establishment of 'truth about GE'. Not everyone agreed with the Royal Commission's Report; parts of it have been criticised in the public arena and therefore it cannot stand as a reference point beyond question.

Instead of trying to achieve the unattainable and identify the level of 'GE truth' in the news text, the study focuses on the question of method and the task of how journalistic norms, under the umbrella of objectivity, determine representation of reality in the newspapers. 'Objectivity' as a method of finding the 'truth' – by gathering information, by examining all sides of the story, by separating 'facts' from 'views' and using other tools similar to scientific methodology – has usually been discussed as a reflection of the rising professionalism in journalism (Schudson 2001). As explained in Chapter 3, there is a wide scholarship on the 'meaning' of objectivity as a strategic journalistic ritual but not that many studies look at objectivity as a dynamic segment of everyday practice that significantly influences both the presentation and articulation of 'reality' in the news story.

The most suitable way to capture the manner and patterns of this 'articulation' is the method of content analysis, a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson 1952, p.18). It would be hard to analyse journalistic practice in the light of the highly opinionated debate about genetic engineering in New Zealand—to comment on the proportion between news and opinions in its media coverage, for example—without prior identification, detection and classification of elements that constitute that coverage. Content analysis is suitable for the description of reporting, for comparing media output, for looking at media content as a reflection of social and cultural values and beliefs, for discussing functions and effects of the media, evaluating media performance, and assessing organisational bias (McQuail 2000). By carefully dividing, classifying and measuring the content of the articles, the study offers some general conclusions about the representation of reality in the press. The primary goal is to provoke discussion about the relationship between

the norm and the practice, between journalistic method and the form of knowledge mediated by the press. If we don't know what is selected in the process of representation, we hardly can discuss reasons for, or consequences of, that process. Still, the New Zealand press coverage of the GE issue could hardly be explained by 'pure numbers'.[49] Those particular numbers make sense only when followed with appropriate 'interpretation' that explains why the newspapers covered the issue the way they did. This is the main reason for not relying only on content analysis as a research method in this study.

The imperfection of content analysis – numbers reveal but do not explain – has been noted earlier. Content analysis, a very popular method of scrutinising news media in the last half-century, has attracted many critics (see Burgelin 1972, Berger 1982). Most of them warn that fragmenting the content brings several risks. Berger (1982) says that the difficulties with content analysis come from the fact that it is hard to be certain that the sample is representative, it is hard to obtain a good working definition of the topic, it isn't easy to find a measurable unit and it isn't possible to prove that conclusions based on content analysis are correct.

Only one of Berger's difficulties with content analysis was evident in this study. It was not a problem to decide what the representative sample of the study of media coverage of genetic engineering would be as 'all articles' published on the GE issue in the relevant period were included. The working definition of the topic was not a problem either as it was clear from the beginning that the topic was 'reporting on genetic engineering' in the New Zealand press (media coverage of genetic engineering). The 'whole newspaper article' became the natural choice for the measurable unit. However, the last problem on Berger's list – uncertainty about correct conclusions – was an issue in this study. The same example of the proportion between the news and opinions in the articles published on the GE issue explains the problem. Content analysis revealed that every third news report was followed by one opinion piece. One could ask: What does that mean? Is it good or bad? Is it too much or not enough? What is the desirable proportion? What can be used for comparison? What is the 'standard' that we can use to find

[49] Content analysis is also defined as a "method of reducing text to numbers so that the frequency of selected qualities can be learned" (Singletary, 1994, p.302).

out characteristics of the New Zealand press and its coverage of the GE issue? As the study includes three daily newspapers, it is possible to compare the coverage of the *New Zealand Herald*, *The Press* and the *Dominion* and to suggest some conclusions (for example, the bigger the circulation, the more readers will be persuaded by its arguments) but not more than that. The content analysis of the articles published on the GE issue over a year in three daily newspapers is thus used as the beginning and not the end of the research; it is only one of the three elements in a more comprehensive analysis.

The logical question then is why bother with content analysis if a more advanced, qualitative research method (such as discourse analysis) is capable of providing better insights about the press? In fact, content analysis provides the ground for a qualitative analysis of the press by identifying modes and trends, and generating a set of questions for further research. These questions are all related to journalistic practice and cannot be identified without a systematic analysis of the content.

The main research question – *how the New Zealand newspapers covered the GE issue* – is further refined to capture elements of practice that might contain norms relevant for understanding 'objective coverage of the issue'. To highlight the concept of objectivity as a method of representing reality, the study investigates the intensity of the coverage, the frequency of source appearance, the explanation of newsgathering method and the proportion of different story-telling frames. The main research question is divided into the following set of sub-questions:

- What journalistic forms were dominant in the coverage of the issue?
- Who were the dominant sources?
- Is the newsgathering process explained?
- What was the main story-telling frame?

4.4.1 Data processing

The study compares coverage of the GE topic in three different newspapers. It operates with the following assumptions about commonality among them: the

New Zealand Herald and the *Dominion* are newspapers based in major centres (business and political) and are called 'major centre newspapers'. The *Dominion* and *The Press* have significantly smaller circulations and numbers of staff than the Auckland newspaper and are referred to as 'smaller newspapers'.

Some practical reasons also influenced the decision to use content analysis as a first step of the analysis of media coverage of genetic engineering. The *LexisNexis* database provided easy electronic access to all articles containing the terms 'genetic engineering' or 'genetic modification' in the three dailies. These articles were electronically saved and subsequently classified in specific folders. Each article was read line-by-line to identify elements of journalistic practice and journalistic tools used to gather and process information. All 672 articles were then coded, aiming to achieve "data reduction, and not proliferation" (Ryan & Bernard 2000, p.780). The codes were entered manually on the electronic copy of the article (see Appendix 2, Coding Schedule). The code book was developed and refined as the research went along.

The numerical part of the content analysis has been done by using *HiLighter* software for textual analysis of the coded articles. The *HiLighter* computer programme easily generates the number of appearances of a word or phrase in a set of articles. The word and phrases for analyses were written codes such as: 'JOURNALISTIC FORM: News'; "JOURNALISTIC FORM: Opinion; SOURCE: Green Party; SOURCE: Government; etc. (see detailed discussion of the code sheet later in this chapter).

4.4.2 Monitoring period

The monitoring period in this study refers to a period of time between two specific events: the release of the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification (31 July 2001)[50] and Election Day (27 July 2002). The preliminary analysis[51] of

[50] The day when the first articles about the release of the Report were published in the press.
[51] The analysis covered the articles published from the release of Royal Commission's Report (July 2001) until the Government gave an official response to the Report (October 2001) and included letters to the editor (Rupar 2002).

media coverage of GE in the first three months after the release of the Royal Commission's Report helped to set up the monitoring period. The reading of the text as the first step in the process of identifying future codes, a process called "open coding" (Ryan & Bernard 2000, p.783), disclosed that the press used three simplifications to present the genetic engineering issue: GE was treated as a political topic; there was near unanimity among editorial writers that GE would bring economic prosperity to New Zealand; and, the story was explored predominantly through the conflict story-telling frame. The preliminary study concluded that these simplifications led to a closing and not an opening of the public debate about the issue. The challenge was to extend the monitoring period and to see if the simplification was influenced, or even created, by extensive reliance on 'privileged sources' (the Government and the Green Party) in the three months between the release of the Royal Commission's Report and the Government's response to that report. The test was to see if the coverage followed the same pattern in presenting and interpreting the issue when there was no pressure of policy decision-making. It also examined how traces of journalistic norms developed around 'objective reporting' changed when the issue took on a different position in the public arena.

The dilemma of what to choose as the representative length of the monitoring period was resolved when an early election was called and the GE issue once again became a "hot topic" in the public arena. "The world's first GM election"[52] became the logical closing date for analysis. All articles published in the three daily newspapers between 30 July 2001 and 27 July 2002 are therefore included in the analysis.

The first reading of the articles indicated there were differences in coverage throughout the year. They were related to four distinctive events: the announcement of Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification (30 July 2001), the announcement of the Government's response to the Royal

[52] The *Guardian*, a British daily published a whole page on New Zealand elections. The lead stated: "More than 2.6 million voters in one of the last countries in the world where the entire food production is GM-free go to the polls on Saturday, and the outcome of the furious debate is as likely to decide the balance of power as security, health or the economy" (The *Guardian*, July 24, 2002).

Commission's Report (31 October 2001), the news that there would be early elections (May, 2002) and Election Day (27 July 2002). To capture the elements of those differences and identify how they are related to the way the GE issue was covered in the news, the monitoring period is divided into three phases.

Phase one, from July 2001 until November 2001, includes articles published from the announcement of the Royal Commission's Report on GM until the Government's response to the Report. These news articles are initiated by the happenings around the release of the Report, at a time when the Government was preparing a policy in response to the Royal Commission's recommendations. All agents in the public arena, including newspapers, fought to raise their voice and have an impact on the future policy.

Phase two, from November 2001 until May 2002, includes articles published from the Government's announcement of the response to Royal Commission's Report until the time when news about early elections first appeared in the press. These stories were written in a [period when no governmental policy on GE was underway, they had different triggers and most of them made connections between the policy on genetic engineering and other issues in society, such as health, food, ethics (in relation to cloning, for example), environment, the economy or politics.

Phase three, from May 2002 until July 2002, includes articles published from the first signal about early elections until Election Day. The stories were predominantly political stories related to the upcoming elections where the issue of genetic engineering was used to discuss the question of a future coalition government.

The categorisation of the three different periods of the coverage will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

4.4.3 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of the media coverage of GE is a whole newspaper article containing the term 'genetic engineering' or 'genetic modification', electronically selected by the *LexisNexis* search engine. The first search on the *LexisNexis* database http://www.lexisnexis.com.au for three New Zealand dailies, the *New Zealand Herald, The Press,* and the *Dominion Post*, gave the following results:

New Zealand Herald: 393 articles
The Press: 185 articles
Dominion: 202 articles

A few problems were identified and subsequently dealt with. Some articles appeared twice and this was corrected manually by identifying items by date and deleting the additional copies. The *LexisNexis* database search engine selected all articles where the phrase 'genetic engineering'/ 'genetic modification' appeared. Among the articles were some letters to the editor. Letters to the editor were excluded from this study for two reasons: not all letters to the editor were in the included folder[53] during the electronic search, and more importantly, letters to the editor, written by the readers, do not belong to 'journalistic practice', the very subject of the content analysis. News texts with less than 50 words are also excluded. Such short texts do not offer material for analysis of journalistic practice. These texts were mainly short announcements on the front page (briefs), none of which was relevant for this research.[54] The last excluded group of newspaper items were advertisements and advertising (paid) articles as the content belongs to the commercial and not informative parts of newspapers (the section that is the subject of this analysis). Two rounds of reading, selecting and deleting set up the number of units for analysis at 672 articles (Table 2).

[53] The preliminary analysis (July-October 2001) included letters to the editor (Rupar 2002). Three dailies published a total of 112 letters to the editor: *The New Zealand Herald* 70, *The Press* 34 and *The Dominion* 8.
[54] The same length criteria for inclusion of news (only news longer than 50 words) is used in the study "Framing the news: The triggers, frames, and messages in newspaper coverage" done by The Project for Excellence in Journalism and Princeton Survey Research Associates , 1999; results viewed on http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/framing/default.asp (19 January 2003).

Table 2. Number of articles

NEWSPAPER	No. of articles
New Zealand Herald	334
The Press	155
Dominion	183
TOTAL	672

4.4.4 Categories

The first reading of the articles revealed that the *LexisNexis* article coding would not be suitable for this research because it was inconsistent for all three newspapers. The *New Zealand Herald*'s articles database, for instance, differentiates between *'NEWS: General'* and *'BUSINESS: Trade; General'* categories following different sections of the newspaper. The *Dominion,* on the other hand, under the 'Section' code, identified journalistic genres and made a distinction between *'NEWS'* and '*FEATURES*'.

The *LexisNexis* newspaper database operates with the categories 'section', 'length', and 'byline', none of which are particularly helpful for this research. 'Sections' were not categorised equally; 'length' is not sufficient to address the research questions about the quality of knowledge generated through GE news stories; and 'byline' is not relevant for a study that deals with trends and patterns of journalism practice and not the individual authors.

The categories established for this study are: Journalistic Form, Source, Newsgathering and Story-telling Frame. These categories follow the logic of the research questions about media coverage of genetic engineering:

- Journalistic Form: What journalistic forms were dominant in covering the issue?
- Source: Who were the dominant sources?
- Newsgathering: Is the newsgathering process explained?

- Story-telling Frame: What was the main story-telling frame?

The study follows McQuail's (1977, p.1) model for structuring news material for analysis. McQuail stresses that categories should be distinct, each relevant for the purpose of description and meaningful to those familiar with the press. They should be mutually exclusive, equally applicable to different sorts of newspapers and applied in a systematic way. What do the categories mean, what are the options for their identification and what does this study expect to find out by measuring the frequency of their occurrence?

The study offers the following definition of 'journalistic form': journalistic form is a mode in which reported (published) information exists. Reported information is a sequence of reality presented in the press. In the news media context 'reality' consists of recent events or matters of topical, local or personal interest. It includes both facts and interpretation of facts because the study assumes that language not only describes reality, but also constitutes it (Turner 1997). The complex process of interweaving description and construction has its equivalent in journalistic form: one (representation) is more clearly manifested in news and the other (construction) in opinions. The forms are intertwined and include interpretation. Journalistic form is both a type of published information and a method of its presentation.[55]

The category 'Journalistic Form' has two codes, '*news'* and *'opinion'*. There is a variety of information published in the newspapers every day: news, features, backgrounders, interviews, editorials and columns. One might assume that the identification of articles under the category 'journalistic form' would include all varieties of the form, but this is not necessary in this study. All analysed articles in the category 'journalistic form' are classified either as *news* or *opinion*.

This is because the aim of the study is to identify how the New Zealand press has reported on issues relating to genetic engineering. The method for achieving that

[55] 'Journalistic form' is not the same as 'journalistic genre' because genre is a more specific type of published information (within 'news' it can be hard news, interview, backgrounder, teaser, reportage; and within 'opinion' it can include editorial, column, commentary, opinion piece …).

goal is to analyse all articles published on the GE issue and identify characteristics that are related to and/or influence the way the issue is presented. Genetic engineering has been a topic that polarised New Zealand society. This study assumes that polarisation on the public stage was actively supported and even re-created by media elite. But is this statement true, and if so, how was it achieved? One way to find the answers is to look at journalistic form and check the proportion of 'news' to 'opinions'.

The classification 'news' and 'opinion' follows two functions of mass media: informative and interpretative (Merill *et al.* 1990, pp.61–63), where naturally 'news informs' and 'opinion comments'.[56] *'News'* in this study constitutes all articles published in the informative sections of a newspaper, written by journalists or reprinted from other news media, that inform readers of recent events about genetic engineering. The 'news' subcategory includes reports, feature articles, interviews, backgrounders, and front and back page articles if they contain information on genetic engineering and are longer than 50 words. *'Opinion'* constitutes all articles published in the informative section of a newspaper that explicitly express opinion, and includes editorials, regular columns of staff writers, regular columns of guest writers, occasional commentaries and all opinion pieces published on *Dialogue* and *Opinions* pages.

The category 'Source' has the following codes: **'***Green Party', 'Government', 'science', 'business', 'organic farmers', 'Federated Farmers', 'environmental groups', 'Life Sciences Network', and 'Maori'*. The 'source' is the provider of information: an identified "individual, group or institution that originates a message" (Watson & Hill 1993, p.179) in relation to the topic of genetic engineering. The 'message' can be stated as either direct or indirect speech. The sources named on the first day after the release of the Royal Commission's Report, on 1 August 2001, are used for identifying the *source* list because they are the 'primary definers' – those who had the initial privilege of announcing their version of the Royal Commission's recommendations on genetic engineering.

[56] The authors state five functions of the mass media: information, entertainment, persuasion, service to the economic system and transmission of culture.

Sources have been identified by listing all individuals, groups and institutions that originated messages stated on the day when the Royal Commission's Report was reported in the press. The following sources were identified: *Greens* (all references to the Green Party and its members)*; Government* (Prime Minister*,* ministers, all governmental departments)*; Science* (individuals and institutions described by using different modalities of the word science such as scientist, scientific organisation, science institute)*; Business* (individuals, groups and institutions attributed as companies, business representatives, business interest groups)*; Organic farmers* (all individuals and groups referred to as organic farmers); *Federated Farmers* (representatives and the organisation); *Environmental groups* (Greenpeace, GE Free New Zealand, attribution 'environmental group' or 'environmental activist'); *Life Sciences Network*[57] (representative or group)*,* and *Maori* (explicit attribution 'Maori').

The idea is to identify primary definers, check and compare their later presence, see who the dominant sources are and, more generally, test whether journalists prefer to rely on official sources. Miller and Riechert (2000) warn that local government and corporate sources have a strong influence on the initial framing of breaking environmental news[58] and this study shows that political sources (the Government and the Green Party) have had a dominant role in framing the GE issue in New Zealand.

Two values (codes) of newsgathering were established: *'explained'* and '*unexplained'*. All articles that clearly described the input of sources behind their stories were categorised as articles that '*explained'* the newsgathering process (such as 'the Prime Minister said yesterday at a press conference in the Beehive[59] that …'). Articles that only stated an opinion or gave quotes without indicating how the news was assembled were categorised as '*unexplained'* (example: 'The

[57] The Life Sciences Network was a pressure group, founded in 2000 to promote biotechnology.
[58] They talk about 'competing stakeholder positions' where the term stakeholders refers to the multiple groups in the policy making process that stand to win or lose as a result of a policy decision (Miller and Riechert, 2000, p.46)
[59] The Beehive is the name of the building in Welington, the executive wing of the New Zealand Parliamentary Buildings. It is sometimes used as a synonym for the Prime Minister's office.

Prime Minister thinks ...'). This categorisation refers to the explicit description of the newsgathering process. The investigation of the clarity of the newsgathering process does not go into details about the frequency of the use of particular journalism techniques (interview, survey, press release, press conference, or meeting). Instead, it is focused on the more general question of the norm that develops in relation to newsgathering protocols: the presence or absence of any explanation of how the journalist obtained the information. The main question for this analysis is: Is there is a clearly stated record of the newsgathering process?[60] This study assumes that when the method is explained there is clarity of the journalistic mediation of reality. This clarity, furthermore, influences the type of knowledge generated for public debate.

The category 'Story-telling Frame' has three codes: '*Problem identification and solutions'*; *'Conflict story-telling frame'*, and '*Connection to broader issues'*. Valkenburg *et al.* (1999) identify four ways in which news is commonly framed: conflict (emphasis on conflict between parties or individuals), human-interest (focus on individuals), responsibility (crediting or blaming certain political institutions or individuals) and economic consequences (focus on economic consequences for the audience). This categorisation of frames does not suit the analysis of the media coverage of genetic engineering. Assuming that the frame is a form of structuring information (Gitlin 1980) in order to provide knowledge about the topic, this study identifies three distinct ways of organising material in news texts. Each of them follows a specific model of news reporting and ordering information in the headline and the 'intro' (the 'lead' of the text):

Problem identification and solutions follows the 'straight news account' reporting model. The main point of reference in this variation of the category is the Royal

[60] Journalists gather information by telephone, face-to-face interview, press release, eye witnessing, witness account, information from other media, press conference or public address. Van Dijk (1988b: 126) found he could class the input sources behind a sample of stories in the Netherlands's newspapers into 12 categories. Bell (1999: 57) developed the list and offered the following classification: interviews, either face to face or by telephone; public addresses; press conferences; written text of spoken addresses; organizationally produced documents of many kinds; reports, surveys, letters, findings, agendas, minutes, proceedings, research papers, etc; press releases; prior stories on topic, either from own or other media; news agency copy; the journalist's notes from all the above inputs, especially the spoken ones.

Commission's Report on GE. All articles that make reference to the Royal Commission's Report in the lead of the article – in the headline and/or first paragraph – are classified as 'problem identification and solutions' articles.

Conflict story-telling frame follows the 'two sides of the story' reporting model. The first reading of the articles revealed that the New Zealand press saw the story about genetic engineering, generated by the Royal Commission's findings, as a topic that created a confrontation between the Green Party and the Government. All articles that make a reference to confrontation between these entities in the 'lead' of the article were coded as 'conflict story-telling frame' articles.

Connection to broader issues follows the 'interpretative' reporting model. The lead of those articles connects the topic of genetic engineering to the wider spheres of the economy, politics, health, national values, development and even entertainment.

Johnson-Cartee (2005) suggests a longer list of indicators for the identifying frame[61] but this study focuses only on headlines and leads because the daily rhythm of a newspaper simplifies the process of framing by requiring what is 'most important' to be said in the lead and headline.

Several problems were identified with the story-telling frame, and they are presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 5. As far as the methodology is concerned, the first problem arises with the overlapping of the frames. Sometimes the lead of the article uses two frames ('problem identification …' and 'conflict …', for example) in the first paragraph. In those cases, both codes were registered to identify the trend rather than measure the exact frequency of use. Secondly, the category 'connection to broader issues' is too broad. When we are dealing with 'good journalism' the connection to broader issues is incorporated in every single frame. It is the very nature of the news, an element of making sense of the event and an element of the contextualisation of the problem. The

[61] Johnson-Cartee (2005) cites Tankard (2001) who made a following list of "focal points for identifying frames": headlines and kickers, subheads, photographs, photo captions, leads (the beginning of news stories), selection of sources, selection of quotes, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, concluding paragraphs (p.173)

journalist, for example, organises the lead around the fact that Royal Commission's Report has been publicised and that the political decision that follows will determine the future of biotechnology in New Zealand. One way to deal with this problem is to further clarify 'broader issues' and define categories in a way that distinguish 'politics' from 'the economy' or 'development'. This was done (and the results are presented in the following chapter) but a cautionary note is needed: the line in the newspaper's representation of different fields in relation to genetic engineering is so blurred that only the absolute and superior dominance of one particular field, the field of politics, justifies the inclusion of this result in the study. The study therefore uses two lists of story-telling frames: the main list with three options: 'problem identification and solution', 'conflict story-telling frame' and 'connection to broader issues' and the other, more specified list where the 'connection to broader issues' is divided into politics, the economy, health, environment and other.

4.4.5 Data control

Budd *et al.* (1967) define reliability as "repeatability with consistency of results" (p.66).[62] This study identifies similarities and differences in news texts in three newspapers and discusses the factors that determine them. It is for this reason that content analysis, as a method that belongs to quantitative research systems, has been applied. However, the establishment of categories for comparison has been the result of qualitative, not quantitative, analysis. Parallel use of qualitative and quantitative analysis enables more robust insights but is not without risks, as the reliability check demonstrated.

Two things were identified in the first exploratory reading of the articles: the media coverage was highly evaluative and opinionated, and the main focus of the articles was on politics and the conflict between the Green Party and the Government. But if that was true for the media coverage of the GE issue, what did

[62] The authors say: "In measurement, it means simply that investigators using the same techniques on the same material will get substantially the same results. It is often referred to as stability". (Budd et al. 1967:66).

it mean? How do we define categories whose existence or absence would lead us to the right conclusions about the reasons and the consequences of such coverage?

The establishment of codes for the code sheet was actually a process of establishing a conceptual scheme that would link news content with public debate to see if there was a connection between a particular journalistic choice and the character of public discussion. The final list of categories included journalistic concepts that were most directly linked to the research questions. Coding started once the categories and modalities were defined. The coding was done manually by reading each article and determining its place in relation to the categories.

The first reliability check was done when the coding of the first 50 articles was finished. The purpose was to see if applying the same technique to the same material would bring the same results. In October 2003, a Media Studies student at Victoria University of Wellington was asked to work as a second reviewer. She was informed about the study, research method and meaning of categories. She was then asked to code a sample of 10 articles from *The Dominion*.

Inter-coding reliability was checked by using Holsti's formula:[63]

$$R = \frac{2\,(C1,2)}{C1 + C2}$$

C1,2 is the number of category assignments both coders agreed on, and C1 + C2 is the total category assignments made by both coders.

The level of agreement was 92 percent.[64] This was not satisfactory because the main point of disagreement[65] indicated serious problems with the definition of one of the categories—'sources'. For instance, the second coder classified the source

[63] As stated in Budd *et al*. (1967, pp. 68).
[64] The total number of category assignments was 62, we agreed in 53 cases.
[65] Few minor disagreements were results of obvious mistakes.

AgResearch[66] as 'science' and on my sheet it was classified as 'business'. The disagreement about *AgResearch* occurred because one coder had in mind their business units and the second coder had in mind the science division of the company. A closer look at the articles revealed that both were right: scientists from *AgResearch* were consulted as sources for the genetic engineering issue (the reason for the second coder's classification) although most of them were talking about the commercial effects of GE (the reason for my classification). My first response was to revise the coding schedule for greater clarity and diversify science into 'commercial science' and 'science'. This turned out to be even more confusing because it is hard to find firm criteria for identifying what is commercial and what is not, without researching each individual institution and its financial arrangements. Additionally, one more 'science' source was already present as a separate category: the science lobby group Life Science Network. The definitions were once again refined and 'science' sources identified only when the actual word 'science' appeared along with the name of the person or institution quoted.

With this clarification, the second reliability check could start. It was done on 18 December 2003, with a Media Studies graduate from Victoria University of Wellington. Ten articles were coded and the level of agreement was 98 percent.[67] I considered this satisfactory, having in mind the number of categories and level of qualitative analysis related to the process of coding the articles.

4.5 Interpretation of reality: discourse analysis

The research question of how newspapers contribute to public debate is approached by a discourse analysis of editorials. Why editorials? Editorials are analysed because they represent the standpoint of the newspaper and have a far more transparent position in the interpretation of reality than any other text in a

[66] The *AgResearch* web site states: "*AgResearch* is an independent, Crown-owned research and development company. The AgResearch Group comprises AgResearch Science, Celentis Limited (a wholly owned commercial science company), and business units that deal with corporate governance and corporate services" (http://www.agresearch.co.nz/agr/AGR_organisation.asp, Viewed: January 28, 2004).
[67] The total number of category assignments was 57, we agreed in 54 cases.

newspaper. The task of identifying the manner in which editorials achieve their persuasive goals is approached by treating these texts in a sociological as well as a linguistic tradition.

The method applied is discourse analysis, an approach to the study of news developed from the need to look at language above the level of the sentence, to incorporate language structures and extra-linguistic information into an analysis of the news text. Drawing on a range of scholarship on discourse analysis (Trew 1979a, 1979b; Van Dijk 1996, 1998; Fairclough 1995, 1998; Wodak 2000), the study identifies the recontextualisation of communicative events, from the news report that provides information about the event to the editorial that describes and evaluates different aspects of the event. The analysis is based on the idea that mass communication is an extended chain of communicative events and that one type of communicative event "reconceptualises" others (Fairclough 1995, p.41).

The analytical framework for the discussion of editorials is critical discourse analysis, which is: "… not concerned with language alone" (Cook cited in Garrett & Bell 1998, p.3) but is a method that examines the context of communication. Critical discourse analysis sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of "social practice" (Wodak 1997):

> Describing discourse as a social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event both shapes and is shaped by them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. (Wodak 1997, p.173)

The analysis of editorials published on the GE issue focuses on explicit and implicit texts of editorials (text and context), identification of identities involved in a polarised debate and on ideological categories. It focuses on the same four elements identified in the content analysis:

- Journalistic form: analysis focuses on headlines and topics of editorials to identify the link between news and editorials (informative and persuasive text form)
- Source: analysis looks at the structure and presentation of arguments to identify the link between use of sources in the news and two sides of the issue presented in editorials
- Newsgathering: analysis examines the most commonly used words in editorials to discuss how the absence of transparency in the news texts supports a 'common sense' argument in editorials
- Story-telling frame: analysis discusses the issue of frame in relation to the transmission of beliefs (ideology) in editorials.

Discourse analysis of these four elements may illustrate the links between the ideology of journalism and public debate. The persuasive elements of the editorial 'talk' are compared with the informative elements of the news texts in order to identify the links between journalistic forms that offer 'facts' and 'views'. This study looks at a news texts as a communicative event, and a form of journalism practice, located "within fields of social practice and in relation to the social and cultural forces and processes which shape and transform these fields" (Fairclough 1998, p.143). The study uses two journalistic forms to investigate changes that are taking place in contemporary journalism in relation to objectivity as an element of journalistic practice that contributes to the representation, interpretation and construction of reality.

4.6 Construction of reality: Survey and interviews

The research question on what journalistic norms determine the coverage of an important issue such as GE in the public domain is addressed by using a survey, interviews and historical analysis. The aim is to identify conceptual elements of the practice that shape professional work and the results are used to discuss the place of norms, rules and principles in the interpretation of reality (see Chapter 7).

As with the content analysis and discourse analysis, the survey and interview questions follow the logic of the main line of the investigation of journalism practice:

- Journalistic form: what is journalism's role in society?
- Sources: what is the relationship between journalists and their sources of information?
- Newsgathering: what constitutes the practice?
- Story-telling frame: what influences the choice of story-telling frame?

The survey is one of the most frequently employed methods in social research. In this study, the survey aimed to address the question of why journalists covered the story the way they did, which professional norms and standards guided their everyday work, and what were their own opinions about journalism and the interpretation of reality and, subsequently, the role of the press in society.

This study uses methodological diversity in approaching the question of the 'interpretation' of reality. It deconstructs the products of journalistic work (by textual analysis of newspapers articles), it looks for general responses to the questions of journalism practice (through a survey) and it asks journalists what principles they apply when writing reports (through interviews). The multiplicity of methods removes potential bias in explaining possible motives for particular journalistic writings. If based only on interviews, the analysis would be coloured by journalists' projection of their ideal work; if based only on surveys, the response rate could influence the findings; if based only on textual analysis, the researcher's own experience might lead to misinterpretation of the articles. The combination of methods, therefore, offers a secure and direct track for seeking answers about the professional norms, rules and principles that shaped the GE coverage.

The survey questionnaire (Appendix 1) draw on studies conducted by The Pew Research Center For the People And the Press (1999), Project for Excellence in Journalism (2004), Scholl and Weischenberg's (1999) study on autonomy in journalism and Deuze's (2002a) study of journalism in the Netherlands. The main

strength of the survey is that it provides a relatively inexpensive way of discovering the professional beliefs of the authors of the articles and it offers comparisons with the other studies. The important issue that the survey helps to clarify is the question of 'who are the journalists writing for?' Similar international surveys have discovered two sub-groups of journalists: one that identifies largely with media owners and business interests, and the other with a larger set of social or public interests. The latter often see their job as being to look beneath the surface at the power dynamics of society (Lorimer 1994, p.107). This study's survey seeks to answer this question with regard to New Zealand journalists and how it influenced their coverage of the GE story. Two trends in the media coverage of GE are of particular concern: the simplification of the public discourse and the tendency to over-dramatise spins on disputes.

One way of simplifying public discourse is to unconditionally use the official version (copy) of reality. Journalists relied heavily on government sources. As explained in chapters 2 and 3, a combination of bureaucratic expediency and professional journalistic subscription to ideas of 'objectivity' results in the privileging of authoritative voices, who thereby secure definitional advantage and become the nation's primary definers (Cottle 1993, p.107). Over-dramatisation is related to a journalistic preoccupation with winning and losing. Newsrooms sometimes look like military headquarters guided by a belief that a conflict produces a good story.

The survey of the journalists who wrote the articles aims to unveil a part of their everyday journalistic practice. That is important for news audiences – to know something of how the news products they consume are manufactured. The news is a specific 'product', and analysis can show something of the make-up of that product. The deconstruction of the process of news production strengthens readers' defence system and their ability to recognise and resist any type of manipulation.

There are, however, some limitations related to the survey as a research method. Schloss and Smith (1999, p.66) emphasise the problem of ensuring an adequate response rate. After making a list of 69 authors whose names were identified in

GE article bylines, an email was sent to editors-in-chief of three dailies asking them to check the names and provide email addresses for each journalist. The revised list[68] consisted of 54 journalists. A letter was sent to each of them explaining the purpose of the survey and the questionnaire, along with a pre-paid envelope in order to save the respondents time and money. Two email reminders were sent later, but the total number of responses remained very low, at only 26 percent.[69] To overcome this problem only the answers where there was a high level of agreement (more than 80 percent) among participants were taken into consideration and discussed as serious indicators of trends (see Chapter 7). There are two reasons for inclusion of these survey data in the study: firstly, it was important to get some data that could allow comparison with international data on journalists' attitudes (Weaver & Wilhoit 1986) and, secondly, the high level of agreement signalled the answers could be considered as a representative response.

To widen the scope of the study and bring both the professional roles and communication processes found within newsrooms into the research, "semi-structured" interviews were conducted. The broad interview questions were sent to the interviewees in advance. Those questions were refined, elaborated and extended during the interview. This type of conversation "allows people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provides a greater structure for comparability" (May 2001, p.111). Semi-structured interviews proved to be of great importance because the range of questions was based on other parts of the research and considered in the light of the results from the content analysis section of the study. Ten people were asked for an interview, all of them accepted, but ultimately only five did the interview. However, the quality of the sample is reflected in the professional status and relevant expertise of the interviewees: I interviewed two editors- in-chief (Tim Pankhurst and Gavin Ellis), a former journalist who is now one of the leading journalism and public relations scholars in New Zealand (Dr. Margie Comrie), a journalist who was the only newspaper reporter at the hearings (Alan Samson),

[68] Some names appeared only once and no one in the newsroom could identify them, some journalists whose articles were published in the *Press* were actually the *Dominion Post* staff members (and vice versa) and were already on the other list, some journalists left the paper in the meantime and no one knew their contact details.

[69] Thirteen questionnaires came back and one polite letter saying why the person does not want to be part in the survey.

and a Press Gallery journalist who covered issues relating to genetic engineering extensively for the *Dominion* (Christine Langdon).

Relatively low rate of response, this time 50 percent, has both formal and informal explanations. The formal excuse for not giving an interview in four cases was lack of time, and in one case, although an initial acceptance was given, there was no further response. The informal explanation was articulated by one journalist as uneasiness about self-reflection: "I just do it, I don't think why I am doing it." This problem will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

All interviews focused only on gathering information. Three of them were done online, a fourth combined an online interview with face-to-face conversation, and the fifth was an hour-long face-to-face interview. All answers are classified and compared with the results of the similar studies on New Zealand and world journalists in Chapter 7.

4.7 Summary

This chapter further refined the research questions and explained the methodology that will be used to investigate them. The three-part investigation starts with a detailed content analysis of the articles. The method of dividing, classifying and measuring the news content in relation to the 'form', 'source', 'newsgathering' and 'story-telling frame' is used as a tool for identifying characteristics and patterns in news reporting on a complex social issue. This methodology yields results suitable for the discussion of journalistic norms developed around these elements of practice: the distinction between facts and views in relation to the 'form', the balance of opinions in relation to the 'source', the transparency of newsgathering in relation to 'newsgathering' and contextualisation of the story in relation to the 'frame'.

The method used for the investigation of the links between one journalistic practice (reporting facts in the 'news') and another journalistic practice (expressing opinion in the 'editorial') is discourse analysis. This method provides devices for connecting text, context and discourse practice in order to find out

what journalistic features are relevant for public discussion about important issues in society.

The third approach, a survey and interviews, is used to conceptualise the norms and forum-creating capacity of the press in relation to public debate about an important social issue. The next three chapters use this three-pronged methodological approach and operational framework of objectivity, explained in Chapter 3, to investigate the links between journalistic norms and public debate in the case study of media coverage of genetic engineering.

CHAPTER 5

OBJECTIVITY AS A METHOD: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE GE ISSUE

5.1 Introduction

Why did the New Zealand press become interested in the issue of genetic engineering and which newsworthy elements of the issue attracted the attention of the newspapers? In introducing the case study on the press coverage of GE in New Zealand, this chapter classifies patterns of news reporting by looking at the elements of journalistic practice: sources, newsgathering and story-telling frame. In particular, it explores how norms developed around the gathering and structuring of news relate to the concept of objectivity. By identifying the number of articles published on the GE issue and classifying the differences in the intensity of the coverage, it investigates the patterns in reporting. It goes on to investigate the policy-making process and interactions between the journalistic field and other fields by looking into the sources of information. The chapter identifies the dominant sources and transparency of newsgathering, and then focuses on the way genetic engineering was reported in the New Zealand press through an examination of the story-telling frame and how the journalistic norms of obtaining and structuring news are embedded in the representation of reality.

5.2 Newsworthiness of the event

The issue of genetic engineering easily fulfilled the criteria of newsworthiness. The issue became news when the Government announced its release of the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification. The announcement and initial comments on the Royal Commission's recommendations were given at two press conferences held on the same day:[70] first, by the Government, and then by the Green Party. Both events satisfied the news value of 'timeliness'. The Prime Minister and the co-leaders of the Green Party were speakers at the press conferences, satisfying the criteria of 'prominence', and the story was a domestic and not a foreign one – therefore 'proximity' was attained. The responses to the

[70] On 30 July 2001.

Report were made by individuals whose careers or life philosophies guaranteed interesting 'human interest' angles in a story about genetic engineering, at a time when the 'odd' examples of less successful genetic experiments, like that of a two-headed salmon (see Weaver & Motion 2002), were already in the public arena. 'Conflict', as a newsworthiness criterion, became apparent when the Government and the Greens reacted to the Report in diametrically different ways. The 'consequences' were incorporated in the shared view that genetic engineering would be one of the most important decisions New Zealand would have to make at the beginning of the 21st century.

The event was so newsworthy that all the newspapers covered it intensively. The *New Zealand Herald*, the biggest and the best-resourced newspaper of the three, published nine articles on the first day, demonstrating its assessment of the importance of the event and its ability to cover all aspects of the story. The headlines of news texts published on 31 July 2001 in the *New Zealand Herald*, for example, included: 'Delight and anger at GE report'; 'Towards genetic engineering – with real caution'; 'Biotech report wins praise from business'; 'Spuds that fight back'; 'Greens' fury at GE nod'; and 'GM report straight down the middle'.

The *Herald*, as well as the *Dominion* and *The Press*, focused on 'consequences' of the release of the Royal Commission's Report and its possible effects on business and politics. Journalistic focus on the effects and significance of genetic engineering for the country's economy, the balance of political power, the development of science, as well as GE's relation to the nation's environment, image, health and other social issues, was reflected both in the intensity and the structure of coverage.

5.3 The intensity of coverage: Press and community

The three main metropolitan newspapers in New Zealand published 672 articles about genetic engineering over a year. The newspaper most interested in the GE story was the *New Zealand Herald*. The *Herald* published almost the same

number of articles as *The Press* and the *Dominion Post* put together (see Table 2 in previous chapter).

Three different newspapers with three different circulations and community backgrounds allow a comparison of the ways the issue was covered. The obvious question to ask is why the *New Zealand Herald* had significantly more articles than the other two newspapers. The *Herald* published more than one article per day, the *Dominion* more than one article every second day and the *Press* published the least number of articles. The main reason for the three newspapers that belong to the same category (broadsheet newspaper) publishing a different number of articles on the same issue has to do with each the newspaper's 'resources': circulation, revenue, number of editorial staff, number and skills of specialised reporters, and organisation of the work. Even when the editorial judgement is the same, a bigger newspaper simply has more resources to produce more articles, and therefore more information, than a smaller newspaper has. The *New Zealand Herald* is, in the national media market, the biggest newspaper, better resourced and stronger than others: the *Herald* has 190 staff members,[71] the *Dominion Post* has 130,[72] and the *Press* has 112.[73]

But is this the only reason? One might also ask, is it always the case that bigger newspapers have more articles on any issue than smaller ones? It is, in fact, not always the case. The premiere of the last *Lord of the Rings* movie got more extensive coverage in the *Dominion* than in the *Herald.*[74] What prevails in this coverage of the movie premiere is not internal resources but the news value of 'proximity': the fact that the movie was filmed in Wellington and made by Wellington director Peter Jackson. In the case of genetic engineering, the 'premiere' of the news story, the two press conferences, was also held in Wellington, but the *Dominion* didn't have as extensive a coverage as the *Herald*. The heated debate about genetic engineering was unequally represented in the papers because there was a difference in editorial judgement about the

[71] The number fluctuates a little, but is never less than 180. That includes all editorial staff, journalists, photographers, artists, designers, sub-editors, clerical staff etc. (Source: G.Ellis, former editor in chief, online interview, 16 February 2005).
[72] Source: T. Pankhurst, online interview, 9 March 2005.
[73] Source: S. Walsh, email correspondence, 20 July, 2006.
[74] See both newspapers published on the 19th of December 2003.

community's interest in this controversial issue. The *New Zealand Herald*, based in Auckland, the most diversified and most pluralistic city[75] in New Zealand, explored the conflict in depth, while the *Press*, based in a regional centre, focused their coverage on the main line of discussion and events that (could) lead to a solution.[76]

One of the reasons for the difference in coverage, relevant to this study, is the influence of the community's power structure on the coverage. Academic research of the news media and community relations (Dunwoody & Griffin 1993; 1997; 1998) demonstrates how the media frames are driven by community structures and, more importantly, by the interpretation of reality offered by the prevailing power structure of the local society. The newspaper most interested in the genetic engineering issue was the *New Zealand Herald*, the newspaper with the biggest circulation, based in Auckland. Auckland is also the business, commercial and financial centre of New Zealand and the city's 'prevailing power structure' belongs more to the world of business than politics. Politics is dominant in Wellington, the country's capital, where the Parliament, the Government and government offices are situated. If Dunwoody and Griffin are right, then the *Herald*'s coverage should be influenced by the interpretation championed by the prevailing business structure, and the *Dominion*'s by the prevailing political points of view, while the *Press*'s coverage should be focused on local and regional aspects of the GE stories. One way to address this question is to look at the sources of information mentioned in the articles on genetic engineering.

5.4 Sources

The link between journalists and sources reflects the most visible element of the relation between the journalistic field and other fields. In a political context, it

[75] The pluralism of the city was identified in Dunwoody and Griffin's (1993) study by comparing number of church and religious organizations, number of business consultants, number of voluntary organizations and number of public relations consultants per capita.

[76] The more pluralistic and diversified communities tend to work in an atmosphere where conflict is a more routine part of public life. In those communities it is natural to recognize conflicts and to report them as such in news media. On the other hand, more unified, usually smaller communities function on a principle of consensus and have a press that rather reports on consensual (final) decisions than on the conflict based process of coming to the decision. See: Tichenor, Donohue and Olien 1980; Dunwoody and Griffin 1993.

exemplifies how journalism works in a democracy (Zelizer 2004, p.153). The use of sources in genetic engineering stories (Table 3) shows that the New Zealand press follows the well-known pattern of privileging authoritative voices in the news (Tunstall 1970, Sigal 1973, Gans 1979, Fishman 1980, Hess 1981, Ericson *et al*. 1987, Cottle 1993b, Deacon & Golding 1994).

Table 3. Sources of information

SOURCE	***The New Zealand Herald***	***The Press***	***The Dominion***	***ALL***
Government	67 (23%)	38 (27%)	50 (24%)	**155 (25%)**
Green Party	62 (21%)	40 (28%)	52 (25%)	**154 (25%)**
Science	61 (21%)	18 (13%)	41 (20%)	**120 (19%)**
Business	31 (11%)	15 (10%)	18 (9%)	**64 (10%)**
Environmental groups	19 (7%)	15 (10%)	13 (6%)	**38 (6%)**
Life Sciences Network	17 (6%)	4 (3%)	8 (4%)	**29 (5%)**
Maori	12 (4%)	1 (1%)	9 (4%)	**22 (3%)**
Royal Commission	8 (3%)	5 (3%)	5 (3%)	**18 (3%)**
Organic farmers	8 (3%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	**14 (2%)**
Federated Farmers	4 (1%)	4 (3%)	5 (3%)	**13 (2%)**
TOTAL	289 (100%)	142 (100%)	205 (100%)	**627 (100%)**

5.4.1 The power of dominant sources

The Government and the Green Party are at the top of the list of sources quoted in articles from the first day of GE coverage until Election Day. They are equally visible across all three newspapers. An almost mathematical balance between these two main sources underlines the belief of journalists that the genetic engineering issue should be covered in polarised terms. The Government's and the Greens' views on the genetic engineering issue significantly differed from the

first day of the release of the Royal Commission's Report. While the Government supported the Royal Commission's recommendations, incorporating them into policy, the Green Party opposed the recommendations and became so critical of the Government's stand on GE that it caused a serious political rift between them a year later. Using the method of balancing views to achieve an objective approach to the issue, however, does not guarantee equality of treatment. Sources are not necessarily 'equal' if they do not get the same space. For example, the *Dominion*'s article published on 31 October 2001 ('GE okay: it's steady as it grows') presents the Government's response to the Royal Commission's Report with the following lead:

> The Government has risked losing favour with its Maori voters and jeopardised a possible future coalition with the Greens to leave New Zealand's door open to genetic engineering.

The news report continues with a comment from the Maori Council executive chairman in a form of indirect speech where the only words in quotes describe how Maori feel "bruised, bitter and sorry". The other quote is a direct quote from a Green Party co-leader who says, "It is not Green policy and we have not signed up to it." The report cites briefly one "other" source (Alliance Party leader) and the rest of the 668 words is the presentation of the Prime Minister and the Government's response to the Royal Commission's Report in both direct and interpreted speech.

Certainly, from the journalist's point of view, there is nothing wrong with this proportion of space. The news report is on the event: the announcement of the Government's response to the Royal Commission's Report. The news values of the event are clear; it is the content of the response that matters. The journalist's inclusion of voices that straightaway oppose the Government's response is just an added value, not necessarily a requirement. The process of public debate about genetic engineering, led by the Government and characterised by conflicting views on the future policy on GE, triggered a series of habitual reactions from journalists, where the first one was to rank the sources. Deacon and Golding (2004), who investigated journalistic interactions with sources, found that

journalists make a difference between sources evaluated as 'advocates' and the other sources seen as 'arbiters'. The views and opinions of arbiters are treated with more respect than 'advocates', a distinction that plays a role in "shaping media evaluations of the issues upon which they are invited to comment" (Deacon & Golding 2004, p.203).

One might argue, with good reason, that both in the news report 'GE okay: it's steady as it grows', and in the reality that the news report represents, the Government was the arbiter. It was the Government's response to the Royal Commission's Report, not the Greens' or the Maori Council's response that was the focus of the news report. The problem is that journalistic habitus is formed in a chain of interlinked reactions developed along the re-presentational function of the press: once identified, 'arbiters' rarely fall into the position of advocates because the practice is conservative by nature, it does not allow sudden innovations. As the analysis of story-telling frames later demonstrates, the Government was identified as a non-aligned provider of information at the beginning of the coverage and it remained as such until Election Day.

The role of the sources in the newspapers' coverage of GE was raised as an issue in the interviews with journalists. When asked to comment upon the fact that the Government and the Green Party were the main sources of information in the news stories on GE, treated as two sides of the story, former *Herald* editor-in-chief G. Ellis (online interview, 16 February 2005) said:

> Not sure what you are asking here. I think that there were in fact three sides. There was the government, the Greens and an organisation set up by pro-GM groups (Life Sciences Network). In news coverage we tried to provide balanced coverage and our own view was very much in line with the Royal Commission's findings.

The editor's view that there were actually three sides to the story, with the Government as a moderator between two opposing sides, justifies the newspapers' call for 'common sense' expressed in editorials (further discussed in Chapter 6). But if there were three sides to the story, why was the third side, Life Sciences

Network, not presented equally in the news? The frequency of appearance of other sources partly answers this question.

The source '*science*' is third on the list of most quoted sources. As explained in Chapter 4, the coding of the articles showed that it is not easy to make a distinction between *'science'* and *'business'* categories. The blurred lines between science, research organisations and business is evident in the article 'Biotech report wins praise from business' published in the *New Zealand Herald* on 31 July 2001. The author says: "Business and research organizations are overwhelmingly relieved by the middle ground charted by the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification …" and then quotes the following sources: Agritech New Zealand; A2 Corporation; Business New Zealand; HortResearch; Crop and Food Research; Forest Research and Life Sciences Network. The headline indicates "praise from business", summarising the newspaper's understanding of the field these organisations belong to. In an essay on public responses to uncertainty, and the role of media in dealing with uncertainty, Einsiedel and Thorne (1999 p.54) note that the science-related story "hosts a wide range of political, moral and commercial influences that are not strictly scientific in nature" and cite scholars who argue that social studies of science and technology should pay more attention to the economic and political context of science. The scientific field, like any other field of social or cultural production, consists of institutions, individuals, relations, interactions, practices, rules, norms and principles that determine its everyday life. When faced with an issue like genetic engineering, science suddenly appears not as a disinterested, truth-seeking agent in a topical debate but as a stakeholder and active promoter of one particular view. How does this happen?

Cook (2004) suggests that one relevant distinction is seldom invoked in the GE debate: the distinction between 'science' and 'technology', "the latter being the application of scientific understanding, whether for general good, for commercial gain or for military power" (p.81). The dividing line has always been blurred, but nowadays this is more so than ever because "science becomes ever more dependent upon government and industry for funding, and both of these sources increasingly demand only 'useful research' (with usefulness interpreted only in

particular ways), so science, rather than being a resource on which technology can draw, instead becomes driven by it, and the distinction disappears" (Cook 2004, p.81). This ambiguity was one of the reasons for identifying the separate source 'Life Sciences Network', a lobby group formed to promote genetic engineering in New Zealand. Although less present than environmental groups, the Life Science Network's campaign was considered by peers in public relations as highly successful and was given the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) Award in 2004.[77]

The fourth on the general list of most cited sources is 'business'. Stories about genetic engineering in New Zealand have links to many other social fields: environment, health, science, politics, economy, law, agriculture, tourism and multicultural relationships – but not all angles were equally explored by journalists during the monitoring period. This study shows that politics has had the strongest influence on driving the issue of genetic engineering in public arena but in the complex relation between the different social practices that constitute social order, it was the neo-liberal discourse of business that produced the 'preferred reading' (Hall 1980, p.135) of the GE stories.

As the analysis of newsgathering transparency shows, journalists considered 'business' as the most 'trustworthy' source among those who provided facts and views on genetic engineering. A study on public relations and the GE issue (Weaver & Motion 2002) indicates that corporate public relations have been extremely successful in "promoting businesses as environmentally responsible" (p.135). New Zealand's neo-liberal market economy provided the 'justification' for corporate and government public relations attempts to stifle public debate about environmental and health implications of genetic engineering research. The cross examination of *sources* and transparency of *newsgathering* (explained later

[77] The *New Zealand Herald* published an article "GM drive a PR winner" (8/05/2004) that says: "A controversial campaign to persuade New Zealanders to support genetic modification won top honours at last night's Public Relations Institute awards. The $180,000 campaign, run by the Life Sciences Network, ran pro-GM advertisements in the week before the 2002 election that were partly funded by two state research institutes, AgResearch and Crop & Food Research. Chief judge Katherine Trought is now Crop & Food's communication manager."

in this chapter) certainly confirms that 'business' sources had easier, less-questioned access to the news than science and political sources.

5.4.2 Non-dominant sources

Other sources – the Royal Commission, GE Free New Zealand, Greenpeace, Maori, and Federated Farmers – were less present than the leading four. The Royal Commission almost disappeared from the list in the second half of the monitoring period, although its extensive report and following recommendations offered a number of arguments that could be used in the media-moderated public debate. The environmental groups' presence (GE Free New Zealand, Greenpeace) in reports followed the policy pattern – it was significant in the 'expectation' phase and dropped in the 'evaluation' and 'anticipation' phases (see Table 4). The Maori stand on GE filled the headlines of articles but the reports preferred interpretation to direct quotes. In the article 'MPs accuse Govt of GM segregation', published in *The Press* on 1 November 2001, the Maori stand is explained by the Minister in Charge of Treaty of Negotiations, Margaret Wilson, and Labour Party deputy leader, Michael Cullen:

> "There is no promotion of segregationist policies ... what we are doing is finding a way to accommodate genuine differences in views that come out of different spiritual and cultural experiences," Ms Wilson said.
>
> The Government appeased the Maori caucus this week over allowing controlled GM trials by promising to strengthen the Treaty of Waitangi clause in legislation.
>
> Labour Party deputy leader Michael Cullen yesterday told Parliament that legislation enacting a constraint period on the commercial release of genetic modification and putting safety conditions on contained research would go to Parliament soon, but further legislation would be

ready next year.

Maori presence in the GE articles shares the pattern of Maori presence in the New Zealand press in general. In a year-long period, Maori sources were quoted once in *The Press*, nine times in the *Dominion* and 12 times in the *New Zealand Herald*. In the first phase of the coverage, the *Dominion* published three articles where the source was identified as 'Maori' and the word 'Maori' – and therefore an explanation of the Maori stance in relation to the GE issue – was used 36 times. This 'voiceless' treatment of Maori corresponds with New Zealand studies that show how the mainstream media isolate Maori from the public sphere (Stuart 2005) and how journalists have problems interacting with the Maori community (Comrie & Cupa 1998).

Stuart (2005) looks at journalism practice in New Zealand and argues that the news media technique, based on European journalism models, is not capable of dealing with the complexities of the Maori position in the society. The primary way of excluding Maori from the news discourse is the very use of the word Maori as a "catch-all" third-person name. The press gives the impression that all Maori share the same opinion on the GE issue and when a newspaper has to include the Maori position on the GE issue, it prefers to deal with the interpretation of the opinion of a whole "group" rather than individualised views. This conglomeration of the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand separates Maori from the rest of the community, "thus the Maori are excluded from the realm of the generalized public sphere of national decision-making process and constructed as a separated group within but not 'of' New Zealand society" (Stuart 2005, p.17). The promotion of oppositional discourse between Maori and Pakeha, according to Walker, is a reflection of the position of the press "sitting in the frame of Pakeha culture, reporting and passing judgment on the intersection of events between Maori and Pakeha" and remaining "steadfastly ethnocentric and monocultural" (Walker 2002, p. 224).

One of the barriers to the inclusion of voices other than *Government, Greens, science* and *business* comes from the organisational setting inside the journalistic field – the main line of coverage of the GE issue was drawn by political reporters,

the Press Gallery journalists. Chapter 2 explained how the knowledge about the event comes from the meaning the individual journalist has about the event and the meaning derived from her interactions with other journalists. The status of the Press Gallery reporters and their close interactions with the environment and politics of Parliament simply determined the process of sourcing. The journalistic norm of balancing two sides of the story, as the first habitual reaction on the amount and the controversial character of information on the genetic engineering issue, led to the almost identical number of appearances of all opposing poles in the debate. Apart from the Government vs. Greens binary, the content analysis of the articles shows equal numbers of appearances for '*environmental groups*' vs. '*Life Sciences Network*', and '*Organic Farmers*' (opponents of GE) vs. '*Federated Farmers*' (proponents of GE).

Although glorified as the essential tool in gathering and structuring news, the objectivity norm that requires balancing two sides of the story does not automatically provide an impartial representation of reality. The transparency of the appearance of sources indicates that journalistic ideology, the 'objective' presentation of views and facts collected from experts, is related to the power of those sources in society.

5.4.3 Sources in the transparency game

Journalists not only present and interpret information obtained from authoritative sources, they also react to those statements, as all other human beings do in social interactions. One of these interactions can be traced to the transparency of source appearance in the news. In the article 'Scare stories bolster GE crusade' (4 August 2001, *New Zealand Herald*), the journalist says:

> The Royal Commission on Genetic Modification believes New Zealand should adopt a 'proceed with caution' approach to genetic science.
>
> But the term 'caution' didn't go far enough for thousands of New

> Zealanders, who want genetic modification (GM) banned.
>
> The public's distrust of genetic science is partly due to a number of scare stories, covering anything from experiments gone wrong to potatoes spliced with toad genes.
>
> Here are some of the incidents which have inflamed the anti-GM movement.

The article continues with detailed descriptions of various incidents. The curious reader could ask where the author found those stories. By looking at world media coverage of GE and using information in press clippings to bolster her own story, by taking examples provided by New Zealand scientists, or maybe by searching Greenpeace documentation? Does it make a difference if 'the number of scare stories' was from the world press, scientific documentation or the Greenpeace archive? Of course it does. If the journalist revealed how she found 'a number of scare stories', readers could decide whether they had reason to be scared or not. By using the 'voice of God' ("public distrust of genetic engineering is partly due to a number of scare stories") the journalist not only fails to provide a context for the information, but fails to report the information itself. Unanswered questions – such as Who says there is public distrust? Why is the distrust 'partly' (and not 'completely') due to a number of scare stories? What is the exact number of scare stories? Who told them and where were they told? – construct the major mystery of the article: what is the source of the information?

The article 'Scare stories bolster GE crusade' is a good example to demonstrate what a full attribution of sources and explanation of newsgathering methods would bring to the meaning of the news. It undoubtedly indicates that a link exists between clarity of news (explanation of newsgathering methods) and the input of sources. The question is: What are the characteristics of that link? If we go back to Table 3 we will find out that journalists covering the GE story – as journalists in many other similar studies – heavily relied on four dominant sources.

The initial hypothesis for this study was that there is a relationship between sources and the transparency of newsgathering information. The more authoritative the sources, the less explanation is given of the newsgathering method. The presumption is that the least transparent and precise articles would be stories with the government as the source of information. The data, however, show different results (Table 4).

Table 4. The appearance of sources and transparency

NEWSGATHERING	***'Explained'***	***'Unexplained'***	***Index****
Green Party	70	108	1.54
Government	62	127	2.05
Science	38	87	2.28
Business	15	56	3.73

* The index represents number of 'unexplained' newsgathering articles divided by number of 'explained' articles

The most precise explanations of newsgathering occurred in news where the Green Party was a source, while the least precise were articles based on information obtained from 'business' sources. What is particularly striking about the sourcing practice in the coverage of the GE issue is how often journalists used the strategy of balance to compensate for the absence of further investigation of the issue. The journalistic toolbox for 'objective' representation of reality was reduced to balancing two sides of the story, where the sides' stakes in the issue are recognised, in the case of political sources, but not in the case of science and business sources. Why does it happen and how does it influence the meaning of the news?

5.5 Newsgathering

The main question for this study's analysis is the clarity of the newsgathering process, specifically if there is a written manifestation of contacts between journalist and source. The recognition of sources' input (source is mentioned in a news story such as 'Helen Clark said') and the precision of input (newsgathering

is *'explained'* for example 'Helen Clark said at the press conference in Beehive') are investigated in relation to the particular social field the media source comes from (e.g., politics, science, business).

The study explores the following questions: first, does the absence of a clear explanation of the newsgathering process have an impact on the meaning of news? Second, does the degree of explanation depend on whether news sources are political or business oriented; and third, is the disappearance of transparency related to the spread of 'media logic' beyond the borders of the field of journalism?

5.5.1 The loss of transparency, the disappearance of context

This analysis showed that almost two-thirds of articles published on genetic engineering in New Zealand did not indicate if the journalist attended a press conference, conducted an interview, used a press release or quoted another media institution. A significant majority of the articles do not state how the information was obtained (Table 5).

Table 5. Transparency of newsgathering

NEWSGATHERING	*The New Zealand Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*	*Total*
Explained	108 (42%)	43 (33%)	58 (33%)	209 (37%)
Not explained	147 (58%)	86 (67%)	118 (67%)	351 (63%)
Total	255 (100%)	129 (100%)	176 (100%)	560 (100%)

For example, in the article 'Quiet start to GM labelling' (10 December 2001, *The Press*) the author says:

> The mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods has begun with very little fanfare.

> Steve Anderson, chief executive of Foodstuffs (South Island), which includes Pak' N' Save and New World supermarkets, said few products would need labelling. 'There are very little GE products now,' he said.

There is no indication where or when the person gave the statement, there is no other article in the newspaper that contextualises this speech or explains why this particular chief executive is the most credible person to comment on the effects of mandatory GE labelling. It is not clear if the person was interviewed by a reporter, and if so, why he was more important and more accessible for comment than some other chief executive of a big supermarket chain, or a manager of an organic food shop. (The only other person quoted in the news article, again without explanation of the newsgathering process, is Green Party health spokesperson, Sue Kedgley.) The lack of explanation about the newsgathering method in this and almost two-thirds of the other articles examined in the quantitative part of this analysis is an element of news culture and a reflection of a specific journalism practice that indicates the standard of journalism writing in New Zealand. The question is: what does this ambiguity in news reports mean and what are the possible consequences of such reporting?

To address those questions the study subjected to a thorough discourse analysis[78] a randomly selected article 'Trade fears for GM labels', published in the *Dominion* (19 April 2002):

> The United States would aim to get rid of labelling of genetically modified food as part of any free-trade agreement with New Zealand, the Green Party said yesterday, citing negotiating objectives stated in proposed US legislation. However, the Government said US objectives would not necessarily be adopted in any deal.

The news article is 54 words long, consists of two sentences and is the only one published that day on the GE issue in the *Dominion*. It is a type of media text most

[78] The study follows Krippendorf's (1980) model of using a discourse approach in news media research in addition to classical content analysis.

readers are familiar with – short and succinct, where balance and objectivity have been obtained by citing two sources with two different opinions.

This schema of news is not a New Zealand journalistic invention. On the other side of the Pacific, media scholars scrutinised the US press and found that stating two opposing opinions is nowadays a substitute for verification: 'The modern press culture generally is weakening the methodology of verification journalists have developed,' say Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001, p.75) and they advocate a methodology of "precision journalism" (Meyer 1991; 2002) where journalists are advised to be transparent about methods and motives.

The New Zealand press lacks transparency when it comes to methods and motives, but how does that affect the meaning of the news? The absence of precision changes the nature of reporting: it transforms the task of finding as many facts about the topic as possible, to the task of obtaining an equal number of quotes (evaluation of facts) from all interested parties. By using discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) to examine the news item 'Trade fears for GM labels', this paper explores how issues are represented and reconceptualised, how identities are constructed and what relationships (between journalist and reader) are established.

The article 'Trade fears for GM labels' starts with a declarative sentence-statement: "The United States would aim to get rid of labelling of genetically modified food …". It establishes a relationship between the author and reader in the form of authority with the limited description "… the Green Party said yesterday, citing negotiating objectives stated in proposed US legislation". In the second sentence, the author temporarily takes the authority from the Greens, using the sentence connecter 'however', and delegates the authority to the second source "… the Government said US objectives would not necessarily be adopted in any deal".

There is no indication of the newsgathering process in this text. The reader is not able to determine if the article is based on a press release or if it is an independent journalist's investigation. However, journalists and public relations personnel might guess that the process most likely took this form: the Green Party

commented on new US legislation by issuing a press release; the press release was sent by fax/email to all news outlets in the country; the *Dominion* received the press release; the journalist rang the government's press office asking for a comment; the comment was provided by the spokesperson. The procedure of obtaining opinions from political sources may well have taken a slightly different route. For instance the news could be a simple, passive compilation of two press releases without 'live' intervention from the journalist, but this does not change the main point – the description of the newsgathering process is considered irrelevant for news content and is omitted from the news as a result. Whatever the reason for the absence of an explanation, including possible space and time limits, this short published text has a simple interpretive frame: the emphasis is on a short evaluation of the legislation by two sides with opposing views and not on the new US regulations.

The practice of reducing topics to two opposing statements, a 'journalism of assertion' (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001, p.75), is a modern substitute for the old journalistic principle of 'obtaining all facts and viewpoints relevant for the news story'. The process of making news, as most journalists would confirm, is an almost unconscious set of decisions taken by journalists in the manufacture of news. It is based on a relatively standardised routine, adopted by the vast majority of news outlets. The 'unconscious' decision to reduce the story to 54 words that give two opposing political statements is a reflection of the journalist's judgement about the most important aspects of the 'event'. The most newsworthy element in the news story 'Trade fears on GE labels' is two opposing views on the (power of) objectives stated in the US document. In such a story, there is no place for explanation as to where, why and how those views were obtained.

Does the omission of an explanation of the newsgathering process influence the meaning of the story? If the answer is indeed 'yes', as it is assumed, does the lack of an explanation reduce, enrich or have no influence on the readers' understanding of the topic (the policy aspects or the limitations of genetic engineering)?

5.5.2 Transparency and meaning of the story

One possible way of looking for an answer is to identify what is 'not said' in the story. What are the points that are not clarified in the news? This approach is well known among journalism practitioners and is usually called "prosecutorial" or "skeptical" editing (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001, p.86). It includes all questions one might ask to challenge the information, sources or conclusions of the article (like a prosecutor in a court room).

Let us explore some of the questions that this particular news story does not address: How did the Green Party find out about the document? Who is 'negotiating objectives' stated in the US legislation? Where (and in what form) does the Green Party 'say' that the US would get rid of labelling? Why did the Green Party quote the document? What else does the proposed legislation include? Why would the US aim to get rid of labelling? What is the level of rejection from the New Zealand Government when it says that 'US objectives would not necessarily be adopted': was the source the Minister of Finance, who holds a pro-GE stance, or a Minister with greater understanding of the anti-GE stance? Who was the source of information from the Green Party? Is it a Green MP whose 'exclusive' information turns out to be ungrounded? Or is it the most reliable MP in the Green Party? Why are the US objectives problematic and what is the future of the free-trade deal?

The list of questions is long, and if addressed, would not fit into 54 words of news. The argument here is not that all news stories should include every detail related to the story. This would not be possible. Rather, the frame of the story 'Trade fears for GM labels' would be dramatically different with and without an explanation of the process of acquiring the news.

Let us look into two 'versions' of the news report under scrutiny. One version is the actual published report – with the newsgathering process 'unexplained' – and the other version is a simulated news report with the newsgathering process fully 'explained':

In the '*unexplained'* version, the article 'Trade fears for GM labels' is an example of 'objective' reporting. The text indicates a relationship between GE (food labelling) and the free trade deal with the United States of America. The action that is a consequence of the relation between GE and free trade (attempt to remove labelling) can be described in two different, contradictory ways. The Green Party says it is 'a certain act' and the Government says it is 'a negotiable act'.

Now let us look at a simulated version where the newsgathering process is '*explained*' (an example of 'interpretative' reporting). If we assume the already mentioned newsgathering scenario (the Green Party issued a press release, and the journalist asked the government's spokesperson to comment), then the news could look like this (non-existing text is in italics and underlined):

> The United States would aim to get rid of labelling of genetically modified food as part of any free-trade agreement with New Zealand, the Green Party said yesterday in *a press release that cites part of the* negotiating objectives stated in proposed US legislation. However, *asked to comment on the Green Party's statement,* the Government said US objectives would not necessarily be adopted in any deal.

Minimal correction to the news (even without moving the foregrounded categorical statement "The United States would aim to get rid of labeling …") distinguishes the positions of the news sources. One sends a press statement and the other is asked to comment. It simultaneously re-establishes the voice of the press and clarifies the transformation of the source text into the article.

The transformation of a source text (press release) into an article is complex because it articulates features of source and target discourses. The process of articulation and translation of official discourse is a natural part of journalism practice. It is explained and defended by the clear recognition of source identities and actions. Analysis of media coverage of genetic engineering indicates that the absence of explanation about how information has been obtained (in this case no 'where' and no 'why' in explaining the sources' actions) leads to the

disappearance of context in the story and loss of the journalist's place within that context. When the newsgathering process is explained, the reader can determine the value of the information. If there is a clear indication that the story is based on an interview, the rule of the game is that the journalist raises questions which the reader is expected to ask. Unasked questions are a loss for the newspaper. If there is a clear indication that the article is based on a press release, the reader 'is told' there are source interests attached to the story. Such factual certainty produces transparency and clarity of news and is relevant for public debates on important issues in society.

5.5.3 Newsgathering and public knowledge

Further analysis indicates a link between the absence of a newsgathering explanation and the type of knowledge generated for public debate. Knowledge of the GE issue – the link between labelling food and free trade in the *Dominion*'s article 'Trade fears for GM labels' – is provided by the Government and the Green Party ('primary definers'). Their versions of reality have not been used as a summary of facts where the facts are subject to verification by the journalist. In other words, when the Greens say there is a link, journalists ought to check the document and ask for a response from the US administration. However, instead of summarising their own rigorous verification and evaluation of the facts (that there is link) journalists opted to summarise the evaluation offered by two opposing sources (the Greens says that/what the Government thinks).

The facts (the United States proposes free-trade legislation; the document has 'negotiating objectives'; one of the objectives talks about labelling of GE food) are replaced with the Green Party's selection of facts. What we see in the news, as an indicator of verification, is not the original document quoted, interpreted or analysed. It is the voice of the 'other side' (the Government) that provides a second statement which contradicts the first. Reporting confrontation between authoritative sources is a reflection of a battle for dominant frame (Miller & Riechert 2000), but is also a comfortable mechanism for obtaining 'factuality' through the compilation of two (non-verified) statements rather than investigating

and interpreting the facts in those statements. The text 'Trade fears for GM labels' presents itself as 'truthful' by contrasting two political judgements rather than testing those judgements against facts found in the original document. The truthfulness of news, however, includes both text and context. Journalists can accept factual contexts provided by news sources without breaking any journalistic principle (including objectivity). If the reader does not have a full and explicit reminder of what distinguishes facts from opinions, clarity of information is lost, and so is the transparency that reveals the stakes of those involved in public dialogue.

The presence of public relations officers, to be precise "para-journalists",[79] in the story 'Trade fears for GM labels' is not visible but it exists. A simple check of the Green Party's website easily identifies that the press release was published a day earlier with the headline 'Free trade deal threatens GE labelling'. The previous analysis demonstrates how the small, simple change that makes intervention of sources, and their 'para-journalists', visible, influences the sense of the news.

The news media landscape, where news is not manufactured by interaction between agents of reality (sources) and agents of the representation of reality (journalists), demands new rules. A good start would be an acknowledgement of the existence of the people in the middle (para-journalists) and an indication of their intervention in reality. Clearly, no one expects all articles to provide a complete explanation regarding the newsgathering process. It would not only clash with the internal constraints of time and space, but it would bring an unnecessary and boring punctiliousness into news stories, which are ultimately narratives. But news reporting based on press releases requires sharper journalistic judgement. The higher a news source's stakes are, the more 'context' is needed in a story. The agenda of para-journalists differs from that of journalists in that they are interested in projecting 'favourable facts' instead of giving an 'equal' treatment of facts and viewpoints, which is the journalistic concern. The

[79] Schudson (2003, p.3) introduces the term para-journalists to stress how "public relations firms, public information officers, political spin doctors, and the publicity staffs of a wide variety of institutions, both corporate and non-profit" use journalistic tools to produce and pack their messages in a form suitable for immediate use in the newsroom.

'unexplained' newsgathering process blurs the line between news reporting by a journalist and intervention by news sources with particular interests.

The clear markers of journalistic and para-journalistic intervention in reality are more present in 'interpretative' than in 'objective' journalism. While European schools of journalism, such as the French, require full contextualisation of events (Hallin & Mancini 2004) – in the case of 'Trade fears for GM labels' the contextualization would be in the form of an explanation that the Greens issued a press release and the Government responded to it – Anglo-American journalism accepts the simple principle of balance of sources to maintain objectivity. The analysis of media coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand points towards what might be the quiet disappearance of an explanation of the newsgathering process. The problem with stories such as 'Trade fears for GE labels' is that they generate knowledge about the different standpoints of political agents while hiding facts that could help readers form their own opinions for debate. This opens the 'voting' for and against the issues but it closes the debate.

Confronting different opinions and confronting arguments for different opinions reflects the difference between voting and debating in the news text and the nature of exchange of information between sources and journalists. As "a form of political action itself" (Schudson 1995, p. 3), this exchange demands clear, precise and transparent accounts from both sides. It is a process. If the ideals behind the early notions of objectivity were about removing journalists' personal interventions in order to present factual information, modern journalism has the task of bringing the journalist back. Once the journalist explains where, how and why she obtained the information about the event or the issue she reported, she regains the authority to make sense of reality by contextualising and imposing a certain story-telling frame upon the event. The choice of story-telling frame is the third element of journalistic practice that constitutes the objectivity norm understood as a method of newsgathering.

5.6 Story-telling frame

The first reports on genetic engineering, as explained earlier, were almost identical in all three dailies. The newspapers evaluated the event of the release of the Royal Commission's Report as the most newsworthy of that day: all the newspapers carried the main stories on the release on their front page; all editorial teams decided to present the story of the Report with more than one article; and all newspapers separated the Royal Commission's findings from the Government's and the Green's reactions on the findings. What does this tell us?

First, the uniformity of all three newspapers' approach to the event highlights newsworthiness as a universal journalistic norm that transcends the particularity of the news outlet. The event that triggered the coverage was the Government's release of the Report. The fact that the event happened in the political field influenced further coverage – the GE issue was set up in the field of politics. The consequence is that the GE story became 'strategically framed news', an event related to wider issues in the *expectation* and *anticipation phase* of the coverage and 'issue-framed news' in the *evaluation phase* (see p.23). The capacity to explain the issue and make an in-depth interpretation of the policy options is identified only in the *evaluation* phase.

Second, the headlines of the first reports disclose the way newspapers framed the release of the Royal Commission's Report and reactions from the Government and the Green Party. The *Dominion*'s headlines read: 'Green Light for GM' (on the Royal Commission's Report) and 'Softly, softly down GM road'; and 'Findings could cost Labour Green support' (report from the press conferences). The *New Zealand Herald* announced: 'Towards genetic engineering – with real caution' (on the Report) and 'Delight and anger at GE report' (press conferences). The *Press* said: 'Commission treads middle of the road for GE' (Royal Commission's Report) and 'Backing GE report could bring strife for Govt' (press conferences).

These headlines recapitulate what editorial teams thought was the most important aspect of the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Engineering. Such summaries imply an opinion – 'softly, softly down GM road', 'middle road',

'with real caution' – and establish a specific perspective on the event. The headline, a newspaper's definition of the event (whether it is that of a journalist or the editor) reflects how the journalists processed a large amount of information about the Royal Commission's Report – they focused on the recommendations and the main sources of evaluation of the Report. The main reports expressed the Government's and the Green Party's views; the other articles cited science, business, and environmental, Maori, and farmers' views.

The routine organisation of information included the translation of complex knowledge into the three broad frames that this study uses: the first, the *problem identification and solutions* frame, follows the 'straight news account' and explains what has happened – the release of the Royal Commission's Report. The second, the *conflict story-telling* frame, uses the easy and powerful narrative of political struggle to interpret the event by focusing on the predictable disagreement between the Government and the Greens. And the third frame, *connection to broader issues*, reflects journalists' efforts to set the Report on the GM event within a broader context.

What are the ways for identifying the possible influence of the frame as a journalistic norm on the public debate about the issue? There are a few obvious answers to this question. The articles using the *problem identification and solution* frame provided more information on the Royal Commission's findings on genetic engineering and – it is logical to assume – subsequently offered more material for the discussion of issues arising from the Report. The *conflict story-telling* articles focused on the relations between the *Government* and the *Green Party* and therefore provided information for more in-depth understanding of the balance of political power. The *connection to broader issues* framed articles linked the GE issue to a wider context and gave substance to the debate on the place of genetic engineering in the political, social, economic and scientific fields. But how does the frame become "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning" (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, p.94)?

5.6.1 The business of intervening frames

The use of frames (Table 6) shows that the main organising idea for the news content was the relevance of the GE issue to other, already known, issues in the public arena. The most commonly used frame in the media coverage of GE was *connection to broader issues*.

Table 6. Story-telling frame in GE articles (general)

STORY-TELLING FRAME	*The New Zealand Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*	*TOTAL*
Problem identification and solutions	10 (3%)	7 (5%)	8 (4%)	**25 (4%)**
Conflict	26 (9%)	24 (18%)	39 (18%)	**89 (14%)**
Connection to broader issues	238 (88%)	103 (77%)	169 (78%)	**510 (82%)**
Total	274	134	216	**624**

The blurred lines of the frames, explained in the previous chapter, reflect the complexity of journalistic work. Along with newsgathering, sourcing, and making judgements about the newsworthiness of the event, and the application of norms such as objectivity, accuracy, fairness or balance, the journalist's work is subjected to time and space constraints, the flow of other news in the newsroom and the knowledge, skills, and creativity of the individual journalist and her editor. The choice of story-telling frame reflects the link between the journalistic field and wider social and cultural space: it is dependent on a norm and the broader editorial policy, but the frame given to a particular news story also reproduces the 'sources of information frame' of the event. In the article *Genetic crops will cost NZ billions says ministry* (*Dominion,* 21 August 2001), for example, the author of the text uses the strategy of intervening frames to deal with the new information:

> A shift toward genetic engineering could be costly to the New Zealand economy, Government advisers have warned.

> Backing up what organic growers have long said, an Environment Ministry report says New Zealand's organics industry would suffer if the Government allowed either limited field tests or uncontrolled releases of genetically modified crops.
>
> … The Government is weighing up controversial recommendations from the Royal Commission on Genetic Engineering, which suggested New Zealand proceed with caution with genetic modification trials.
>
> The article indicates disagreements but does not elaborate on why the recommendations are 'controversial'. It elucidates the elaboration of conflict by stating the opposing views, but again without explaining what lies behind the conflict:
>
> Environment Minister Marian Hobbs played down the findings saying organics was a small industry in terms of export value.
>
> A cost could not be put on the impact of genetic modification without knowing what controls New Zealand would put on the technology, she said.
>
> But Green Party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons said the report should add weight to opposition to the commission findings.

The choice of verb (*played down*) and conjunction (*but*) emphasizes that a conflict exists rather than explaining what the conflict is. This ease in following the frame offered by one source – that the organic industry is a small industry in terms of export value – leads to the only available objectivity strategy left, the strategy of balancing one view with another. When the other source has an opposing view – that the impact on the organic industry should be taken into account – the 'conflict story-telling' frame is born.

The strategies used to frame the GE issue as a conflict between those who supported the Royal Commission's Recommendations on GE (Government) and those who opposed it (Greens) became apparent during the election campaign in 2002. Every sixth article (89 articles out of 510) used a 'conflict' story-telling frame when dealing with the topic of genetic engineering (Table 7).

Table 7. Story-telling frame (phase specific)

STORY-TELLING FRAME	**Phase One** *Expectation* July 2001-October 2001	**Phase Two** *Evaluation* October 2001-May 2002	**Phase Three** *Anticipation* May 2002-July 2002	***Total July 2001-July 2002***
Problem identification and solutions	25	0	0	**25**
Conflict	24	9	56	**89**
Connection to broader issues	164	147	199	**510**

The 'conflict' frame was a handy tool for explaining the consequences of genetic engineering. The "fact" that the Greens 'would pull down any government that lifted the moratorium on commercial release of GE' was repeated in most of the articles published ahead of the elections. Here is the example (*New Zealand Herald,* 11 June 2002):

> The Greens continued their strong run, doubling their backing to 9 per cent from 4.5 per cent in a similar poll in April.
>
> It is the third poll showing surging Green support since the party said it would pull down any government that lifted the moratorium on commercial release of genetically modified organisms.

The focus on conflict moves the news text far away from the issue of genetic engineering. The capacity of the news text to communicate the genetic engineering issue is reduced to strategic political goals, and makes it suitable for discussion only on that particular segment of public debate. The story about genetic engineering in New Zealand has been linked to politics in the past and its re-evocation in the election reports in 2002 shows one more segment of journalistic practice related to the forum-creating capacity of the press: the

longevity of the frames, with the use of old frames in dealing with new information about the "old" issues.

5.6.2 The power of embedded frames

The 'conflict story-telling frame' used to categorise articles on GE needs some clarification. For example, Prime Minister Helen Clark described the Green Party as a 'single issue party'. This phrase became a theme in all electoral debates and was reprinted in articles such as 'Greens down in poll – Labour rethink likely' (*Dominion Post* 21 June 2002):

> Miss Clark also fired a warning shot at the Greens, saying they were straining "public tolerance" for MMP.
>
> "If you get small parties trying to mess the system around and drag governments down on single issues you will strain public tolerance and really ... at some point, if the nonsense gets too great, there will be a public response."

The conflict story-telling frame explains the position of two political actors in the public arena, the Government and the Greens. It actually belongs to two frames, the *conflict* frame and the *connection to broader issues* frame. The 'conflict' frame is given a separate category to distinguish the clash between the Greens and the Government from other stories that discussed the GE issue inside the political frame, such as stories about governmental preparations of the policy, ministerial reports, and other parties' standpoints on GE. The aim was to check if journalists used politics as the wider frame for the interpretation of genetic engineering or whether it was only the representation of the existing political conflict between the Greens and the Government that gave the impression of the dominance of politics in representing the GE stories. In other words, does the actual event – conflict between the Greens and the Government – lead (and frame) the coverage or is the GE issue itself seen (and framed) as a political issue? The more detailed

analysis of the connection to the broader issues frame shows that politics, in absolute terms, dominated the coverage (Table 8).

Table 8. Connection to broader issues frame (specified)

CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME	*The New Zealand Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*
Politics	90 (38%)	38 (37%)	84 (50%)
Economy	56 (24%)	15 (14%)	37 (22%)
Science	28 (12%)	14 (14%)	28 (16%)
Environment	7 (3%)	5 (5%)	5 (3%)
Health	11 (4%)	2 (2%)	5 (3%)
Other[80]	46 (19%)	29 (28%)	10 (6%)
TOTAL	**238**	**103**	**169 (100%)**

The supremacy of politics[81] demonstrates a journalistic preference to use the old frames: those that are already embedded in a social construction of reality. The last time the issue of genetic engineering had been at the top of public agenda was in 1999 when it was framed as a political issue – on that occasion, the run-up to the 1999 elections, the left-wing parties promised the establishment of the Royal Commission on Genetic Engineering. The announcement of the Commission's findings two years later brought to mind the old frame and helped both journalists and their readers: it helped journalists to speed up the reporting process and helped readers to understand the context of the story.

[80] The fragmented category 'other' consists of human interest stories, arts and entertainment stories, television reviews and news articles where the issue of genetic engineering is mentioned in relation to other topics and fields not listed as politics, economy, science, environment or health. . As explained in chapter 4, some stories had two frames. In that case both were listed. Category 'other' was usually a second frame, one more narrative and organizing idea along with the main frame. For example, the *New Zealand Herald* published four articles on "corn-gate" interview with the New Zealand Prime Minister (John Campbell's interview with Helen Clark, *TV3* ,10 July 2002). These articles about the interview discussed the issue of politics (Prime Minister's role in "covering up" the GE corn import and the relationship with the Greens) but also the role of the press in the society and the standards and style of national journalism. The frame categories were therefore "politics" and "other". This interview has been used since then as defining, critical incident for investigation of journalism as a cultural practice in New Zealand.

[81] The list of most frequently used words (Table 9a) shows that the politics was the most dominant frame in absolute terms.

The identification of the most frequently used words in the articles throughout 2002 (Tables 9, 9a, 9b and 9c), supports this analysis of the frame and shows how newspapers, at different stages of discussion, constructed the story about genetic engineering.

Table 9. The most frequently used words in the articles (all three papers)

Phase One *Expectation* July 2001– October 2001	**Phase Two** *Evaluation* October 2001 – May 2002	**Phase Three** *Anticipation* May 2002 – July 2002
1056 GM	516 GM	325 Labor
546 Government	302 Government	321 Greens
397 Commission	273 New Zealand	313 Clark
314 New Zealand	178 Research	274 Government
178 Christchurch	82 Christchurch	189 Election

Table 9a. The most frequently used words in the articles(*Herald*)

Phase One *Expectation* July 2001– October 2001	**Phase Two** *Evaluation* October 2001 – May 2002	**Phase Three** *Anticipation* May 2002 – July 2002
314 New Zealand	273 New Zealand	238 Clark
277 GM	178 Research	187 Coalition
227 Government	166 Government	131 Campaign
209 Genetic	154 GM	96 Alliance
204 Commission	120 Genetic	96 Business

Table 9b. The most frequently used words in the articles (*The Press*)

Phase One *Expectation* July 2001– October 2001	**Phase Two** *Evaluation* October 2001– May 2002	**Phase Three** *Anticipation* May 2002 – July 2002
211 GE	82 Christchurch	183 Labour
178 Christchurch	62 Government	181 Greens
176 Government	46 GM	138 Government
142 Genetic	42 Genetic	107 Election
112 Commission	38 Issues	94 Christchurch

Table 9c. The most frequently used words in the articles (*Dominion Post*)

Phase One *Expectation* July 2001– October 2001	**Phase Two** *Evaluation* October 2001– May 2002	**Phase Three** *Anticipation* May 2002– July 2002
143 Government	80 Genetic	142 Labour
139 Genetic	78 Government	140 Greens
81 Commission	74 GM	136 Government
78 GM	64 Maori	82 Election
67 Issues	46 Issues	75 Clark

In the months when genetic engineering was one of the hottest topics in the election campaign, the *anticipation phase* (May 2002 – July 2002), the *New Zealand Herald*'s most frequently used words were 'Clark', 'coalition', 'campaign' and 'Alliance'. The *Herald*'s main concern in the articles was apprehension about who would make a coalition with Labour leader – Prime Minister Helen Clark – once the coalition partner, Alliance, lost its strength. This powerful political construction points to (possible) winners and losers and represents one of the variations of the *conflict* story-telling frame.

When politics removed, the next most frequently used word is 'business', reflecting the New Zealand media's tendency to reproduce a common sense in

promoting business interests (Bale 2005). What does the promotion of business interests mean in relation to public debate? Does the big corporation, with its aim of attracting as many advertisers as possible – and the newspapers belong to two big multinational corporations – bring the big corporate culture into the newsroom? Hope (2004) notes the interest of the owners to rationalise news resources and explains that within New Zealand, a press duopoly, APN and Fairfax, "compete for readership, celebrity columnists, billboard space, and advertising contracts rather than journalistic excellence" (p.5). He warns that the commercial battle between two weekly papers, owned by APN and Fairfax who have same corporate approach to the press, "provides readers with a narrow range of viewpoints and stifles public debate" (Hope 2004, p.5).

Media coverage of genetic engineering indicates that the interaction between journalism and media ownership is not a straightforward action-and-reaction type of game. When asked to comment on his relationship to the owners, G. Ellis (online interview, 16 February 2005), who worked as the editor-in-chief of the *New Zealand Herald* for eight years, says:

> Editorially the paper pursues policies independent of owners and management. In the years I led the editorial department I never received a direction on editorial content (aside from an initial request that I did not advocate violence as a legitimate means to a political end – which I had no difficulty in accepting). Advertisers occasionally believe that their purchasing of space gives them privileges. It does not. There have been instances where the paper has foregone advertising rather than bow to advertising pressure.

The *Dominion Post*'s editor-in-chief, T. Pankhurst (interview 22 March 2005), agrees:

> Our relationship with our owners Fairfax, a publicly listed company, is one of independence. They do not dictate editorial policy. Neither do advertisers. We obviously need to be fair and professional in our coverage to retain reader and advertiser support and you do not want to

> be too far out of step with them, but advertisers generally accept that the product must be credible and that is in their interests too.

Does the fact that the owners do not directly interfere in editorial policy mean there is no link between the pattern of ownership and the quality of journalism in the press? Norris argues there is a link and points out that newspapers have been faced with demands to cut costs and improve profits. When they belong to a chain of newspapers they have opportunities to recycle each other's stories because they serve different regional markets: Wellington and Christchurch, for instance: "From a national perspective, it can be argued there is less diversity and a diminished range of opinion, but in monopoly markets the reader knows no difference"(Norris 2002, p.48).

Another effect of cost cutting and the drive for profits has been the loss of jobs in many news organisations. The decrease has led to a loss of local knowledge, expertise and contacts "regarded by many professionals as key elements in informed reporting" and the appearance of a new type of newsgathering that is "reactive and done on the phone from the centralised newsroom" (Norris 2002, p.48). The concentration of press ownership and deregulation has decreased the resources available for critical investigative reporting (Hope 1996).

Newspaper duopoly in a territorially divided market leads to the absence of real competition among the dailies. The existence of newspaper chains means there is no competition among journalists to obtain the earliest access to news, or "scoops" or "exclusive" information. Why should the *Dominion Post*'s journalist covering the GE issue bother to do an exclusive story when it will be simultaneously published in the *Press*? When asked how the other coverage influences their reporting on the same event, the *Herald*'s editor said: "We were not swayed by the manner of coverage but, obviously, new information brought to light by other newspapers might influence coverage. The *Herald* has always tried to lead, not follow, the way a topic might be addressed" (Ellis, online interview).And the *Dominion Post'*s editor said: "We try to take the story on. If the *Herald* has the 'what', we want the 'why'" (Pankhurst, interview).

The economic transformation and the division of newspaper market didn't have open repercussions on editorial policy. But, as the analysis of leader articles published on GE issue shows (see Chapter 6), the press reflects the ideology of the business behind the press.

5.7 Summary

The content analysis of newspaper coverage of GE with a focus on identifying journalistic sources, transparency of newsgathering and the story-telling frame shows how journalists deal with complex issues such as genetic engineering and how the concept of objectivity is reflected in the way the issue is presented for public debate. The study identifies the role of 'journalistic logic' in classifying sources as either arbiters or advocates, and it highlights the ease with which this distinction is subsequently continued. It reveals that the journalistic practice of not explaining the newsgathering process is related to the sources and the work of public relations experts who use journalistic logic when providing information about the events relevant for their own field. This chapter has revealed the absolute dominance of the political frame in covering the GE issue and the trend of using the norm of balancing opposing views as journalists' habitual response to a situation where there is a confrontation between political agents.

The analysis points towards the discrepancy between the equal number of appearances of political sources with opposing views, the formal equilibrium of authoritative sources, and the unequal presentation of views by journalists in being more cautious when using the Green Party views than the Government, science or business sources. In order to investigate if this divergence influences the effectiveness of the press in providing a forum for public debate, the next chapter focuses on journalistic form. It identifies the proportion of 'opinions' to 'news' in the coverage of the GE issue and discusses how the editorials, as the most explicit intervention into reality, relate to the issue in public arena.

CHAPTER 6

OBJECTIVITY AS AN ACCOUNT AND THE INTEPRETATION OF THE GE ISSUE

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter approached media coverage of genetic engineering by analysing the interactions between the journalistic field and other surrounding fields. The question of how New Zealand newspapers reported the GE issue was addressed by deconstructing the ways of gathering news as well as the norms that were applied in the use of sources, transparency of newsgathering and choice of story-telling frame. This chapter is focused on the 'text' element of journalistic discourse, and specifically on journalistic form. It aims to extend the investigation of journalistic norms and their influence on public debate into a consideration of the interplay between different forms of the newspaper's text. The chapter identifies how discursive characteristics of one journalistic form, the 'news', influence another journalistic form, the 'editorial', and how the editorial as a newspaper's voice in a public debate interprets the issue in that debate.

By investigating the manner in which editorials achieve their persuasive goals, the study seeks to discover particular components of journalistic discourse that have possible influence on public discussion about genetic engineering. The intention is to assess the power of argumentative dialogue in the press and to indicate the discursive potential of the text to modify power relations in other fields (Bourdieu 1991). This chapter identifies the formation of argumentative discourse in the press. The chapter uses the editorial to examine the play of discourses within the news text and to observe how journalistic norms – such as the choice of sources, the story-telling frame, and the principle of objectivity in news reports – influence the topic's interpretation in editorials.

The analysis of the establishment of identities and relations between those involved (Fairclough 1995) is aimed to address the relationship between media discourse and dominant ideology. Assuming that news media play an essential role in maintaining the authority of political system (Reese 1990) and are

operating within the larger ideological sphere, the study looks into journalism practice and the concept of objectivity to identify how two different news genres, hard news and editorials, have influenced each other within a larger ideological context.

Firstly, this chapter provides an account of how news differs from opinion. It then identifies the proportion of news to opinion in relation to the status of the issue in the public domain (*expectation*, *evaluation* and *anticipation* phases) and discusses journalistic interpretation of the issue, namely the account of reality in the press. The chapter then focuses on the 'editorial' as a specific sub-genre of 'opinion' in the news discourse and looks at headlines, topics and the structure to discuss the intertextuality of the editorial, that is "how the speech and writing of others is embedded within media texts" (Fairclough 1995, p.75). The investigation of this transformation process, the ways the editorial transforms and recontextualises news reports by making references to already published facts and views, is used to discuss one particular feature of the news discourse: the newspaper's production of common sense. The chapter concludes with some observations on the articulation of arguments in the news text and the relationship between the production of 'common sense' and the spread of (neo-liberal) ideology in newspaper editorials.

6.2 Journalistic form

Journalistic form, a discursive type with "distinctive rhetorical styles, aesthetic conventions and communicative functions" (McNair 1998), is the first element of the news text that reveals its communicative function. Two main forms are developed in relation to the two primary functions of the press – to inform and to comment: 'news' and 'opinions'. The lines between the two forms are blurred, but the distinction still exists and expresses a difference between publishing facts and views.

The investigation of 'facts' in news articles shows the newspaper's decision to report an issue such as genetic engineering is based firstly on an evaluation of the newsworthiness of the event. The answer to the question "why should our readers

care about this" that Tim Pankhurst, the *Dominion Post* editor-in-chief (online interview 22 March 2005) underlines as the leading principle that coverage is based on, determines the inclusion of the story in the newspaper. What influences its further life in the press is a series of news judgments about the intensity of coverage (number of published articles), the structure of coverage (proportion of 'news' to 'opinions'), and the degree of the newspaper's direct involvement in the public debate (number of editorials and 'opinion pieces'). The following analysis investigates how these components – intensity, structure and involvement – are related to the community and the status of an issue in the public policy process.

6.2.1 'News' and 'opinions'

A content analysis of articles (Table 10) shows that the *New Zealand Herald* was ahead of the other two papers in terms of informing its readers about genetic engineering and commenting on it. Thirty percent of the *Herald*'s coverage comprised opinion pieces. This compares with 24 percent of opinion pieces in the coverage of the *Press* and 13 percent in the coverage of the *Dominion*. Clearly, the *Herald* played a much greater partisan role in attempting to persuade its readership than the other two newspapers.

Table 10. Journalistic form

NEWSPAPER	News	Opinion
The New Zealand Herald	234 (70%)	100 (30%)
The Press	118 (76%)	37 (24%)
The Dominion	159 (87%)	24 (13%)

What contributes to journalistic partisanship? A close reading of the articles indicates that the initial decision to publish an opinion piece on the issue comes from 'consequence' and 'conflict' as dominant news values in the GE story. From an editorial point of view, an ongoing story like genetic engineering has the capacity to generate polemic: each new 'opinion', if eloquent and persuasive enough, has a potential to produce a set of new 'news' on the issue that can engender new views and new judgements or opinions. This circle of 'opinions'

and ‘news’ in the coverage is a routine way of dealing with a story that lasts longer than a day (Tuchman 1978) and is, at the same time, the most prominent element for linking the press with other arenas of public debate. The driving force in this process seems clear: the more complex the issue, the more dynamic the ‘news’ and ‘opinions’ cycle. But the logic is not straightforward – the press does not become a frenzy of opinion on all issues. Some stories, although ongoing and important, pass almost unnoticed on the opinion pages of the paper.[82] The case of media coverage of GE shows that the proportion of ‘news’ to ‘opinions’ might be more related to the reason for writing the story (trigger) and contextual conditions that bring the issue into the press.

6.2.2 Journalism and public policy

The frequency of appearance of the articles shows the newspapers paid cyclical attention to the genetic engineering issue (Table 11).

Table 11. Number of articles throughout the year

NEWSPAPER	**Phase one** *Expectation*	**Phase two** *Evaluation*	**Phase three** *Anticipation*	Total
New Zealand Herald	91 (27%)	88 (26%)	155 (46%)	334 (100%)
The Press	75 (48%)	38 (25%)	42 (27%)	155 (100%)
Dominion	57 (31%)	47 (26%)	79 (43%)	183 (100%)
TOTAL	223 (33%)	173 (26%)	276 (41%)	672 (100%)

The three phases of the coverage, as explained in Chapter 4, are identified in relation to four benchmark events: the release of the Royal Commission’s Report, the announcement of the Government’s response to the Report, the announcement of early elections, and Election Day. The distinction between phases is made relative to the public policy decisions, and the meaning of ‘public policy’ is

[82] The Employment Contracts Act was replaced by the Employment Relations Act in 2001, with some considerable impact on the workplace. This issue got considerably less coverage than genetic engineering, although both were in public arena at the same time.

flexible enough to include discussions on issues of public interest and not only actual policies. The three phases correspond with the status of the issue in the 'public policy' arena and the time of their appearance in the press.

The stories in phase one, *expectation,* usually have a clear trigger ('Government is about to announce a policy'); the stories in the *evaluation phase* are more vague about stating the reasons for the coverage ('A number of scare stories have been reported in relation to genetic engineering); and *anticipation phase* stories usually connect the issue with other more important issues ('GE will decide this election'). There are some overlaps between coverage driven by 'expectation', 'evaluation' and 'anticipation'. The media coverage of GE shows how the anticipation-driven coverage dominated the treatment of the issue in the 'major centre newspapers' (*The New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion*), while the 'regional centre paper (*The Press*) paid more attention to the GE issue in the *expectation* phase. The difference in the treatment of the issue can be explained as a reflection of the differences between the editorial policies of the newspapers as well as their relationship with the community. First, *The Press* is a local newspaper based in a rich agricultural region in New Zealand, and was more interested in investigating the impact of the future GE policy on the development of agriculture than the other two newspapers. Out of 75 articles published in the *expectation* phase in *The Press*, 14 deal with the issue of farmers' views on GE (18.6%)[83], far more than *The New Zealand Herald* (8%) and *The Dominion* (14%). Second, as a regional paper *The Press* is more interested in 'soft' than 'hard' news[84] and the higher number of articles in the *expectation* phase reflects several individual actions organized by the Organic Farmers—an association opposed to commercial release of GE—and by local Green Party members. For example, one family[85] walked from Christchurch to Wellington (370km) to express their concerns in regard to GE and *The Press* followed their journey extensively – 12 articles were published on their journey (the same march was

[83] *The Press* published 14 articles where the word 'farmers was used, *The Herald* 8 and *The Dominion* 8.

[84] The same trend has been identified both in the United States and Australia. (See *The state of the news media 2005*: *An annual report on American journalism* and *Australian State of the News Media Report 2006*.

[85] Karen and Fraser Palmer-Hesketh and their children Maitreya (4), and Ajala (1).

ignored by major centre newspapers). And thirdly, the discrepancy in the number of articles published ahead of the election (*anticipation* phase) reflects different interest in the elections between highly interested major centre newspapers and the modestly interested local press.

The use of GE to discuss the balance of political power is most visible ahead of the elections in the *anticipation phase,* but was incorporated in both the 'expectation' and 'evaluation' of the GE ('Would the Greens support the Government on issues of confidence and supply?'). The level of interest in the issue varies: in all three newspapers it drops in the *evaluation phase* signifying the daily press's preoccupation with events with a clear time frame. In the evaluation phase, with no policy decision or elections on the horizon, the press became less interested in the issue of genetic engineering. The newspapers lost the set of handy triggers from the preparation of the policy phase (press conferences, demonstrations, public meetings, official announcements), and journalists, who didn't get media-staged events from the pre-election 'anticipation phase', had to deal with the reality of GE as an "emergent science, science whose truth has not yet been settled by consensus, either scientific or public" (Priest 1999, p.97). The question is, therefore, one of how journalistic form in 'expectation', 'evaluation' or 'anticipation' stories corresponds with the public debate about the issue.

The proportion of 'news' to 'opinions' changed in those three phases – what is important in Table 12 are not absolute numbers,[86] but the proportion of 'news' to 'opinions':

[86] Absolute numbers are not comparable because the time frame is different, *phase one* lasted three months, *phase two* six months, and *phase three* lasted three months.

Table 12. Journalistic form throughout the year

NEWSPAPER	**Phase One** *Expectation*		**Phase Two** *Evaluation*		***Phase Three*** *Anticipation*	
	News	**Opinion**	**News**	**Opinion**	**News**	**Opinion**
New Zealand Herald	67 (74%)	24 (26%)	63 (72%)	25 (28%)	104 (67%)	51 (33%)
The Press	67 (89%)	8 (11%)	23 (60%)	15 (40%)	28 (66%)	14 (34%)
Dominion	51 (89)%	6 (11%)	40 (85%)	7 (15%)	68 (86%)	11 (14%)
TOTAL	185 (83%)	38 (17%)	126 (73%)	47 (27%)	200 (72%)	76 (28%)

The proportion shows that all three newspapers are more interested in informing (they published more news) when the policy is still in preparation (*expectation phase*) than when the policy is adopted (*evaluation phase*) or discussed in relation to another issue (*anticipation phase*). This preference corresponds with the informative function of the newspapers that McQuail (1994, p.79) puts at the top of the major social functions of the mass media in contemporary society. The list also includes correlation, continuity, entertainment and mobilisation where 'correlation' is explained as "explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events" (McQuail 1994, p.79).

The number of 'opinion' articles that carry the 'correlation' function of commenting upon the issue is lowest in the *expectation phase*, slightly higher in the *evaluation phase* and highest in the *anticipation phase*. This trend corresponds with the status of the issue in the public domain. The public disagreement over the best solution for the GE issue (or any issue in public domain) has legitimacy during the preparation of the policy and is incorporated into the news articles through extensive news coverage where, under the umbrella of objectivity, different voices (sources of news) get a chance to be heard. But once the policy is adopted, the disagreement moves into the 'evaluation' phase and the number of 'opinions' becomes proportionately higher.

The relatively high number of opinion pieces published in *The Press* in the *evaluation* phase—higher than in *The Herald* and *The Dominion* – comes again from the community context. On the 10th of January 2002 someone broke into the local scientific laboratory, a glasshouse with genetically modified potato plants and destroyed the crops. The event, labelled as act of vandalism ('Eco terrorism', *The Press*, 17 January 2002) intensified the coverage and increased the number of opinions as evaluation of that particular event, and not the whole GE policy.

The relationship between the press coverage and the status of the issue in public domain becomes more interesting when the number of editorials is identified. The coverage of the GE issue in the three phases indicates the New Zealand press has a preference for evaluating policy when it is adopted (*evaluation* and *anticipation* phase), rather than influencing its preparation (*expectation* phase). This, however, does not mean that the press has no ambition to raise its voice and contribute to the policy-making process. It does have such an ambition. In the policy-preparing phase (*expectation*), the press, through editorials, gives itself privileges to comment upon the issue more often than the other writers of opinion articles. A closer look at the structure of opinion items (Table 13) shows that the press has a strong ambition to influence policy: it more often raises its own voice when policy is being prepared than after it has been established. [87]

[87] This is a general trend, but newspapers demonstrated differences in raising its voice in public debate. For example, *The Press* published four editorials in the *evaluation* phase. Three of them were summaries of the year where the GE issue was just mentioned as one of the important issues in 2001) ("Six of the best", December 20, 2001;'Dominated by tragedy', December 31, 2001; and 'A year of challenges", January 1, 2002) and one was evaluation of the attack on GE crops ('Eco terrorism", January 14, 2002).

Table 13. Number of editorials and other opinion pieces throughout the year

NEWSPAPER	**Phase one** *Expectation*		**Phase two** *Evaluation*		**Phase three** *Anticipation*	
	Edit.	**Other**	**Edit.**	**Other**	**Edit.**	**Other**
New Zealand Herald	8 (33%)	16 (67%)	2 (8%)	23 (92%)	6 (12%)	45 (89%)
The Press	3 (37%)	5 (63%)	4 (40%)	11 (60%)	4 (29%)	10 (71%)
Dominion	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	2 (26%)	5 (74%)	4 (36%)	7 (64%)
TOTAL	14 (37%)	24 (63%)	10 (21%)	37 (79%)	14 (18%)	62 (82%)

All three papers published, proportionately, more editorials on GE in the *expectation* phase than in *evaluation* and *anticipation* phase. The exception is the *Press* but when the summary-of-the-year editorials are excluded, the trend is the same (it would be 10% not 40%). The papers' willingness to announce their own standpoint on the GE issue in the middle of the heated debate about the Royal Commission's Recommendations, at a time when it was not clear how the Government would respond and what policy would be adopted, might indicate the newspapers' ambition to shift towards the role of 'public arbiter' in society. The position of journalists as public arbiters has a long tradition in European journalism (Hallin & Mancini 2004) but is a relatively recent practice in the American press (Entman 1989). The analysis of media coverage of GE shows that New Zealand journalism readily takes the position of mediator in public disputes. Journalistic authority to arbitrate comes from its declared objectivity, and the notion that facts and views are clearly separated in news texts.

6.2.3 The myth of 'facts' and 'views'

If the news belongs to the genre of story-telling, editorials belong to the genre of argumentation. Media scholars make a distinction between 'factual' and 'fictional' genres. Within the 'factual' genre, the news is scrutinised as the most

prestigious of daily media genres, a status gained from "its role at the centre of the exercise of power in modern societies" (Garrett & Bell 1998, p.4).

In print journalism, two pages – the front page and the editorial page[88] – are at the forefront of the practice that defines relations between the field of journalism and other fields of cultural production. The front page of a daily newspaper simultaneously reflects the most important events of the previous day[89] (representation of social reality) and reveals journalism's approach to those events[90] (interpretation and construction of reality); the editorial page expresses the newspaper's reactions to issues of public concern. While the front page sells the newspaper's judgment of the most important events of a day, the editorial page indicates the position of the newspaper in the wider public arena (Hilgartner & Bosk 1988). In USA these two pages attract the largest audience. More than a third of all newspaper readers read editorial pages regularly and studies have shown that the primary audience for editorial pages includes people who are active in civic and political affairs (Hynds & Archibald 1996). The creation of a forum for public debate includes the newspaper's own voice in issues of public concern. The editorial's 'we', established in the leader article,[91] a flagship of 'common sense' and 'good for all' press philosophy, reveals the character of the newspaper's construction of social reality.

The newspaper hierarchy puts editorials at the top of the scale of news articles, underling the myth about separating facts (in news reports) and its own views on the facts (in editorials). The editorials are written by a member of the newspaper's staff (leader writer, editor or senior journalist) and, as the voice of the newspaper, convey the editorial board's position on a current news event. Instead of a byline, editorials use the editorial 'we' to emphasise the authority of the newspaper's

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[88] There is ambiguity of terms in journalism studies: the whole informative section of newspapers as opposed to the advertising section, is called 'editorial pages' and the page where editorial is published is 'editorial page' too.

[89] For more on the steady development front-page design in American press see: Barnhurst, K. and Nerone, J. 'Design Changes in U.S. Front Pages, 1885-1985, *Journalism Quarterly* 68 (1991), pp.796-804; Barnhurst, K., *Seeing the newspaper*, (New York, 1994).

[90] For details on 'reading' the news discourse see Bell, A. and Garrett, P., eds., *Approaches to media discourse*, (Oxford,1998).

[91] Two terms, 'leader article' and 'editorial' are used interchangeably in his study.

voice in making a statement about important issues in society such as genetic engineering.

6.2.4 The voice of a newspaper

Editorials are distinct as a socio-cultural practice. If news is characterised by simple, short sentences, attractive and eye-catching headlines, summary leads, attributed speech and precision of terms, editorials are a form of argumentative discourse. Historically, they have followed changes in newspaper format, content and standards of journalism while reflecting, interpreting and attempting to influence wider political, social and cultural changes. Meyer (2001) describes how the rise of neutral fact-based reporting inspired an essayist to write in 1866 that the time was at hand "for the abolition of editorials and the concentration of the whole force of journalism upon presenting to the public the history and picture of the day." Meyer says:

> The opposite happened. Opinion journalism acquired fresh life, as readers, swamped by fact, turned to editorials for selection and judgement, salted by adjectives not sanctioned in news departments. At the *[New York] Times* (where traditionally the news and editorial departments operate separately, divided by a zealously guarded wall), a succession of editorial writers have been turning out blasts and bravos for 150 years.

Editorials survived due to an existing need and space for argumentative discourse in the press. They stayed alive because of their unique position in newspaper journalism. This role is distinct from that of the news: while the news informs, editorials assess; where the first explains what has happened, the latter tell us why and how it could affect our lives. The news feeds us with information we need to be free and self-governing (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001) and editorials aim to convince readers why certain points of view should be taken into account when considering an issue.

Scholars have already found that editorials have important functions in the expression and construction of public opinion (Bolivar 1994, Meyer 2001, Le 2002, Achugar 2004) and deserve investigation for their links to ideology (Van Dijk 1998). The call upon common shared values, such as "If the science proceeds now with due care, common sense can win in the end" (editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 November 2001), attempts to reaffirm the mental *model* of science as a symbol of progress and responsibility already present in our experience. Models have 'settings' such as time, location, circumstances and participants, and are used as a persuasive tool in both news and editorials. In the news, models support the authenticity of the facts, and in editorials they strengthen the argument. As scholars have pointed out (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001), the editorial pages aim to hold to the same standards of truthfulness or allegiance to public interest as any other part of the newspaper. There are no established rules for writing a good editorial[92] but there is an agreement that the credibility of editorial writers is "rooted in the same dedication to accuracy, verification, the larger public interest, and a desire to inform that all other journalists subscribe to" (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001, p. 97). As the official stance of the publication and "one of the widest circulated opinion discourses of society" (Achugar 2004, p.294), editorials represent institutional opinion and present themselves persuasively even to those who disagree.

The next question, then, is: how do editorials achieve persuasiveness? The schematic structure of the editorial reveals it typically consists of a summary of the event, an evaluation, and a pragmatic conclusion (Van Dijk 1996), equivalents to statements on the topic, elaboration of arguments and a conclusion. The actual

[92] One of the sites for journalism teachers, for instance, offers this answer to questions about what editorials do: *criticize or attack* (if they criticize, they require suggestions for change. If you launch an attack against something, you must be impeccable in your charge. An attack is forceful; criticism does not have to be forceful, but it has to be held down with facts and suggestions for change); *defend* (stand up for an individual or an institution that is under attack by society); *endorse* (but you must give solid reasons for your endorsement of a political candidate, an issue, or the reasons behind building a new gymnasium); *compliment* (show evidence that the compliment is deserved. Do praise when warranted); *instigate, advocate or appeal* (to instigate editorially would mean that the newspaper intended to go on a crusade for something – improvements in the school study hall system, for example); *entertain* (an entertaining editorial is good for the reader's soul, but it should have a worthwhile point and should be written about something worth the reader's time; *predict (*support your predictions with fact) – Adapted from "Types of Editorials" by Rob Melton, H.L. Hall, and other sources (available at http://taje.org/fortaje/PDF/editorials.pdf)

editorials might vary these components but they never fail to offer action-oriented opinion. As Van Dijk (1996) explains, editorials play a role in the formation and change of public opinion, in setting the political agenda, and in influencing social debate:

> When expressed in editorials, opinion and ideologies are being produced by journalists and other writers, who both as professionals and as other social group members (e.g. men, whites, conservatives, etc.) exhibit their shared social representations, and participate in the complex processes of newspaper production and reception as well as in intergroup interaction and institutional reproduction.

Close readings of the texts published on GE reveal some of the devices used to achieve persuasiveness of editorials, such as headlines, transformation of issue into a topic, and the objectivity twist used to underline the 'facticity' of expressed views, as discussed bellow.

6.3 Discursive potential of editorials

There are several reasons why editorials published on genetic engineering have been used to discuss how journalism practice moves itself into the sphere of argumentation. First, the issue of genetic engineering was a frequent topic of editorials – 38 editorials were published in the three dailies over a year. Second, the journalistic form of editorial is suitable for the easy identification of links between the language (text) and the whole context of communication that scholars find crucial for analysis of a media discourse (see Cook 1992 cited in Garrett & Bell 1998). The ideological position of the editorial's 'author' is more complex than it initially looks. The 'author' of the editorial is not an individual but a collective. Although written by individuals, editorials represent the standpoint of a newspaper as a whole and have a far more transparent position in the diffusion of ideology than any other newspaper text.

The process of identifying the ideology behind editorials on GE begins with recognition of other texts embedded in the editorial. The elements of 'embedded

texts' relevant for this study are news stories: more specifically, the journalistic norms developed around the practice (how to obtain information, for example) and around the text (how to structure the story). The 'objectivity' norm, for example, resides and can be identified both in journalism practice and in the text itself.[93] Detection of the embedded texts in the journalistic form of 'news' is a straightforward process: the 'news' text includes official sources 'texts' (eyewitness account, public or interview statement, press release); previously published texts (facts and frames) on the same issue; texts from official documents and databases, and any other text obtained in the process of newsgathering or consulted by the author of the news. The intertextuality of editorials is more complex and requires a set of sophisticated research tools to be deconstructed. . The standard practice of editorial writing in New Zealand[94] is agreement between the editor-in-chief and the editorial writer about the topic, the newspaper's point of view and the main arguments. The editorial writer consults the newspaper's library to check what has been written on a topic in the same way a news writer consults press clippings to summarise some of the previous material in a background paragraph (Matheson 2000). The difference between the two journalistic forms is that a news article plays the role of a source of information about the issue or the event, while an editorial becomes 'event' itself – a message to the reader about what the newspaper thinks its position should be in relation to the topic discussed in public arena.

Through this, the newspapers' discourse becomes a home for complex interactions between different forms of social narratives. The obvious forms of intertextuality, "visible, manifest intertextuality" (Fairclough 1992, p.117) in news texts are direct and reported speech, comparison, and background documents. For example, direct and reported speech are used "as a form of argumentation and as a way of guiding the reader on how to interpret the events by connecting them to his/her available social mental models" and the strategy of comparing statements from different sources is used "to validate and authorise the newspaper rendition and interpretation of the events" (Achugar 2004, p.313). The use of different

[93] Roscho (1975, p.55) says more in the practice than the text itself.
[94] Described by the *Dominion Post*'s and the *Herald*'s editors-in-chief in interviews with the author (2005).

authorised voices gives authority to the newspaper and legitimates its position as a voice of the public – a voice above all stated individual voices.

As a newspaper's voice, editorials recontextualise other communicative events and in so doing aim at becoming the voice of the public. This study seeks to answer the question of how an editorial achieves such a task by conducting a three-part investigation[95] of: visible or explicit components of editorials such as headlines, topics and triggers; invisible or implicit components related to the establishment of identities and relations; and analysis of lexical choices, words that are used to articulate or verbalise the arguments. The objective is to examine the link between hard news and editorials, to investigate how editorial discourse generates knowledge and opinion about social issues, and to discuss how this knowledge contributes to the formation of social identities. It looks at the traces of journalistic logic in editorials in order to locate the newspaper's place in public debate and the relation between journalism and the interpretation of reality.

6.3.1 Headlines

The first element of the editorial to be noticed is its headline. The headline of an editorial is more open in its intentions than the headline of a news report: it aims to attract the reader (as does a news headline), it indicates the topic (as does a news headline) and explicitly gives an opinion (different from a news report headline). The opinion in an editorial headline is open, not implicit or hidden as it is in news reports. This explicit judgement indicates the possible ways of looking at the issue and invites readers to accept the newspaper's judgement on it.

Linguistic analysis of the GE editorials' headlines reveals several tools used to strengthen the persuasiveness of these editorials (Table 14).

[95] This tripartite conception has been used in Le's (2002) discourse analysis of editorials on Russia published in the French newspaper *Le Monde*.

Table 14. Words in headlines

HEADLINES	*The New Zealand Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*	**Total**
Noun subject	7	1	5	13
Noun object	21	17	11	49
Verb active	14	3	3	20
Verb passive		1		1
Adjective centre		4	3	7
Adjective margin			1	1

Almost all verbs used in the headlines are in the active voice indicating the newspaper's main objective: the mobilisation of readers. Some headlines call for action, such as 'Clark needs to talk with United Future' (*New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 2002), others provide explanations of what 'really' has happened, as in 'Reason gives way to fear' (*New Zealand Herald*, 12 July 2002). A third group emphasises the need to organise society in order to achieve a particular goal, for example 'Reality must rule in the debate on GM' (*New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 200). Only one verb used in the analysed sample of 38 editorial headlines is in the passive voice, 'Dominated by tragedy' (*The Press,* 31 December 2001) and that editorial summarises the events of the year just ended, and 'tragedy' is related to another issue.

Every third verb in this sample is a 'modal verb'.[96] By using some of the tools of advertising, the *New Zealand Herald*'s headline writers, for example, express the implicit and underlying threat: 'Reality must rule in debate on GM' (4 September 2001), 'Science must win the GM argument' (26 September 2001), 'Scientific care can give sense a win' (2 November 2001), 'Green must rethink' (27 May 2002). Although the actual sentences do not use the full form of cause and consequence connection ("*A* must be done, to avoid the *B* result", Leech, 1966, p.125) they clearly indicate it. Shortened to save space and to attract the reader, the headlines achieve the equivalent effect by using the 'must' or 'can' to offer the 'common-sense' solution. The solution that is the 'best for all of us' is delegated

[96] Can, could, may, might, must, ought to, shall, should, will and would.

to science, seen here as a non-disputable, authoritative voice ('scientific care can give a sense …').

The analysis of headlines shows that the majority of editorials published on GE put emphasis on giving an opinion in the form of an instruction as to what should be done. Active modal verbs are powerful persuasive tools, but they need the support of clearly indicated subjects (agents) of the story to convey the full meaning. The use of names indicates that editorial judgement of a problem is hugely dependent on who is involved in the story. Two agents, the Green Party and the Government, dominate the headlines in GE editorials, just as they dominate the list of sources identified in all news articles published over the same monitoring period. The names mentioned in these headlines (Greens, Government) correspond with the names that appear on the list of sources in the news reports. Sources in news articles give accounts of events and, therefore, have an influence on the definition of events; actors in the headlines of editorials are highlighted as a driving force behind the events. The Greens are strongly condemned in the *Dominion*, where three out of nine editorials on GE have an identical headline: *'*Greenie madness', pointing the finger at one of the agents of the story as a core obstacle in achieving a 'middle road' and 'down-to-earth' approach to reality. The editorial has the potential to convert the position of the source into a driving force of action.

The power of dominant sources[97] goes beyond the informative discourse. The headline *'Reality must rule in debate on GM'* (*New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 2001) does not contain the personalised agent of the story, but when taken in the context and compared with the news reports published earlier, clearly indicates governmental sources as its place of origin. 'Reality' in this headline is both 'real' and 'desired', as in the quote from the environment minister who, asked to comment upon the fact that the desired image of a clean and green country "would be affected in the long term if field tests of genetically modified organisms were allowed", said: "We must all do more to make a clean, green New Zealand a

[97] The complexity of sourcing news, sources relation to journalists and particular concerns about representation, access, definition of reality and privileging powerful interests has been discussed in Chapter 5.

reality if we are to protect and promote our highly valuable image" (*New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 2001).

One might ask what is wrong with the statement 'reality must rule in debate' and why anyone would be against the notion of a reality that rules the debate. That is exactly the problem here: as a form of argumentative discourse, the editorial uses this tool of rhetoric to make the point, but the stylistic strengthening of the argument harms its accuracy: 'reality must rule' means that the existing reality is under threat by anti-GE activists. The point 'reality must rule' is common sense but this common sense comes from an imprecise expression. It is true that argumentative discourse is based on effective, if not always absolutely accurate points – that is part of the 'arguing game' – but editorials claim to be more than a pure exposition of rhetorically well-composed arguments. The editorial gains its credibility from the norm that says it should have same standards of accuracy and precision as any other news text. It is simply a conversion of premises: in the case of the editorial 'Reality must rule' it is not true that one side wanted 'reality to rule' and the other did not; the two sides in the genetic engineering dispute had different definitions of 'reality' and the paper uses the common-sense expression 'reality must rule' to align its support with one of those definitions. This 'preferred' definition of an issue is also signalled in news reporting. The rule of the game in the journalistic field is to use editorials not as the only journalistic form for the expression of opinion –'opinion' is already expressed in the selection of topics, in the use of sources, in framing the issue, to name but a few instances – but as the most open expression of the newspaper's opinion. This link between news reports and editorials, when one journalistic form indicates and the other explores, becomes more visible when the topics of news texts are highlighted.

6.3.2 Topics and triggers

The examination of the topics of the GE editorials, done by reading the headline and the first paragraph and by looking into the editorial's trigger, confirms the absolute dominance of politics (Table 15).

Table 15. Topics identified in leads

TOPIC	*The Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*	***Total***
Economy	1			1
Food safety	1			1
Politics	7	7	7	21
GE contamination	2			2
Cloning	1	1		2
GM Report	3	2	2	7
Other		2		2

Almost two-thirds of the editorials[98] use politics as the trigger for giving an opinion on genetic engineering. The results of this analysis correspond with the results of the analysis of news articles, where politics was the most frequently-used story telling frame, well ahead of the other options specified within the 'connection to broader issues' frames (Table 8).The examination of the editorials' triggers reveals that two-thirds of editorials (Table 16) [99] were generated by a political event (release of the Royal Commission's Report, Government's response to the Report, elections) or political speech.

Table 16. Editorial triggers

TRIGGER	*The Herald*	*The Press*	*The Dominion*
Conference	1		
Cloning	2	1	
Economy news	2		
Sabotage	1	1	1
Political speech	3	3	1
Anti-GE campaign	1		
Investigative book	1		1
Political event	5	6	6
Other		2[100]	

[98] *The New Zealand Herald* 46.6 percent; *The Dominion* 77.7 percent and *The Press* 61.5 percent.
[99] *The New Zealand Herald* 53.3 percent; *The Dominion* 77.7 percent and *The Press* 69.2percent.
[100] Two editorials in the *Press* were included in the research although the GE issue was commented on and evaluated only as one of many relevant issues in the year – those editorials were published at the end of 2001 and the beginning of 2002.

The conversion of politics from the dominant frame in the news stories into a dominant topic of the editorials follows the logic of the sources' transformation from providers of information into agents of the issues. Editorials, by definition, give opinions based on an interpretative reading of an event (phenomenon) and, as many prominent editors explain (Evans 1994; Meyer 2001), present arguments from all sides of the story to strengthen the line of reasoning. Aiming to influence the majority of readers, editorials necessarily have to perceive an ideal 'majority' in order to provide the mainstream 'reading' of the event[101]. The process unavoidably includes identification of common ground or the 'common sense' position that provides easy access to the majority. The case study of media coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand is a very good example for explaining how these 'common sense', 'majority' and 'mainstream' notions are both the ground for and the consequence of journalistic mediation of reality. To report the event, a journalist has to rely on readers' knowledge about similar events in the past. The process of contextualisation includes an assumption about the 'average reader' or what the majority of readers will understand – that is, a ground for mediation of reality. The consequence of the assumption about commonality in understanding the context is that a journalist's mediation of reality quite often only reinforces the *status quo* in society. The Government's and the Greens' overriding positions among the GE sources and the dominance of politics as a frame in the news articles, by the logic of a journalistic field, has to narrow the issue on a topic that (predominantly) belongs to the field of politics. The analysis of the mechanism, by which one segment of journalism practice (sourcing and framing in news reports) influences another journalism practice (presentation of the issue in editorials) shows that the objectivity principle plays a crucial role in this game. The objectivity is seen in the concept of 'two sides of the story', which characterises the notion of balance in reporting. How does it work?

6.3.3 Objectivity twist

To understand the importance of 'objectivity' in the verbalisation of arguments in the press, one has to look at the structure of editorials. The editorial consists of the

[101] See Hallin (1986, pp.116–117).

lead, and the interpretation and evaluation[102] of the issue. The lead usually explains the trigger of the text and the main premise, as in the editorial 'Greens' GM stand a cop-out' (*New Zealand Herald, 4* July, 2002):

> Actor Sam Neill, one of the prominent citizens who declared themselves for an extension of the GM moratorium yesterday, said he regretted very much that the subject had been "politicised" over the past few weeks. One of the luxuries of amateur ventures into political debate is the pretence that the venture is somehow non-political.

The stylistic feature of this introduction is in a form of proposition and rebuttal: the article first says, "he regretted very much that the subject had been politicised*"*, then in the second sentence, evaluates that statement: "One of the luxuries of amateur ventures into political debate is the pretence that the venture is somehow non-political." It continues in a 'yes, but' manner until the end of the text:

> Neill, along with Sir Peter Elworthy, Dame Susan Devoy and two lesser luminaries, are not standing at this election. That is the only sense in which their contribution differs from, say, the Green Party. Like the Greens, they oppose any possibility that the moratorium might be lifted when it expires in October next year. Like the Greens, they presume to know the state of the science in another 15 months or, more likely, they do not care how safe commercial release may claim to be; they do not want it in the food supply.

To show that nothing is as it looks, the editorial puts a qualifier on everything that those who are anti-GE might use as an argument. For example, the organic farming becomes "so-called organic farming":

[102] Bolivar talks about the 'lead', 'follow' and 'valuate' and explains: "The 'lead' introduces the aboutness and a posture, the 'follow' responds, and the 'valuate' closes the cycle with an evaluation" (Bolivar 1994, p.293).

> Their motive may be commercial – GM crops would not be good for the country's 'clean, green' image, especially to the business of so-called organic farming – or simple caution in the face of the unknown. Says Neill: 'I'd like to see the politics taken out of this debate because it is too important, too critical for all New Zealanders.' Hear, hear.

This rhythmic pattern of 'objectively' stating the opinion in one sentence and then snubbing that opinion in another, deserves attention for at least two reasons: firstly it proves the sometimes forgotten fact that any article published in a newspaper, including the editorial, is still a narrative. Along with all the rules of factual news writing and principles that lead to the development of an argument, the authors of editorials aspire to offer a good read: to write intelligent, attractive and memorable text. As Meyer (2001) says: "A great editorial may be hard to define, but readers know one when they see one. Such editorials are clipped out, argued over, reprinted and remembered."[103] The editorial 'Greens' GM stand a cop-out' is shaped by the newspaper's ambition to provide good reading. The 'pros' and 'cons' manner is dynamic and vivid, and even when the reader disagrees, the text still sounds more interesting than the official discourse on the same issue (such as party statements, for example).

The two faces of truth, underlined in the 'pros' and 'cons' composition of the text and the elaboration of arguments is an objectivity twist that simplifies differences in order to highlight the preferred 'middle road' and 'common-sense' option. In another editorial, which discusses the chicken company Tegel's decision to stop feeding chooks with the GE soy-meal as a response to a survey which found 60 per cent of its customers were concerned about the chicken feed ('Feeding the chooks with a bit more salt', the *New Zealand Herald*, 30 August 2001), the author uses a quote to isolate an argument that is attacked in the next sentence:

> Managing director Peter Lucas said he was surprised by the survey result: "It was stronger than I expected."

[103] This statement reflects also journalistic 'common sense', something that is understood among practioners as a common shared experience of elements of a good editorial.

> Was he really surprised? Simply by raising the question, his survey ensured it would produce a worried response. *Tegel* has not reported the precise question asked of its customers. But it is hard to form a question on this subject which would not invite the response the company received.

This objectivity twist in editorials is equivalent to the news report's principle of stating both sides of the story. In the news, it helps to 'truthfully' describe the issue and the position of those involved. In editorials, it helps to 'truthfully' highlight the topic and give the stance of the newspaper. The argument of editorials is strengthened by listing those who support it and identifying those who oppose it. It is always a two-way process: editorials support and condemn, but at the same time call on readers to do the same and decide if they agree with the opinion, or not. The editorial 'Reality must rule in debate on GM' (*New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 2001) puts it plainly: "The vast majority of us are opposed to the notion of cloning human beings and see dangers in transgenic modifications." The creation of 'us' against 'them' reveals the links between the editorial and the construction of a dominant ideology.

6.4 Editorials and ideology

The importance of the applied objectivity twist in selling one particular ideology – neo-liberalism – as common sense in the story about genetic engineering becomes clear when we look at macro-structures, editorial sentences that sum up and verbalise the main arguments. The 'close reading' of editorials shows the main arguments in the case study can be classified into four groups: the importance of GE for New Zealand, positive judgement on genetic engineering, negative judgement on the Greens, and instructions on what should be done with the GE issue. The main arguments reveal the system of beliefs proposed.

6.4.1 Why GE matters

When talking about the importance of genetic engineering, editorials describe New Zealand as a country which "lost the security of the colonial trading relationship with Britain",[104] needs 'economic growth to improve its standard of living,"[105] is "content to squander its expertise in agriculture research",[106] and "cannot afford to be held to ransom by single-issue fanatics."[107]

All editorials express positive judgement on all aspects of the genetic engineering issue, except cloning (this issue was isolated from the debate about GE as a theme that carries so many moral and medical dilemmas that it has to be left for further consideration). The same argument recapitulates the importance of applying GE technology: it makes the country competitive and wealthier, it promotes a knowledge economy, it is a step forward in agricultural innovation and is equal to the discoveries of fire, the wheel, the steam engine and electricity. The *Dominion* re-writes its own editorials, and twice publishes the same figures: that "building on research in biotechnology would add $1.4 billion to the economy by 2010 and create 19,000 jobs" (19 October 2001 and 27 May 2002).

Negative judgements of the Green Party's stand on GE are the most detailed evaluations in all three analysed newspapers. The *Dominion Post* leads the battle against the Green Party. It uses the same derogatory word 'greenie' ('Greenie madness' is the headline of three out of nine published editorials) to highlight messages such as "keeping the greenies, the alarmists and the Luddites pacified" ('Greenie madness', 10 September 2001); "harmful economic effect of the greenie vision", "Luddite hysteria of the Greens; scaremongering of the Greens*"* ('Good science, not emotion', 19 October 2001); "a swarm of greenie goblins" ('Beware of greenie goblins', 1 November2001).

The fourth group of macrostructures are 'instructions', usually to the Government, on what has to be done to deal 'justly' with the issue. All three dailies repeat the

[104] 'Quest for the crest is a job for all of us' (*New Zealand Herald*, 1 August 2001).
[105] 'Economy still at the core' (*New Zealand Herald,* 22 July 2002).
[106] 'GM report straight down the middle' ((*New Zealand Herald*. 31 July 2001).
[107] 'Greenie madness' (*Dominion*, 27 May 2002).

message of the Royal Commission's Report on GM – 'proceed with caution'. Additionally, depending on the trigger of the actual editorial, the instructions state: "if the science proceeds now with due care, common sense can win in the end" ('Scientific care can give sense a win', *New Zealand Herald*, 2 November 2001) and "we must proceed cautiously, especially in field testing" ('GM report straight down the middle', *New Zealand Herald*, 31 July 2001).

The 'common sense' argument comes as the final call and summing up of the arguments used to explore the importance of genetic engineering for New Zealand. The key words in the editorials confirm that the construction of the arguments is linked to the use of sources and frame in the news articles. The most frequently used words in the editorials are: *Government, Greens, genetic, Labour, New Zealand, research, election, Commission* and they correspond with the most frequently used words in the news reports: *GM, New Zealand, Government, Greens, research, National, issues, elections*.[108]

The similarity of key words in news articles and editorials confirms that editorials embed news and news frames, in this case the 'connection to wider issues' frame: once a frame is established (in the news articles) it remains in all news forms (including editorials). The question now is: what ideology can be identified behind that frame? Although the buzz-words that relate to the modern economy such as 'benefits' and 'development' are less frequently used than the names of the political agents, the 'Government' and 'Greens', the main argument in the editorials on GE without doubt belongs to the field of economy. This is despite the relative 'invisibility' of economic discourse already noticed in the scholarship on the language of modern capitalism (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2000, Fairclough 1998, 2000).

6.4.2 Transmission of beliefs

The question now is to see how the identities and relations between the two main agents of the story, the Green Party and the Government, are established to make

[108] The computer software *HiLighter* is used to measure the frequency of the words in editorials.

the underlying economic discourse both strong and invisible. An example is one of the already mentioned editorials 'Greenie madness' (*Dominion,* 10 September 2001). It is suitable for analysis because it strongly manifests all noted editorial characteristics: politics is the topic, the trigger is not revealed, the Greens and the Government are the main agents in the story, and a strong argument in the introduction is reinforced by rhythmical use of 'objectivity twists' and 'not only, but also' contrasts.

The author introduces the topic with a strong and clear evaluation:

> The Government's response to the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification next month could well prove to be the most pivotal decision of its term. It will signal not only whether a major scientific advance will have a future in New Zealand, but also whether it is serious in its pursuit of a knowledge economy.

There are three assertions here: the response will be the most pivotal decision, it could signal a major scientific advance and it could contribute to the pursuit of a knowledge economy. The use of the conditional clause 'could well prove' should not mislead: its purpose is to announce and underline the statement in the second where the certainty of 'it will signal' facilitates an acceptance of the 'facts' that follow. The author plays with the importance of the three statements by gradually raising the significance of each and, although she uses a conditional ('could prove') and a false question form ('whether'), she does not leave the reader in any doubt as to what is desirable and inevitable: a knowledge economy.

The author of the editorial makes a distinction between the major agents in the upcoming political process. She says 'emanations from the Beehive' and only in the next sentence introduces actors: 'Prime Minister Helen Clark', giving a full name and title, and the other side of the story, descriptively as "the greenies, the alarmists and the Luddites" who have to be "pacified". This simplification of the GE scene, a reflection of a series of simplifications already done in news reports, provides the setting for the drama that unfolds. Aspirations are established as facts, and models as reality. The editorial says:

> Emanations from the Beehive are chilling on both scores. As with sustainable beech cropping on the West Coast, Prime Minister Helen Clark seems again to be leaning towards keeping the greenies, the alarmists and the Luddites pacified. She hints that the Government will rule out any conditional or commercial release of genetically modified crops or animals – not because they are necessarily harmful, but because they are GM.

The words 'emanations' and 'hints' describe the ways the newspaper learnt about the Government's intentions. It is a code that indicates what options are on the table for upcoming policy. New Zealand Press Gallery journalists explain they have regular 'off the record' chats with the Prime Minister, usually on Sunday afternoons, when she announces upcoming or new policies but asks not to be quoted[109]. The aim of 'off the record' announcements is to 'test public opinion'.

How does the Government's practice of 'hinting around' upcoming policies influence journalism practice? The process takes a form of a trade-off where the Government gives the newspaper information in advance in exchange for feedback.[110] Among other things, it also removes clear markers that news media are mediators between "experienced reality" and "agreement reality".[111] The analysis in the previous chapter on the transparency of the newsgathering method explains how this absence of clarity influences the meaning of the news. One of the frequently used markers, well known in quality broadsheet newspapers, is the statement about the 'off the record' procedure. In this case, if the author explained that the Government wanted to test public opinion, the reader would be in a position to understand that the proposed regulation was just one of the options on the table.

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[109] Guest lectures at Victoria University of Wellington: journalist Vernon Small, *New Zealand Herald*, October 2001 and political editor Al Morrison, *National Radio*, September 2002.
[110] Franklin (2003) explains that the trend of packaging of politics rests on collaboration between journalists and politicians more than on a conflict between the two.
[111] The distinction between 'experienced reality' and 'agreement reality' is that the first is personally seen, touched, tasted, and the second is a social product, with different sources of origin, such as church, government, school, community, news media (Babie 1989).

The headline of the editorial is taken from the attributive characteristics of one side of the GE story – the 'greenies, the alarmists and the Luddites' – who are going to be pacified. The implied behaviour, clarified as 'madness' in the headline, is emphasised by the choice of the verb pacify. 'Pacify' underlines the suggested irrational behaviour of those groups. The absence of a precise attribution and the presentation of beliefs as facts is covered by the use of the 'voice of God':

> [ruling out commercial release of GM crops] would be tantamount to tossing the Royal Commission's careful $6.2 million evaluation out the window or, if the decision is for New Zealand to sit on its hands till world opinion catches up with genetic engineering opportunities, mothballing it. The commission considered those options, but sensibly advocated proceeding with GE, while ensuring that proper safeguards were in place. ('Greenie madness', *The Dominion*, 10 September 2001)

No space for doubt, questions or explanations. The fact that there are at least two identified groups with different opinions on GE does not bother the author who walks away from the dispute with a simple sentence that paints one group as irrational extremists and tells the other, the Government, what to do:

> While that would never satisfy extremists, who dwell on everything that could possibly go wrong and magnify it so alarmingly that it is a wonder they ever get out of bed in the morning, it should satisfy the Government. ('Greenie madness', *The Dominion*, 10 September 2001)

This representation and evaluation of the social actors clearly manifests the editorial's preferences. The author's disqualification of the 'greenies' is used to evoke social models that make sense of the text and, as Achugar (2004)[112] clarifies, "contribute to the creation of a desired reading position" (p.299).

[112] Achugar (2004, p.299) says: "In addition to investigating the socio-semantic choices that inform these identity constructions, I explore the use of the resource of Appraisal by which writers position their audience. There is construction of a viewpoint from which these social actors mentioned in the previous section are evaluated and attributed a group membership. According to Martin (2000) semantic resources are used to negotiate emotions, judgments, and valuations.

The desired reading position of the editorial is that of full support of the commercial release of genetically engineered crops. The editorial argues that a commercial release contributes to a knowledge economy and facilitates further development of science and economic prosperity to give the country an edge over its competitors. The construction of this argument follows argumentation rules identified by Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999, cited in Richardson 2001). There is a statement that declares a position ("Of all the doorways to the future, GE is the one that best fits the concept of a knowledge economy"); an acknowledgement of the opposite view ("While the appeal of 'clean and green' is obvious, cautiously implementing GE techniques along the lines suggested by the Royal Commission will not make the countryside dirty and polluted"); and a set of clearly defined premises that illustrate the argument's line of reasoning:

> Some research proposals would never pass the tests it suggests. Others could only go ahead under strict conditions and supervision. But to rule out anything that could have commercial application would be to nobble a key component of the knowledge economy and send a generation of research scientists overseas in despair. There, no doubt, they would hope to do the same research in a more positive environment – and the benefits would flow to New Zealand's competitors. Then one day our political ostriches would wake up and buy back what they seem ready to spurn today. New Zealand would have lost all advantage and the economy would have passed up a major chance to expand on a broader base.

The editorial's conclusion aims to convince the reader that the argument has been soundly and persuasively made:

These semantic resources contribute to the (re)construal of the relations of power and solidarity among interlocutors. Through the system of Appraisal (Martin & Rose 2003) attitudes are negotiated to tell readers how editors feel about the social actors and their character and feelings. These evaluative traces evoke social models or scripts that the readers use when trying to make sense of the text. These elements contribute to the creation of a desired reading position, which of course can be resisted by readers who do not share the ideological implications of these discourses."

> The royal commission was intent on preserving opportunities – for organic growers as much as genetically enhanced agriculture. In some areas, further research and extra safeguards will be needed to ensure that can happen. That is where the Government should be focusing its response. Banning meaningful research, or simply watching and waiting indefinitely, would strangle the knowledge economy at birth.

Still, for those who do not share the preferred reading position of the editorial this line of reasoning does not function very well**.** The problem is that editorials are "public, mass communicated types of opinion discourse (that) focus on public news events, and support general social, economic, cultural or political opinions, usually shared by other elites" (Van Dijk, 1996). They are expressions of certain points of view and transmitters of an ideology as a system of evaluative beliefs, not transmitters of synchronized ideologies as they claim by using a voice of God to define what is good for the future of New Zealand.

6.4.3 Journalism and neo-liberalism

The editorial 'Greenie madness' seeks to position the concept of the 'knowledge economy' as an objective that everyone wants, or should want, to achieve. Knowledge economy has been described by Fairclough (2000) as a key concept of the most powerful global ideology: neo-liberalism. The GE issue presented as a key component of the 'knowledge economy' is a demonstration of the neo-liberal ideology in the New Zealand press. It not only reduces the issue to one component ("Banning meaningful research, or simply watching and waiting indefinitely, would strangle the knowledge economy at birth") but at the same time, it satisfies the interest of an economic class which wants expansion on a broader base ("New Zealand would have lost all advantage and the economy would have passed up a major chance to expand on a broader base"). Van Dijk (1995) points out that as "basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organised by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group", ideologies are inscribed in discourse and "contribute to organisation of the social representations, attitudes, and knowledge" (p.248). The New Zealand press is,

clearly, ideologically aligned with the dominant economic class, as evident in editorials.

Fairclough links the appearance of the neo-liberal ideology with the processes of social change saying that categories such as 'globalisation', 'neo-liberalism', 'new capitalism', 'knowledge economy' and 'learning society', are "partly actual and partly imagined responses to socio-economic crisis".[113] Similar observations can be found in Bourdieu and Wacquant's (2001, p.1) article that thoughtful description of neo-liberal talk as the strange 'newspeak' that

> is the result of a new type of imperialism whose effects are all the more powerful and pernicious in that it is promoted not only by the partisans of the neo-liberal revolution who, under cover of 'modernisation', intend to remake the world by sweeping away the social and economic conquests of a century of social struggles, henceforth depicted as so many archaisms and obstacles to the emergent new order, but also by cultural producers (researchers, writers and artists) and left-wing activists who, for the vast majority of them, still think of themselves as progressives.

The neo-liberal ideology is expressed by the new lingua franca in a form that insists on 'common sense'; it is there to justify, and never to question, positive opinion on a knowledge economy. Richardson (2001, p.146) identifies an appeal to the 'common sense' of an audience as one manifestation of creating empathy "through implicit assumption, since common sense is founded on the existence of unquestioned and unquestionable truths."

6.5 Newspaper's stance and public debate

The notion of common sense in the GE editorials is usually explicit in the concluding remarks where the newspapers call for a middle ground and balance.

[113] Fairclough, N. 2006, "Blair's contribution to elaborating a new 'doctrine of international community'", article to appear in a special issue of Journal of Language and Politics on discourse analysis and war (edited L Chouliaraki) – available at http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/norman/norman.htm (26 July 2006).

For instance, the *New Zealand Herald*'s editorial "Quest for the crest is a job for all of us" (1 August 2001) says:

> It is time an international agency was nominated to consider some sensible, practical and binding rules for human genetic experiments, if only to let our human dignity find its bearings. Somewhere between outright bans and reckless adventuring, the balance must be found.

The same newspaper, three months later, declares: "If the science proceeds now with due care, common sense can win in the end." ("Scientific care can give sense a win", *New Zealand Herald*, 2 November 2001.) What journalistic devices are used to construct the position of 'common sense'? Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs (1997, p.209) say that central features for the concept of argumentation are: inferential structure with propositions put forward as claims and others' propositions (reasons) put forward as justification and/or refutation of those claims; the two-sided arguments with two opposing communicators' roles: a protagonist who puts forward a claim and an antagonist who doubts that claim and contradicts it.

In the case of the newspaper's editorial, the antagonist is a sceptical audience, projected or imagined as needing proof to be convinced of the claim. Or, to be more precise, it is a 'minority' who does not share the enthusiasm for genetic engineering. As the editorial 'Tiptoe through the GM tulips' (*Dominion*, 1 August 2001) says:

> The report of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification is a breath of fresh air on a subject which can readily be exploited to alarm the ill-informed.

Three months later, the same newspaper ('Beware of the greenie goblins', *Dominion Post*, 1 November 2001) develops this declarative statement into the following paragraph:

> The Government's decisions on genetic modification, like the report of the royal commission which it has been agonising over, are positive for New Zealand's future, practical in setting the boundaries, and pre-eminently cautious. Unless their implementation is handled with great care, however, they will spawn a swarm of greenie goblins that will haunt future administrations.

One may ask how this and other previously quoted editorials that spell out what is good and bad, right and wrong, what should or should not be done, differ from other forms of argumentative discourse, political speech, or more interestingly, propaganda? If Merrill's (1997) consideration of the connotative meanings of 'propaganda' (deceptive, biased, success-oriented and devoid of a sense of fairness) were used, propaganda and journalism techniques meet in achieving their persuasive purposes in editorials. The journalist is a propagandist, says Merrill (1997, p.138), if his story conforms to one or more of these five characteristics: *persuasive* (is the story intended to persuade? Does the journalist want the audience to believe something or to change an opinion, or does he want to reinforce an opinion?); *action oriented* (does the story show evidence of a desire by the journalist to get somebody to take an action?); *selfish* (is there an egocentric motivation behind the message?); *intentional* (is the message created in a predetermined or intentional way, so as to bring about the journalist's desired ends?); and *deceptive* (are various devices used by the journalist to deceive the audience, or has the journalist been devious in the presentation of the story?).

Each of the analysed editorials in this study has at least two of these listed characteristics (persuasive and action oriented). Still, we are talking of editorials and not propaganda texts, and only if we are extremely unsatisfied with the opinions presented would we say that an editorial is propagandistic. The difference emerges from the context: readers delegate power to the editorial team to make judgements. The reliance on 'common sense' is reliance on shared social representations. It also depends on action that is aimed not to persuade readers to have a particular opinion on an issue or to indicate what readers should think about (this has already been done in the news articles). Rather, it is to convey to

everyone interested the newspaper's perception of the 'preferred model' of understanding the issue.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated how the choice of sources and story-telling frame, elements of journalistic practice, influence both reporting facts and presenting views. It has demonstrated how the interplay between two forms of newspaper text, news and editorial, constructs the account of the GE issue in the press. This account varies in relation to the status of the issue in public domain (see p.156). Full support to the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification, condemnation of the Green Party, as well as the promotion of the perceived economic benefits from GE – the main points of editorials on the GE issue – have highlighted the link between media discourse and the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism. Within this larger ideological context, the editorials highlight political controversies over the topic of genetic engineering rather than generate knowledge about the issue of genetic engineering.

The questions that remain to be answered are: what is behind the editorials? Why did the press cover the issue of genetic engineering the way it did? Why did editorials reflect a neo-liberal discourse? What are the characteristics of the journalistic field in New Zealand that open the way for neo-liberal discourse? What are the professional values that lead journalists to participate in such a promotion? And, how do elements of their internal work organisation influence the type of the coverage that emerges? Some of these questions will be addressed by journalists and editors themselves, whose views are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

OBJECTIVITY AS ATTITUDE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC DEBATE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a concise overview of the basic professional characteristics of New Zealand journalists. Based on interviews and a survey of journalists, it follows the logic of the research question: what leads journalists in their everyday work and what norms determine the coverage of an issue such as genetic engineering in New Zealand? It investigates journalists' concept of their role in society, their relationship with their sources of information, work ethics, occupational standards, the daily routine in the newsroom and the influence of professional norms on the newspaper's construction of issue in public debate. The emphasis is on the 'construction' of reality and the factors that determine what part of reality will be included in the coverage of an issue, and the form it takes.

The interviews that were undertaken reveal that the majority of journalists approached the genetic engineering issue as a topic that polarises opinion. This approach can be found in the coverage of the Royal Commission's hearings on GE, an earlier event that preceded the release of the Report. This chapter, therefore, starts with the story of the coverage of the Royal Commission's hearings and then moves into a discussion of objectivity as an 'attitude' norm (see p.80) by linking journalists' self-understanding with public debate about important issues in society. It firstly offers an overview of the professional values expressed in attempts to self-regulate the field, and then analyses specifics of the professional ideology that constitutes the field. The daily routine in a newsroom, identified in the interviews with journalists, is used as a basis for a discussion about the influence of journalistic practice on the coverage of GE. The last section of the chapter uses journalists' professional self-reflection on the way they covered the GE issue to address the question of the more general issue of journalism's mission in society. The chapter closes with a discussion of journalists' attitude about the role newspapers should play in public debate, and

the "orchestration of habitus" (Bourdieu 2002, p.8) and its influence on the meaning of the story.

7.2 Coverage of the RCGM hearings

When asked what guided him as a journalist, Allan Samson, lecturer at Massey University and member of the New Zealand Press Council (interview, 2005), stresses two components that very well describe the New Zealand news culture: "to get the story first" and "to have a good story". The first confirms the competitive nature of local journalism and the second reveals the ambition to go beyond simple dissemination of information. Samson is a valuable raconteur of the links between professional norms and the coverage of the genetic engineering issue: he was the only print journalist who reported the Royal Commission's hearings on GM in 1999 and 2000. Those hearings were a part of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification (RCGM) process that led to the Report on genetic engineering a year later. How did the reporting on the GE issue start?

As explained in Chapter 1, the interest of journalists in this 'scientific' issue was triggered when unlabelled genetically modified food was discovered in shops at the end of the 1990s. The GE question became the focus of significant public and political concern and led to the establishment of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification in 1999.The aim of the Commission was to investigate "strategic options available to New Zealand to address now and in the future genetic modification, genetically modified organisms and products" (Royal Commission's Report, 2001, p.6). Samson was at that time the science reporter for the *Dominion Post*. In the interview for this study, he reveals details of the coverage that explain the newspaper's approach to the GE issue. Samson remembers:

> When the inquiry was announced, the editor called me into his room, and asked, "How are we going to cover this?" The editor's first decision was that we should go along to each day of the hearing, and then structure the story based on the value of newsworthiness. I immediately saw flaws in this argument – this was the first ever,

> anywhere in the world, inquiry of such magnitude. How could we know the newsworthiness without sitting through the entire thing?!

Samson argued that it should be covered as a court case, and he won: "Why did I argue for a court type of a coverage? Because when you cover the court, there is a whole set of rules about how you cover court, the rule of balance between the sides – in the old days, you used to sit through an entire court [case]". During Samson's informal meeting with the editor it was clarified that it would not be possible to have balance on a given day, but that over time, by covering each event as a news story, the newspaper would get a balanced picture over the full four months of the duration of Royal Commission's hearings.

It was also decided that it "would be just untenable to go beyond the courtroom on a given day, go for comment outside the court room on a daily basis", so it was decided not to seek comments on the statements given in the Royal Commission's hearings. Samson clarifies why:

> Otherwise, the job would just get out of control. It has to be understood that the pressure from lobby groups was so intense that I was getting pestered. There were so many press releases arriving through the fax machine everyday. The pressure was staggering.

Samson was the only print journalist attending the hearings ("because I think it was perceived as too hard") and the copies of his reports, by agreement, went through the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA) to other newspapers in the country. He explains the experience:

> I've learnt there are no rights or wrongs; genetic engineering is a very complex issue. The skill of the journalist is to translate, and to be able to explain to the layperson what the story is about. If I don't understand, it means I have to ask more questions. There is always a pressure for any story to be sexy, because if it's not read, what's the point of the story? It's got to be interesting. But covering a subject like GE is not easy, it becomes very difficult, and you might achieve the

> ideals of good reporting one day, and another day you might write a lot of turgid nonsense, it's just … the nature of the 'beast'.

This early coverage of the issue left traces in the articles published in 2001 and 2002, the media coverage this study is dealing with. Here is what Samson says:

> The other aspect of this is, there was a tremendous deadline pressure, because GE is not seen as the big story of the day, and they don't want the story filed at 8, 9, 10 o'clock at night or at midnight. I was told very early on, they wanted my pieces through by 6 or 6.30 pm. The inquiry finished each day, at about four o'clock, or four-thirty, sometimes five. It put a huge pressure on me, because, it was a very complex subject, and when you're covering something that goes on all day, and of this complexity – it's not like an ordinary news story – you come out with a headache, you are struggling to concentrate every second, you miss some important things if you don't, there's this huge pressure, it really was, so there was pressure, in a sense, from the news editor [who would] sometimes send stories back and say, 'that's not interesting,' or 'surely [something] could be done better'. Sometimes the pressure was internal, from me, 'cause I'd write a story then read it before I sent it in, and [think] 'Oh my God, did I write that?' And the other big battle I had was, part of the agreement with my editor was that we'd run a piece every day with a special logo we'd devised. Oh, there was always something to write about. 'Cause that was the struggle, to find the angle, of each group. But sometimes, there were a couple of times when the News Editor, a different News Editor, would just not run my story, and I took it as a matter of pride, the agreement was there would be a story every time, so I had some rows with the News Editor, one day I forced a story to be re-run in a Monday's paper, sometimes something would be published only in the first edition … I got every one there, by the way. The reports were short, they had to be. (…) 25, 35 cm I suppose. They were all cut too, by the way, because I always wrote more than I got published.

After the Royal Commission's hearings it was hard to keep the newspaper interested in the issue. When the Royal Commission's report was released, Samson had a problem persuading editors to run GE stories:

> I don't know if it was stated or unstated, but it was clear that they didn't want huge amounts on it, unless there was something seen as a major departure. They wanted obviously the Royal Commission's Recommendations ... The Press Gallery office covered it. They wanted also the Government decision. I remember also I wrote a page for Newspapers in Education for children, they didn't see it as a very sexy subject any more … I would have like to have seen more analytical features on where things stood. At the same time, my heart sunk at the thought of it, because I just didn't have the energy, or the time …

It is interesting to note that the initial decision to cover the Royal Commission's hearings as a court case corresponds with the Commission's own understanding of their role. The head of the inquiry, Sir Thomas Eichelbaum, explained in an interview with the *Press*[114] that he approached the 15-month, $6 million inquiry into genetic engineering like any case from his time on the Bench: "I was very much in a position that a judge is when he goes into hear a new case; he goes in with an open mind and a minimum amount of information."

The 'minimum amount of information' certifies the Commission's unbiased approach to GE, but what about the journalists' approach?

7.3 Journalistic values

Journalists interviewed in this study claim an attitude of openness towards the GE issue and when asked to list the main values that define their work, state a set of journalistic norms that can be found in any democracy: accuracy, objectivity, fairness, balance, integrity, and independence. Still, when asked where these principles can be found in written form or what document clarifies

[114] "Inquiry head regarded hearing 'like any court case'" (the *Press* 31 July, 2001).

them, there is a kind of confusion: is it in the Press Council's Statement of Principles, the union's code of ethics or the news organisation's style book?

The division of the newspaper market among two big multinational companies, the ambiguity of journalistic self-regulation in New Zealand, the way of keeping journalistic standards and handling disputes, comes, as in all countries with a 'liberal media system', from the fact that it is organised primarily in an informal way, within individual news organisations. In the United States and Ireland there is no press council or press complaints commission; in Canada local press councils, voluntary and relatively weak, are funded by the press; and in Britain the Press Complaints Commission is still run by the newspaper industry (Hallin & Mancini 2004). The system of journalistic self-regulation in New Zealand, "the vehicles for media responsibility and accountability" (Tully & Elsaka 2002), is voluntary and includes the New Zealand Press Council for the print industry and the Broadcasting Standards Authority for the television and radio industry.

7.3.1 Self-regulation in print media

The Press Council, established in 1972 by newspaper publishers and journalists, has ten members, five from the public and five from the industry. The Press Council is 'complaints driven', dominated by lay members and chaired by former High Court Judge Sir John Jefferies, and as *The Dominion Post*'s editor-in-chief explains:

> It rules on complaints against newspapers. Anyone can complain to the Council at no cost, and the editor is obliged to present their evidence to the defence, and the papers have to print their finding. There is no financial sanction, but no editor wants to publish a ruling that attacks his or her paper. (Pankhurst, interview, 2005)

The Council, committed to the broad principles of freedom of expression, bases its decisions on the document "Statement of Principles" that many in the industry

see as an inadequate guide to ethical practice.[115] Tully and Elsaka (2002) note how "the preamble [of the *Statement of Principles*] certainly emphasises the public interest in maintaining freedom of expression, but the 12 clauses are not set in the context of fundamental principles such as truth-telling, fairness and independence" (p.145). The clauses deal with issues such as accuracy, corrections, children and young people, comment and fact, discrimination, subterfuge, headlines and captions, photographs and letters to the editor. The internal 'code of ethics' for the *Dominion Post* and *The Press* states the same principles of accuracy, fairness and independence but does not clarify what those principles mean in the context of everyday journalism practice.

The reluctance to use the mechanisms of self-regulation for the advancement of the profession has attracted media scholars' attention. Two recent PhD theses discuss the evolution of New Zealand journalism as a profession (Elsaka 2004) and the relation of some professional values to reporting science (Sessions 2003). Elsaka (2004) offers a useful overview of the historical development of the journalistic occupation and its contemporary configuration in New Zealand, and Sessions (2003) investigates two journalism principles, 'verification' and 'balance', in the context of science news.

Elsaka (2004) argues that New Zealand journalism lacks the legislative, organisational and philosophical foundations to sustain a long-term commitment to professionalism. The 'invisibility of professionalism' in the current journalistic environment is linked to the invisibility of the professional and ethical frameworks that comprise New Zealand journalism's infrastructure and to the lack of professional discourse required to give effective force to these structures: "The current state of play is thus a consequence of both a declining sense of professionalism within journalism and the lack of consensus within journalism about the nature and benefits of journalistic professionalism" (Elsaka 2004, p.297). The lack of consensus about the nature of journalistic professionalism might exist on a national level, but in a specific news organisation a set of

[115] Lecturer in media law, Steven Price, Lecture to the Journalism class, Victoria University of Wellington, March 2005.

unwritten journalism standards comes into play forming a line of consensual actions that Breed (1955) explaines as a journalistic need for reference group formation.

7.3.2 Professional ideology

Journalists talk about journalism in patterned ways using "catch phrases associated with journalism's practice" (Zelizer 2004, p.30) and New Zealand journalists are no exception. The closest work that deals with the standards of the journalism profession in New Zealand, a collection of essays called *Kiwi Journalist: A Practical Guide to News Journalism* (Tucker, 1992), states that "New Zealand journalists have traditionally regarded what they do as a trade, a pragmatic attitude that has produced generations of gifted practitioners" (p.xiii). The intervention of 'gifted practitioners' in the GE reality raises a question about the nature of contemporary journalism, its professional ideology and preference for being characterised as a trade rather than a profession in New Zealand.

The 'patterned' ways journalists explain their everyday practice reveal two elements of professional ideology that might influence the appearance of an issue in public debate: 'market journalism' coming from the corporate culture environment; and an insistence on objectivity understood as a balance between two sides of a story. The specific professional ideology of 'market journalism' sees journalism more as a business than a public voice. All three newspapers in this study stress the economic dimension of their appearance. The *New Zealand Herald*, for example, is described as a daily that 'promoted a progressive approach to economic and social policies' (*LexisNexis*[116]). The former editor-in-chief of the *Herald* clarifies the position of the paper as a broadsheet centrist, which "supports the notion of a market economy with less rather than more government" and "does not support one political party and sees itself as a watchdog on

[116] Available at http://helicon.vuw.ac.nz:2091/sourceselect/source.asp?srcpdn=academic&cc=&spn=&_m=36592c16136f31a15f730ea55e22a37d&wchp=dGLbVlz-zSkVA&_md5=9f6ca2a02b857759120f55cf3c9b3fac&product=universe&unix=http://helicon.vuw.ac.nz:2260/universe&extendRQ=Y&startingChar=N&return=listSources.asp&csisrc=257912 (31 July 2006)

government activities irrespective of the 'colour' of that government" (Ellis, interview 2005). The *Dominion Post*'s editor describes the paper as a "daily broadsheet, Wellington region based, centre/centre right editorial policy – whatever that means" (Pankhurst, interview 2005) and the *Press*'s website emphases on the paper's orientation towards the community, a daily that "targets special interest groups such as farmers and business people".

The support for the notion of a market economy, a centre/centre right editorial policy and attention to special interest groups such as farmers and business people indicate the type of relationship between the journalistic field and the field of economy in New Zealand. The previous chapter demonstrated the link between general support for the notion of a market economy and the reflection of this in editorials. The unanimous support for GE and the recommendation 'proceed with caution' discloses the link between the journalistic field and the field of economy. The editorial allows newspapers to take a stance on an issue by offering (market-based) interpretations of the issue for public debate. But what is the case with 'news': how does support for the notion of a market economy correspond with the professional ideology based on the principle of objectivity?

The *Dominion Post*'s editor-in-chief underlines that all reports are subjective to a degree, and how they are read depends on one's point of view: "What could be seen as a positive development in Taiwan, could be seen as a very negative development by China; probably would be." Such a view is often used to stress that 'objectivity' does not exist. Two opposing standpoints, one that views journalists as observers and the other that sees them as participants, reflect two different professional ideologies. The first takes journalism as neutral, objective, restrained and technically efficient and sees journalists as transmitters of accurate and faithful accounts of social processes; the second view portrays journalists as participants in the news who "believe that the news must be reported in context, with journalists imposing their own points of view on it" (Dunlevy 1998, p.122).

Unlike media scholars, journalism practitioners talk about 'participant' and 'observer' positions as inclusive rather than exclusive: "Being an objective journalist means sitting on the fence on issues and giving equal weight to both

sides" (Langdon 2005). Being objective in covering GE, for instance, meant not "to be seen as having a bias … not showing any preference of any political party or person" (Langdon, 2005). Although the absence of preference for a political party indicates a neutral 'observer' position, the fact that the newspapers took a stand on the issue points to 'participant' status in public debate. And this is not just any status, but a privileged one as the voice in public debate that stands independently in relation to political factors. Why is this the case?

Journalists and journalism scholars interviewed in this study stress that the notion of objectivity carries a desire to demystify politics. As Margie Comrie, former journalist and now news media and public relations scholar, explains:

> The prevailing understanding of objectivity is that you let both sides have a say – that you should appear to stay detached. In political reporting there is an attempt to look behind the facts … but that is driven by the desire to show that every move by politicians is self-interested (Comrie, interview 2005).

The reduction of the objectivity norm to 'let both sides have a say' means that journalists reporting on genetic engineering preferred to state opposing views on the issue and leave it to the audience to decide which political side was right. As for the issue itself, editorials were there to help the undecided. One of the authors of the news articles published on GE admits retrospectively that the principle of giving equal weight to the both sides "often meant reporting views that were ludicrous without giving equal weight to fairness and common sense" (Langdon, 2005). The notions of 'equal weight' and 'common sense', the result of the journalist's habitual reactions to events within and outside the field, are rooted in everyday journalistic practice.

7.4 Journalistic practice

About 2,500 journalists are currently employed in New Zealand (Lealand 2004). The number of working journalists has declined in this country since the deregulation of the media market in the late 1980s (Norris 2002), a trend that

might have significant consequences for the quality and range of reporting (McGregor & Comrie 2002). In all three newspapers covered in this study, reporters are formally divided into 'round' or 'beat' reporters and 'general' reporters, but the work overload forces them to move from one 'round' to another; they work in shifts and regularly work longer than the hours they are paid for. One of the journalists who covered the GE issue describes how under-resourced in terms of staff *The Press* was when he started his career: everything he wrote got published almost without a change (Samson, interview 2005). Put simply, the paper was often hard-pressed to get enough written material to fill the available space.

Thirty years on, the situation has improved in the sense that the average story's chain of production includes more people – reporter, photographer, chief reporter, illustrations editor, graphic artist, sub-editor, check sub, chief sub, news editor, editor (Pankhurst, interview 2005) – but the institutional support is still far from that received by broadsheet newspapers in Britain or the USA. Comrie agrees:

> I think New Zealand journalists struggle against staffing issues. There are too few of them to fill the news holes. They are covering too many rounds. There are few career opportunities (especially in the press and radio) so they are inclined to be young and inexperienced. They have of necessity grown more dependent on media releases and covering council meetings etc second hand. With relatively few media outlets the media are also very conscious of what everyone else is doing. They end up all singing from the same song sheet or certainly all covering the same story and often beating it to death. (Comrie, interview 2005)

Journalists are usually required to be both skilled practitioners and critical, reflective thinkers, but in New Zealand there is strong emphasis on the first. The relation to sources, the practice of newsgathering, and the procedure of framing reflect journalists' knowledge of their own field but more in the practical sense ('logic of the practice', Bourdieu 2000, p.130) rather than as a full comprehension of the journalist's general social position, structure of the media institutions or the understanding of journalism within a wider social context.

7.4.1 Daily routine in a newsroom: Press Gallery journalists

To see journalism within a social context means to acknowledge the journalistic field's interactions with the outside world. At the front line of the interactions between journalism and politics in New Zealand are the Press Gallery journalists, who were the first to report on the release of the Royal Commission's Report. How did they influence the coverage of the GE issue? Would it have been different if environment or science beat journalists had covered the story from the beginning?

To address the question of the Press Gallery reporters' influence on the media coverage of GE, one first has to understand the position of the Press Gallery in the journalistic field. Press Gallery reporters have offices in Parliament, and this physical closeness to the centre of political debate, and relative remoteness from the newspaper's office,[117] leaves some marks on their work, as explained in Chapter 5. Journalists interviewed in this study stress that the Press Gallery reporters' relationship with the politicians is one of mutual need, but add that the relationship is characterised, or rather should be characterised, by a cautious approach from both sides. Political practitioners use and sometimes manipulate mass media to promote political objectives (see Iyengar 2000), a practice that has led some editors to warn: "There are plenty of politicians in this parliament who would love to tighten reporting sanctions, and we do not want to give them any ammunition" (Pankhurst, interview, 2005).

Political journalists, members of the Press Gallery, spend more time with politicians than in the newsroom and develop specific relationships with other agents of communication, such as press officers and political parties' media advisers. Gradually, "by balancing pressures from new sources, from competitor colleagues, and from their employing news organizations, these reporters can achieve a fair degree of autonomy and targeted power" (Tunstall 2001, p.20).

[117] It is of course questionable if the 'real' newsroom still exists, as a majority of journalists nowadays communicate with editors via phone and email .

Former New Zealand Press Gallery chairman Oliver Riddell goes further and claims that the Press Gallery is the "Opposition" whose day-to-day job is to scrutinise the Government's work, "to criticise, muck-rake and (if possible within the constraints of the defamation laws) pull down politicians and their parties" (Riddell 2002, p.201).

This power comes from the fact that the Press Gallery reporters are the first to report on issues raised in the political arena. Due to this privileged position at the intersection with politics, Press Gallery members are the first not only to report, but more importantly, the first to interpret and therefore frame the issue. They are able to impose a definition of an issue and the rest of the journalists simply have to follow. This power is rooted in the logic of the field and expressed in a saying familiar to journalists "don't change a good frame". In other words, it is easier to contextualise the event once the frame is established than to change it in the middle of the coverage.

The question relevant for this study is: does the power to be the first to frame the issue correspond with being in the best position to make the initial news judgement? Sir Geoffrey Palmer (2002), a former Prime Minister and professor of law, uses the case of the media coverage of genetic engineering to explain that this is not so. He notes that the complexity of the New Zealand political system (the mixed member proportional voting system) requires skilled, knowledgeable, analytical political reporters who have the time and energy to research the legislation coming to the Parliament and follow the long discussions in select committees. But unfortunately, says Palmer (2002, p.177), the New Zealand media don't have the resources for such a comprehensive coverage and when they don't, mistakes are possible:

> If you take the genetic modification debate that is an extremely good example of precisely the problems faced by the journalist. The policy issues in that debate are extremely complex and difficult. They have a scientific base to them. The Royal Commission's Report was lengthy and complicated. The political decisions that had to be made were extremely involved. I think that probably the public at large did not

> understand much about the various levels of decision that the government was called on to make. Then, it was necessary to find the political party position of each group on that and to write analytical material making sense of it all. I did not see much of that. It is too hard (p.177).

The main response to the claim that there is not enough "analytical material that makes sense of it" is that New Zealand newsrooms, whether the Press Gallery office or the newspaper's newsroom, are so under-resourced that the daily work is reduced to the compilation of press releases and a few phone calls. Journalists' relation to their sources in a situation when there is not enough time and money to do proper research is abridged to only a superficial balancing of the number of times each source appears in the paper.

7.4.2 Relation to sources

New Zealand newspapers are autonomous from direct political control, but, as with newspapers all over the world, they are deeply bound up in the actual operation of government through newsgathering routines (Hallin 1986). Different levels of independence from sources in source-reporter interactions, from passive and neutral in Britain to active and neutral in Sweden (Patterson 1998), reflect, and are a reflection of, the different roles journalists take in society. In that sense, the question of the relationship between journalists and their sources in the New Zealand news culture reveals the role (if not actual, then desired) journalists should play in society. Comrie (interview 2005) stresses the size of New Zealand as an important component that influences journalism as whole and not only its sourcing practices:

> The distinctive thing about New Zealand is how small it is and how well everyone knows each other. It's a small society, especially in Wellington, of journalists, top public servants, and politicians and public relations people. I think journalists have exceptional access in New Zealand. However, objective news reporting has become largely

> the reportage of what people say, rather than much critique of this. Business people have a free run in the business pages (from journalists who are pro-business). Papers like the *Dominion* are avowedly pro-business. Science in general receives little coverage (except the 'wowee!' sort). However, scientists are generally treated with respect. Aligning itself with business was therefore an astute move by the pro-GE science community.

The objectivity norm, reduced to "what people say", rather than what their statement means, has led to the simplification of the genetic engineering discourse on policy issues (Chapter 5) where the evaluative arguments were borrowed from the more powerful, pro-GE oriented sources, being business, science or political sources. The evidence can be found in the editorials published on GE (Chapter 6) where the key phrases of improvement, progress, change, knowledge economy, Luddites and sound science[118] dominated the coverage. Journalists who were interviewed in this study agree, for example, that the relationship with political sources is 'largely collaborative' and characterised by a 'generally accepted [notion] that each needs the other'. One journalist says: "The best politicians know how to work the media and spend a lot of time walking around the Press Gallery spreading their views on the issues of the day on and off the record, seeking to influence the way stories are reported" (Langdon, interview 2005). Press Gallery journalists are aware of politicians' aspirations to influence coverage, but everyday newsgathering practice makes it hard for them to spend more time with their sources, and as a result sense-making activity is reduced to the simple balancing of different standpoints in their reports.

7.4.3 Newsgathering

All journalists interviewed in this study agree that much of the newsgathering in New Zealand happens by telephone. A phone conversation has generally replaced the face-to-face interview and is a point of reference – as was the interview some

[118] Similar phrases are used by the British press in elaboration of GE issues (Cook 2004).

decades ago – a preferred way of newsgathering when compared with new newsgathering methods such as Internet and email. Ellis (interview, 2005) explains:

> The telephone is probably the principal means of newsgathering domestically. While reporters are encouraged to visit sources regularly, in Auckland at least, traffic can present considerable delays and the telephone substitutes. There is increasing use of the Internet for background and alerts but the anarchic nature of the web means that no mainstream media would use it as primary unverified sources. Email is used where necessary but such exchanges are a little stilted and a telephone conversation would be preferred.

The difference between a telephone conversation and a face-to-face interview is in its length, form and content. Journalists agree that phone conversations are short, brief, fast and focused on the actual daily happening, whereas face-to-face interviews are structured in advance, longer and tend to cover a broader range of questions related to the issue. The phone interview usually does not allow the source to think carefully, during long stretches of silence, about the words they are going to use, and in that sense is more likely to bring effective short statements like 'sound-bites'. The face-to-face interview, however, provides more non-verbal material, a very important part of communication.

There are no known studies on telephone versus face-to face interviewing in journalism, but some studies in other disciplines indicate that phone interviews might affect the quality of data acquired. The analysis of large-scale, nationally funded survey data collection, although not directly linked to journalism, points towards some trends: telephone respondents are less cooperative and engaged in the interview than people who are interviewed face-to-face (Holbrook *et al.* 2003, p.79):

> Random digit dialling telephone respondents were more likely to appear (as evidenced by no-opinion responding, non-differentiation, and acquiescence) to be less cooperative and engaged in the interview,

> and were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the length of the interview than were face-to-face respondents, despite the fact that the telephone interviews were completed more quickly than face-to-face respondents.

Why, then, would journalists switch to a less productive way of interviewing sources?

When asked what the prevailing method of newsgathering is today and offered a choice between the face-to-face interview, press release, press conference and phone conversation, one journalist said: "Generally interview. I would never write from a press release without seeking additional views and comment. Most interviews were done by phone for expediency. The GE story would have been mostly based on phone interviews" (Langdon, interview 2005).

This answer goes to the heart of the matter: the phone interview is done to get "additional views and comment" because the journalist "would never write from a press release". The contemporary journalistic practice, as explained in the previous chapter, includes a middle point between the reporter and the source – public relations personel and their press releases. This changes the method of newsgathering by changing the mode of conversation between the journalist and the source. The press release obviates the need for an in-depth interaction between journalist and source, as it has all the characteristics of real news. In such a setting, journalists do not want to waste time investigating the Government's or anyone else's press release where the source has proven to be trustworthy, and the facts are already assembled, presented and neatly summarised. The only need is for "additional view and comment".

A former editor-in-chief (Ellis, interview 2005) says there is no harm in using press releases but still stresses:

> No journalist worth his name should simply cut and paste press releases. If a reporter was found to have done so he or she could expect a reprimand. It amounts to the unquestioning acceptance of

> information and journalists should always question what they are being told, if for no other reason than to test its veracity.

Another editor-in-chief agrees and adds that most press releases are useful in pointing to an event or, when there is a real need, "We may use a quote from the release if we can't get hold of the person or if it is a particularly good one"(Pankhurst, interview 2005). The journalists who covered the GE story admit it was very hard to escape being deluged by public relations, but that it was very important not to rely on them because "for all their fancy talk about truth and how it is important to good PR, it ignores the truth that their role is to put a good face on things"(Langdon, interview 2005). Public relations activity triggers different levels of alert in journalists. Journalists welcome spokespersons, always ready to provide comment on behalf of the source, and handy press releases that summarise the facts. But they find PR's attempt to 'put a good face on things', or to frame the event, problematic. What elements of journalism's defence system does this issue bring into play?

7.4.4 Framing

Social scientists (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Iyenger 1991; 1994; 2000) investigated how priming and framing, methods of providing and presenting information, have influenced the understanding of issues and policy decision-making. However, the journalistic practice of 'framing' the issue remains under researched. The analysis presented in Chapter 5 showed how newspapers imposed their own understanding of the genetic engineering issue. By calling the Royal Commission's Recommendations 'sensible and sane', by highlighting the dispute between the Government and the Greens, by suggesting possibility of economic profit and excluding risk information, the press reduced the story about genetic engineering to a few questions related mainly to the balance of political power. We have seen that the logic of the journalistic field contributed to different ways of treating the genetic engineering issue throughout the year: in phase one, the *expectation phase*, there were proportionally many more 'news' than 'opinion' pieces compared to the *evaluation* and *anticipation* phases but, at the same time, in the

expectation phase, the press most strongly demonstrated their ambition to persuade the readers.

Reporting conflict between the Greens and the Government was a comfortable mechanism for satisfying the journalistic norms of objectivity and balance by obtaining 'factuality' through a compilation of two points of view. When asked "what frames have you found useful for writing the GE story", the majority of surveyed journalists put at the top of the list 'impact on people/stakeholders/community' (84 percent), far ahead of other options in the survey ('important issues', 'connection to broader issues', 'conflict', 'explanatory', and 'trends'). The use of the 'strategic' or 'thematic' frame (Iyengar 1991), the connection to broader issues, was – in the case of newspaper coverage of the GE issue – journalists' habitual response to two contesting attempts to define the GE issue, the Government's and the Green Party's. It was simultaneously the most logical answer to the situation where (at least) two sources were fighting to impose their own definition of the issue. As noted earlier, journalists use frame to emphasise certain aspects of the event while protecting their profession from the unacceptable influences of other fields.

The content analysis of the articles showed the New Zealand press positioned the issue of genetic engineering primarily inside the field of politics. Journalists interviewed in this study explain that it is a natural expression of the position of the events that were reported – political actors triggered the majority of the stories. The details about the applied practice in reporting on genetic engineering can be understood by looking at the broader context of making news judgements. When asked how the *Dominion Post* makes a news judgement, the paper's editor-in-chief explains (Pankhurst, interview 2005):

> What we're trying to do when deciding what stories are worth publishing is appeal to as many people as possible, and the rule of thumb that we apply is why should the readers care? We get an enormous flow of information into the office every day, and our staff is highly skilled at filtering that into a more concentrated useable form.

> We assign our reporters to rounds, such as education, health, civic, and they are the first point of contact in those areas, and they are expected to know what is going on in their patch. We also get a huge amount of information from the public, through phone calls, through emails, and materials that they send us from organisations that want publicity. The ones that don't want it are harder to deal with, and a lot of what we do is extract information from people who are reluctant to give it. Everyday our key department heads meet at two thirty, we are presented with a long list of the new stories of the day, and it sets out the stories that we're working on….
>
> And that's the first cut that allows us to identify the main stories that we're working on. And what a lot of it needs is shaping. We are asking all the time, what is the relevance of this, why should our readers care about this? And taking into consideration what's on the television, assuming that they're onto the story as well, and ensuring that it's not going to be a repetition of what they saw the night before.

Two general criteria for 'shaping' the news, the relevance to the readers and the original approach, demonstrate journalistic strategy in dealing with events such as genetic engineering. Relevance to the readers is linked to the other fields of social, political, economic and cultural production. Firmly based in reality, the principle of relevance is a social antenna for depicting events that are potentially interesting to readers. The imposition of a frame on such events is a process of explaining "why our readers should care about this". The analysis of the appearance and input of sources in the news shows the complexity of the process of 'explaining' because journalists are not exclusive holders of the meaning of the event. The reporting process is far from neutral stenography: the translation and interpretation of reality is influenced by a range of economic, political and cultural factors. The criterion of relevance to the readers is an element of the journalistic field's openness, a part of its interactions with other fields and as such is a key for understanding the relationship between journalism and public debate.

7.5 Journalistic mission

The forum-creating capacity of the press, the key element for understanding the relationship between journalism and public debate, was signalled in the 19th century but fully developed in the 20th century. The historical change deserves some attention because it explains the ground for newspapers' authority to map the world around us. Media scholars have noted that in the 19th century "Victorian news seems to have been able only to *represent* information, while the modern news story *was itself* a piece of information"(Matheson 2000, p.565) and that political journalists in the 20th century began to move away from verbatim reporting of others' words, towards interpreting – seeing their role "as involving some fundamental translation and interpretation of political acts to a public ill equipped to sort out for itself the meaning of events" (Schudson 1982, p.99). The historical change came with two innovations: the use of the interview, largely distrusted until the turn of the century; and the editorial interventions in presenting reality. Here is how Matheson (2000, p.562) clarifies the last development:

> The 19th-century newspaper of course contained interpretation and description, but rarely in its own voice. In fact, it did not really have a voice. The newspaper printed, for example, letters from correspondents or letters between public officials as news (and not, as a modern newspaper would, as readers' comments on the news) with little or no framing text from an editorial voice. It seemed to rely on the cultural authority of the letter as a mode of communication to vouch for the information contained….

Less then a century ago, newspapers still printed verbatim reports of parliamentary or judicial proceedings signalling the authenticity of these texts with explanatory phrases such as "The Board of Agriculture announces that . . ." (*The Times*, 1 December 1919 cited in Matheson 2000, p.563). The newspapers needed to explicitly mark both the source of the information and its status as information about the world because "the news had not yet developed the textual apparatus of interviewing, summarising, quoting and editing that would allow it to be able to claim to represent reality" (Matheson 2000, p.563).

This study demonstrates the full development of the journalistic textual apparatus at the beginning of the 21st century: declarative sentences that sound like statements (*Genetic engineering will put New Zealand …*) and the shift of an active sentence into a passive (from *The Government announces GE policy* into *The GE policy has been announced*), explained in the previous chapter, reflect influential frameworks which experienced journalists have already acquired in the course of their work. The question is how the journalistic apparatus might influence the readers' opinions, beyond the obvious influence on the perceived relevance of the issue. Deconstruction of the news text reflects the diversity of social conditions that create the text, inside and outside the journalistic field. The 'inside conditions' – journalists' understanding of their role in the society, definitions of their profession and the conceptualisation of the leading principles (such as objectivity) – indicate where the borders are in journalistic practice, and what scope there is for change.

7.5.1 Role of the journalist in society

The discussion of the role of the journalist in New Zealand society starts with the relationship between the fields of journalism and economics. Journalists and journalism scholars agree that the professional values of New Zealand journalists, as the factor that determines journalistic practice, are highly influenced by their material position. One of the most prominent New Zealand television presenters, John Campbell, thinks economics is at the core of the trouble with New Zealand journalism:

> If journalism is bad it's because journalists aren't paid enough and too many journalists go and work in public relations rather than stay in journalism, and because the bottom line of newspapers, TV networks ... the requirement of TVNZ to pay a dividend or TV3 to pay a dividend back to Canada ... means that we're not employing enough journalists, not enough researchers, not enough producers – that's why journalism is bad" (Dunbar, 2003, pp.13–14).

Economic constraints head the list of perceived problems that face contemporary journalism in New Zealand: at the top are problems with sources and staffing, followed by the erosion of the profession and convergence of ownership and commercial influences (Lealand 2004, p.186).[119] New Zealand reporter says: "Overseas ownership of the two newspapers groups has resulted in cost-driven practices, compromising good journalism" (Lealand 2004, p.186).

Journalists interviewed in this study agree that the division between two newspaper groups, Fairfax and APN, shapes the position of the print journalist in New Zealand society and influences the standard of journalism. Alan Samson says: "There's no panic for journalists to get the story first any more. The competition that existed between the *Dominion* and the *Evening Post* is gone; there's no question." Heavy workload, no investments, and lack of training push New Zealand journalists to compile information rather than explain. Christine Langdon says:

> New Zealand print journalism is generally done on a shoe-string. Reporters often carry high workloads and have limited time for research and investigation, which results in coverage that usually tells readers what is going on in their communities/nationally but does not seek to explain what is behind the news with any insight. There is little attempt to understand and explain context and background. There is often a willingness to go directly from press releases and to give emphasis to reporting the views and opinions of those who bray loudest, known in the industry as "rent-a-quotes" because of expediency. Because chief reporters come from a reporting background rather than a management background, they are often not good teachers and co-ordinators and this also hinders quality

[119] New Zealand journalists' emphasis on the relation of economic problems to their profession corresponds with the study on American journalists and the state of the press in 2004, done by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and Pew Research Centre. This American study shows journalists fear more than ever that the "economic behavior of their companies is eroding the quality of journalism" and that the "business pressures are making news thinner and shallower than ever" (http/www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/journalist_survey_commentary.asp, 24 August 2005).

> journalism. There is a lack of training and investment from print media to improve the quality of reporting. To their credit New Zealand journalists generally have a desire to report accurately and to seek "balance" – however they are often satisfied to accept a "no comment" or "spokesperson was unavailable" as evidence of having sought balance, rather than having a determination to ensure that they are giving their readers a full and accurate picture.

The modest analytic-interpretive role of New Zealand journalists, explained as a consequence of heavy workload and understaffing, does not mean there is no ambition to take on the role of news explainer, or that there are no achievements in that area. In the answer to the question "what is the most important role your newspaper plays in community", most journalists participating in this study's survey chose "news explainer, providing knowledge", well ahead of the second-ranked function "news-breaker, getting the story first".[120] This corresponds with the results from Deuze's (2002a) discussion of existing research on different news cultures, where journalists from Australia and the UK, countries with the similar news cultures to New Zealand's, ranked 'providing analysis and interpretation' much higher than did journalists from the Netherlands, Germany and United States. All journalists in Deuze's study ranked 'interpretation' and 'getting the news out quickly' higher than the rest of the functions.[121]

The discrepancy between the ideals of providing the context and the background for a story, and the reality where the journalist has to rely on sources called "rent-a-quote", has consequences for the coverage of the issues in the press, as discussed in the previous two chapters. The discrepancy between the way in which the profession has been perceived and the way it has been practised by journalists also defines the space for individual negotiations inside the field and under the umbrella of the commonly shared professional value of objectivity.

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[120] Other options were: investigative watchdog, catalyst for community conversion, community steward, disseminator of just the facts, and other.

[121] Other options in Deuze's combined list of media roles were: be an adversary of public/business, give people a chance to express their view, reach widest possible audience, investigate claims of government, signal new trends, develop intellectual /cultural interests of public, stand up for disadvantaged, provide entertainment, exert influence on public, provide a good environment for advertisers.

These negotiations are important for development of the practice in the light of the journalists' interactions with the agents from other fields, a new class of 'para-journalists' (see Chapter 5), who have the ambition to take the lead in 'mediating' reality.

7.5.2 Public relations war

The media coverage of genetic engineering, triggered by the release of the Royal Commission's Report, looked occasionally like coverage of the publicity war between promoters and opponents of genetic engineering. Margie Comrie, who teaches public relations at Massey University, explains that the pro-GE lobby behind the Life Sciences Network won the battle – but by convincing the politicians, rather than public. Comrie (interview 2005) says the Life Sciences Network was very well prepared for the Royal Commission's hearings and "once they got the verdict they wanted out of the Royal Commission, which was what the Government wanted too (because they wouldn't go seriously against business), they just had to keep a relatively low profile". She describes the "war" as:

> Life Sciences never let a chance go by and always (or nearly always) responded. The scientists, not all of them but the main institutes etc., really did feel their future was endangered. Being scientists of course they also had a different picture of risk and they did feel that their opponents held all the emotional cards. On the other side the Greens and anti-GE groups had a line in the sand from which they were not prepared to budge (or that at least was the impression given, maybe that is part of an under-reported part of the case) that meant no real compromise was possible so it did turn into a war.

The work of public relations officers with journalistic knowledge and skills has had an influence on the relationship between journalists and their sources, but what about the influence on the forum-creating capacity of the press? Comrie

thinks that public relations insistence on "the message" might limit the variety of opinions in the forum:

> Public relations officers with a media background know how to help people hone their sound bites and to say the appealing thing. Francis Weavers (the Life Sciences spokesperson) would argue that his efforts allowed a lot more scientific viewpoint to get out into the media, which had been dominated by the "other side". However, I think the long-term effect of reliance on mediating through PR could be a restriction of views. Journalists need to raise their game.

The analysis of the explanation of newsgathering method, presented in Chapter 5, indicates that the journalists could have 'raised their game' in reporting the genetic engineering issue by acknowledging the input of sources and thereby achieving greater transparency in information distribution. But they did not do so because they were dealing with an issue that policy makers and research and development managers saw as "a strategic technology of the 21st century" and an issue in a "stage of acute political controversy across Europe" (Bauer 2005, p.5) and the world.

7.5.3 Editorial stance

The set of news judgements made in covering the genetic engineering issue in New Zealand illustrates that the newspapers' editors were well aware the GE issue included "national economic interests" and that GE was a question of the application of scientific knowledge.

The commonly used strategy was to base the newspaper's approach to the GE issue on the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification. The *Herald*'s former editor-in-chief (Ellis, interview 2005) says "we strongly based our editorial policy on the Royal Commission's findings" but adds that "the view expressed in the leader column did not, however, determine news coverage where both sides of the debate had a right to be heard". An even-handed approach was

applied because the *Herald* was "principally interested in providing readers with information on which they could form their own opinions". Ellis clarifies the main frame in the coverage and the difficulties:

> I think the frame was undoubtedly strategic. We had warring factions, each intent on winning the day and, in the middle, a government that had difficulty satisfying its own broad constituency on a matter that was charged with emotion. Little wonder really that there was an adversarial tone to much of the debate. The difficulty was in sorting the facts from the rhetoric. By taking a stand [editorially] supporting the findings of the Royal Commission we were somewhat demonised by the anti-GM lobby – in spite of the fact that our news coverage was, in the hands of people like Simon Collins and Anne Beston, well balanced.

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The media coverage of GE, as much as the issue itself, polarised the public arena. The case of genetic engineering was reduced to a version of the David and Goliath story with the classic frame of the big corporations versus small consumers, small farmers, and brave overseas scientists standing out against the flow. Genetic engineering issue became very important in New Zealand because the country is dependent on agriculture and primary products. One group of people was able to successfully argue that if New Zealand didn't become involved in the pro-GE movement, the country could 'go down the tubes'. The other group insisted on a 'green' image, arguing the country could be economically saved by remaining GE free. The *New Zealand Herald*, the *Dominion Post* and *The Press* supported the 'proceed with caution' approach to GE because newspapers have a general pro-business editorial policy. As Comrie (interview 2005) says:

> Newspapers are inclined to be pro-business. What is good for General Motors is good for New Zealand. We've bought the business line for a long time now. Arguments on the pro-side were being made by all the establishment figures and many scientists … people who "know". The type of knowledge and style of presentation of the opposition was less professional, less unified and too "emotional" to sound "responsible". I

> don't think that advertisers were important. I do think prevailing neo-liberal discourse was.

One might think that the owners bring neo-liberal views to editorial boards but the newspapers' editors-in-chief stress that the representatives of the owners of the paper never attend editorial meetings. The topic of the editorial is discussed every day by the editor-in-chief, two leader writers, the cartoonist and one of the editor-in-chief's deputies (the *Herald*) or editor-in-chief and three leader writers (the *Dominion Post*). Ellis (interview 2005) explains:

> Editorials are written by either the (two) leader writers or one of the senior editors. I wrote editorials and would expect my successor Tim Murphy will do likewise. He and the deputy editor wrote editorials on occasion. The process I followed was that we would debate a topic and try to reach a consensus. If I could be persuaded by argument then that argument prevailed. If I had a particular policy that I wished the paper to follow then I would direct the line to be taken. There was, however, a remarkable level of consensus reached through lively debate. I must say that on the GE issue there was general agreement among the opinion team that following the recommendations of the Royal Commission – our view – was the right line to take.

The *Dominion*'s editor (Pankhurst, interview 2005) shares his experience:

> Editorials are written to the editor's direction and in theory the editor writes them all. In practice the editor writes very few of them. We have three editorial writers. The aim is to pick up on issues of wide interest and to make sure the leader does not waffle, that it says something, gives an opinion. Leaders are a major source of letters to the editor from readers agreeing with or opposing the views we've put up. An ideal leader is an essay that sets out an issue, argues the merits of it and comes down with an opinion.

The *Dominion Post*'s journalists who wrote news articles on genetic engineering were sometimes consulted in the process of writing an editorial, but had no influence on the writing or views expressed. Generally the leader writer and editor decide jointly on the topic and the editorial will reflect the views of the editor. Reporters may indirectly influence editorials with the way they report issues; however "they generally have no direct input into editorials" (Langdon, interview 2005). The indirect input matters here. Hallin and Mancini (2004, p.208) note that there is an assumption in American journalism that the standpoint expressed on editorial pages does not spread to news reporting because the news reporting has to stay neutral. Still, there are some exceptions. They cite a study (Nacos 1990) who found that newspapers tended to use more sources consistent with their editorial policy. That means that the newspaper's ambition to influence public debate, openly expressed in its editorial, goes beyond the editorial page and through the network of actions that contribute to the production of news as a whole.

7.6 Summary

The role of the press, exercised in its daily production of news, is inscribed in the traditional functions of informing and educating but also in providing space for public debate. The newspaper's role, described by New Zealand journalists, is to "inform and educate and promote discussion, to connect individuals with the societies in which they live and work" (Langdon, interview 2005) and to "provide the public with information on which they can base their own informed opinions and actions" (Ellis, interview 2005). Ellis stresses "it also has a vital role as a forum for the views of the public and provides considerable space in its op-ed pages for contributed commentary".

This chapter has shown that the coverage of the genetic engineering issue was influenced by a set of features that constitute journalism practice: the habitual response to a news event (for instance the controversy over GE was compared with the controversies seen in the courts); professional ideology (expressed in 'market journalism') and balance as the key component of the objectivity norm; the organisation of a newsroom (division between 'beat' and Press Gallery

reporters); and an under-resourced newsroom that has consequences for sourcing practices (privileging of authoritative sources), newsgathering (dominance of obtaining information by phone and from press releases), choice of story-telling frame (adopted from the sources). In such an environment, with a heavy workload that prevents in-depth or investigative reporting, and a business-oriented editorial policy, journalism's mission of providing a forum for public debate is reduced to editorial pages and the newspaper's own view expressed in the leader article.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters explored the questions of journalism's role in providing a forum for public debate, in raising its voice in public debate, and in representing an issue in the public domain. The findings have demonstrated how important it is to discuss journalism in relation to the wider social, political and cultural context. Indeed, the intertwined nature of the field has defined the majority of academic studies of journalism. But, this thesis argues, it has also limited them. The impression that "journalism is most appreciated when it turns in nonjournalistic phenomenon" (Zelizer 2004, p.1) comes from the fragmentation of journalism scholarship. Spread across the disciplines of sociology, history, language studies, political science and cultural analysis (Zelizer 2004.), the study of journalism has been traditionally focused on discussion of journalism 'in relation to…', rather than discussion of journalism 'as such'. In contrast, this thesis used a case study of the newspaper coverage of genetic engineering in New Zealand from July 2001 until July 2002 to set up a framework for conceptualisation of journalism in its setting and as an independent, self-determining phenomenon. The study applied a multidisciplinary approach to journalism to capture the essence of the interactions between the field of journalism and surrounding fields, and it looked at journalism as a self-determining practice to reveal the mechanisms by which journalism contributes to the production of meaning in society.

By looking at journalism as a specific type of socio-cultural practice, the study has demonstrated that the field of journalism is both an indicator and an independent variable[122] of the 'meaning-making' process in society. The investigation of the newspaper coverage of the genetic engineering issue in New Zealand has shown that the question of how journalism contributes to public discussion is inseparable from the question of how journalists provide information relevant to public understanding of the issue. The argument put forward in the previous chapters is

[122] See Benson (2004).

that the journalistic field's interaction with the existing power structure in society is defined both by the contextual factors – political, economic and cultural – and by journalism itself, a set of practical schemes that define what is important, appropriate and preferred in the everyday work of journalists. This set of practical schemes that Bourdieu (2005) calls journalistic *doxa*[123] holds the key to understanding journalists' professional authority to mediate reality for their readers. At the forefront of the practice that defines relations between the field of journalism and other fields of cultural production is the concept of objectivity.

This study has shown that the norm of objectivity is integrated into a news-making process as an applied method, an aspired account and a formatted attitude. This norm determines a newspaper's ability to address events and issues in a meaningful way. Being a *modus operandi* of the journalistic field's interactions, it defines a newspaper's potential to create a space for public debate. The norm of objectivity is incorporated in all elements of journalism practice. This thesis has focused on journalistic form, sources, newsgathering and frames and demonstrated how the norm of objectivity has set down the discursive potential of the news text to represent, interpret and construct reality about genetic engineering.

The findings of this study underlined the tension between a range of conventional forms of objectivity and the complexity of the GE issue in the public domain. The analysis of the newspaper coverage of GE revealed how the objectivity norm, once understood as a shield for the defence of the autonomy of the profession to mediate reality, became an obstacle in extending journalism's potential to contribute to public debate. As a method, objectivity failed to provide a set of transparent protocols for the representation of the issue in the public arena; as an account, it reflected the impossibility of separating 'facts' from 'views' and positions of detachment from those of partisanship; and as an attitude, objectivity was endangered by the increasing power of economic imperatives in the production of news.

[123] Bourdieu's (2005) definition of 'doxa' as "a system of presuppositions inherent in membership in a field" (p.37) is one of the primary reasons why I chose field theory as the most suitable framework for investigation of journalism.

This thesis has assumed that the norm of objectivity is central for understanding the "invisible structures" (Bourdieu 2005, p.30) that create, sustain and modify the relationship between the journalistic field and the fields it interrelates with. It has demonstrated that an important part of this configuration is journalists' habitual reaction to events, a professional reaction that is historically, socially and economically rooted. The analysis of media coverage of the GE issue was focused on these reactions: the patterns in news reporting, the means of interactions between the journalistic field and the wider community, and the elements of practice that relate to the forum-creating capacity of the press.

8.2 Journalistic field and public discussion: What the analysis of newspaper coverage of GE revealed

The analysis has shown that the system of journalistic rules, unified under the umbrella of objectivity, is generated to keep journalists' authority to map an issue in the public domain. These rules are products of journalism practice, developed and modified in accordance with the logic, the autonomy, and the position of the journalistic field in relation to other social fields.

The patterns identified in the coverage of the GE issue in New Zealand newspapers has indicated that the logic of the journalistic field draws a specific circle in relation to facts and reality: firstly, facts are represented in the form of a news report, secondly, the process of representation includes interpretation – not just facts but telling 'the truth' about the facts; and thirdly, representation and interpretation are synchronised actions in the process of the construction of the news story with 'objectively' arranged facts that give meaning to reality. This process of representation, interpretation and construction explains why studies of journalism focus on the investigations of news as form of knowledge and a "discursive field of representation" (Hartley 1996, p.235) that is interlinked with the traditional institutions of power. The analysis of newspaper coverage of GE disclosed that the newspaper's role in shaping the public debate is defined by the dynamic interaction between the structure of the field (Benson, 1999) and

historically, socially and personally developed dispositions of journalists within the field.

The study showed that the autonomy of the journalistic field in New Zealand is defined not only by the relationship with the political and economic fields, but by the community in general. The relationship between the community and the newspaper, discussed in Chapter 7, is more relevant for the everyday work of journalists in New Zealand than is ownership structure. There was a difference in the newspapers' judgements about the community's interest in the GE issue—a different habitual perception of the readers' interest in the issue of genetic engineering—but more similarities were found between the newspapers that belong to 'pluralist' communities than between the newspapers that have the same owner. Thus, there were more similarities in the coverage of the issue between the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion Post* (major-centre papers) than between the *Dominion Post* and the *Press* (same owner). Furthermore the power structure in the community had an impact on the way the issue was represented in the press. The *Herald*'s coverage bore the stamp of the prevailing business structure, and the *Dominion Post*'s of the prevailing political interpretations of the event, while the *Press*'s coverage was focused on local, regional aspects of the GE stories. The initial decision to cover the GE issue extensively came from the most dominant value in newspaper stories nowadays: the 'consequences' news value, an answer to the question what follows as an effects from the event -. The rising competition between broadcasting, print and online media diversified the content of each medium, leaving the task of in-depth coverage to the newspapers. Extensive news coverage of the GE issue has shown how the news value of consequences integrates different voices in public debate and opens a space for developing the forum-creating capacity of the press. From an editorial point of view, the huge 'consequences' capacity of a story generates another news value, 'conflict', and keeps the issue 'alive' for a long time. The stronger and more persuasive the 'opinion', the more chances there are to produce new attractive 'news', which can, in turn, bring new 'views' and new 'news' on views until a new issue appears.

The 'news' and 'views' cycle, a reflection of the internal logic of the journalistic field, is represented by the cycles in news reporting. The cycles are a reflection of

the external dynamics between the journalistic and other social fields. This study recognised three phases in the coverage of the genetic engineering issue and identified accompanying journalistic norms in relation to the reporting cycles that might serve as a model for similar investigations in the future. The 'expectations driven stories' are recognised as 'event' type stories, with a clear time frame, usually between the occurrence of a particular issue and a solution or decision in relation to that issue. 'Evaluation driven stories' are 'problem' stories that investigate a phenomenon or policy through examining an issue's patterns of occurrence. 'Anticipation driven stories' treat an issue either as a trigger or a sub-topic of the text; they usually deal with structures in relation to an event or phenomenon. The study showed the press was more interested in informing when the policy was still in preparation ('expectation phase') than when the policy was adopted ('evaluation phase') or discussed in relation to another issue ('anticipation phase'). Editorial writers sought to influence the policy-making process but gave themselves more privileges than other opinion writers. Journalistic norms – developed in relation to journalistic form, sources, newsgathering and frame – supported the cycles identified by policy makers and revealed the conservative logic of the journalistic field. Sources who were identified as 'arbiters' rarely became 'advocates'. In the case of genetic engineering, the Government was identified as a non-aligned provider of information at the beginning of the coverage and remained so until Election Day. The identified dominance of politics, as a framework demonstrated a journalistic preference to use old frames: those already embedded in a social construction of reality. It revealed journalists' inclination to reinforce the status quo rather than take up the challenge to investigate the claims made by the pro- and anti-GE groups.

The examination of links between hard news and editorials revealed how the internal logic of the field shapes its interactions with other fields. Journalists' approach to sources, and all the rules developed around their relationships with sources influenced the debate about the issues in the public domain. The frequency of the appearance of the Green Party or the Government in editorial headlines corresponded with the frequency of their appearance on the list of sources in news. These sources gave accounts of events, and therefore had an

influence on the definition of events; actors in editorial headlines pointed a finger towards the driving force behind the events. The 'objectivity twist', in which the truth or a fact is stated in one sentence or paragraph, and then in the following text is 'twisted' to make a point simplified differences in order to highlight the preferred reading of the issue: the one that the editorial argued for. The argument of the editorials was strengthened by listing supporters and identifying those who were opposed to the offered opinion showing the essence of editorials: editorials support and condemn, but in so doing call on readers to do the same. The almost identical list of key words in news articles and editorials confirmed that editorials embedded news.

The GE issue, constructed in the New Zealand press as a key component of the 'knowledge economy', drew attention to the dynamics between the heteronymous and autonomous poles of the journalistic field. The non-transparent, so-called 'euphemized neo-liberalism' (Bourdieu, 1998b, p.50) of the New Zealand press reduced the issue of genetic engineering to political decisions about the future economic development of the country. The aim was to support and strengthen the arguments of the side perceived to have the broader vision on economic prosperity presented in editorials as the common-sensical choice of all New Zealanders. The newspaper article – whether a news report, feature, interview or opinion piece – never simply 'reflects' the reality of an event; it effectively provides "a codified definition of what should count as the reality of the event" (Allan 2004, p.4). This thesis has demonstrated that the ideological dimension of journalistic mediation and codification is based on the notions of objectivity and common sense. The case study of the newspaper coverage of genetic engineering showed how New Zealand newspapers, independent from the state and powerful business, and autonomous in taking a stance on the issue of GE, consistently and over a year-long period supported the dominant neoliberal ideological position of the establishment (Chapter 6), without ever acknowledging an adherence to this view. The commonsense approach to the genetic engineering issue was based on the establishment of an imaginary equity between (social) wealth and (individual) health, a flagship notion of the promoters of the development of biotechnology. In the editorial 'Reality must rule in debate on GM', *The New Zealand Herald* says:

> The fact is that, properly managed, genetic modification stands to make this country more competitive and wealthier. Conversely, it will be hard-pressed to challenge other producers and manufacturers if it is held in a GM-free strait-jacket. And that will make the country poorer.
>
> The real debate must be around how New Zealand manages its GM research and development and how it ensures that the results of that research do not have adverse environmental impacts. In other words, how we achieve the right balance.
>
> For a person like Stephen Hawking, imprisoned by motor neuron disease, the placard-wavers must be a burden. Likewise, New Zealanders with conditions such as multiple sclerosis must wonder where the humanity of such people truly lies. For these sufferers, genetic modification may offer the hope of recovery. The medical possibilities that have been opened up by the human genome project are vast but without some ability to undertake genetic modification many of those opportunities will be lost. (*The New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 2001)

The process of the 'establishment' of relationships is important for the study of journalism because it is the 'practice', the middle element in the 'text, practice and context' triangle of the news discourse, which defines the interactions with the outside world. The objectivity norm reduced in news reports to 'what people say' rather than what the point means, led to the simplification of genetic engineering in public domain. Key words and phrases such as *improvement*, *progress, change, knowledge economy, sound science* dominated the coverage from the representation of events (when citing sources) to the interpretation and construction of the GE issue (when summarising or commenting upon events). The analysis of media coverage of the issue indicated that, on the one hand, sources adopted a global approach to journalists by preparing in advance 'sound bite' statements for use in interviews and, on the other hand, journalists adapted to the sources by relying on the 'professionalism' of sources to offer news-suitable information. Journalists' tendency to favour "written stories which are already

prefabricated in an appropriate news style and therefore require the minimum of reworking" (Bell 1991, p.58) easily found justification in the neo-liberal market of ideas. The assumption of the neoliberal logic is that business-sourced news is of interest to all of us and is aimed at the (financial) well being of all citizens. Under this logic there is no need to identify the moment of mediation of reality and 'waste' space explaining where, for example, the business source provided information for the story. The input is considered trustworthy because there is an assumption of a shared interest between sources, journalists and the public – that all are united in finding and telling the truth.

The clash between the objectivity norm that requires a fair and balanced approach to events, and the reality of a journalist's work – its internal organisation, the time and space constraints, long working hours and under-resourced newsrooms discussed in Chapter 7 – opened a door for the promotion of ready-to-use discourse, offered by dominant and privileged groups. The decision on whether beat reporters or Press Gallery journalists would cover the GE story had an impact on the character of the coverage – it influenced accessibility of sources, choice of journalistic form and the framing of the issue. The Press Gallery journalists had their own columns to comment upon the issues covered, while the 'beat' reporters only occasionally got that chance. The set of factors that influences the representation, interpretation and construction of reality includes therefore not only the wider social, political, economic and cultural setting, but the position and characteristics of individual journalists inside the field. However, as is documented in the thesis, these individual journalists do not operate in a vacuum; their everyday practice is based on acquired knowledge about the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 2002) within and outside the journalistic field. These rules of the game constitute professional ideology that defines and transcends the journalistic field[124].

[124] Becoming a part of public relations, for example.

8.3 Objectivity norm and journalism ideology

The analysis of the objectivity norm in the coverage of GE, presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, has shown that professional ideology is based on the following set of beliefs: that all events have a beginning and an end that correspond with the medium's news cycle; that reality is not only multifaced but consists of identifiable sides; that there is a conflict between at least two sides in every story; that there are more and less relevant voices in the debate (such as Greens, Government, environmental groups, Maori); and finally that there is a hierarchy of reality in relation to geographical position where 'our' reality about GE is always more relevant than 'their' reality about GE. These beliefs show how journalism ideology, developed around the elements of everyday practice, has the potential to have an impact on public debate.

The appeal to the 'common sense' of an audience is the last stage in the newspapers' production of definable, if not unquestionable, truth, about an issue in the public domain. This production is led by the idea of objectivity related to the everyday interaction between journalists and agents in other social fields. As a concept that belongs to the corpus of epistemological questions, objectivity is incorporated into the formation of the news discourse in its most rudimentary form. The media coverage of GE shows how the 'ongoing story' triggers interactions outside but also inside the journalistic field: what starts as an 'objective' method in mediating the views expressed in public debate continues as a call for common sense in editorials. The multi-layered notion of objectivity sets up a frame for considering the issue in the future – this frame runs as the dominant frame until the details outside of the frame push for clarification of the standpoint in a new editorial that produces a more specific frame for the news stories. The re-contextualization of the story continuous in this way until the new, more newsworthy story takes over the editorial pages of the press.

The principle of objectivity about controversial issues forces journalists to balance opposing views (Government's vs. Green Party's in the case of genetic engineering, for example), but not to balance the facts behind the views. The logic

of the field, objectivity as a way of gathering news, dictates balancing the institutional equals, even when it does not deepen the knowledge about the issue under consideration. One might ask why journalists keep the simplified model of 'both sides of the story' in place when it is obvious that it no longer corresponds to the complex reality. The question de Certeau (1984) raised some 20 years ago might be useful here: how do the ways of operating intervene in the field that regulates them (p.30)? How does the practice of keeping alive the myth of objectivity intervene in the field of journalism? Does it make a shield or a sword for coming to terms with modern times as explained in Chapter 7? The modification of journalistic practice, an ongoing process since the early days of shipping news, both reflects and influences the interplay between the journalistic and other social fields, be it politics, business or technology. The highlighted link between objectivity, as the most visible segment of journalism ideology and the journalistic field, resembles the relation between ideology and field in any other social space. As a collection of schemes that allows agents to carry on their practices (Bourdieu 2002), professional ideology is used to advertise journalism, to frame the role of journalists in society, and to conceptualise the field. Journalism ideology defines what is acceptable and what is not in the profession. It makes connections between causes and consequences in everyday practice, such as in the instruction to have both sides of the story in order to get 'an objective story'. Norms, written or unwritten, are regulatory rules, but the norm of objectivity is more than a rule: it is a desired mode of a practice, a process, and an aspiration. Three elements of the objectivity norm – a method, an account and an attitude – distinguish objectivity from other norms, thus making it a suitable frame for investigating the ideology of journalism. The difference between the proclaimed standards of 'objective' journalism and the actual standards in presenting events implies that the objectivity norm plays a crucial role in the process of the mediation of reality.

This thesis has raised the question of the absence of a framework that would capture the character of the objectivity norm and reveal the way news discourse reflects and rationalises dialogue in the public arena. Assuming that journalistic professional ideology (a system of professional beliefs) influences media coverage of an issue just as much as political ideology (a system of shared

political ideas and values), the study deconstructed the norm of objectivity on three constitutive elements – a method, an account and an attitude – and scrutinised four features of journalism practice – journalistic form, sources, newsgathering and story-telling frames – to test how generalisable this framework is. The fundamental question underlining this thesis was what constitutes journalists' authority to produce meaning. The thesis argued that the norm of objectivity holds the answer to this question. The three-part analysis of objectivity as a method of journalistic work, an account of reality and an attitude of journalists themselves is suggested as a suitable model for investigation by placing journalism at the centre of academic inquiry. This research argues that this model has an ability to communicate both with journalism scholars and journalism practitioners: firstly, it contributes to the development of q methodological and theoretical framework in journalism studies and, secondly, it highlights the elements of the practice that are long overdue for re-examination.

8.4 Significance of the three-part analysis

The three-part analysis of the case study is a valuable model for the investigation of journalism, because it highlights diverse aspects of the complex relationship between journalism and society. This flexible line of investigation, a comprehensible identification of the mediation of reality, can add to concept-formation and to the refinement of journalism studies theory. Most of the scholarly literature on journalism is focused on journalism as an outcome of political, economic, organizational or cultural interventions without conceptualizing what aspects of journalistic practice may influence and is influenced by other social fields. This operational model for the investigation of the norm of objectivity has a capacity to reveal the potential of one social phenomenon—journalism practice—to influence another social phenomenon—public debate—and to serve as universal model for investigation of interrelations between journalistic field and other social fields.

The strength of the tri-part analytical framework is its ability to summarise and use different research traditions in journalism studies: it allows identification of coverage by using content analysis as a research method; it suggests investigation

of the voice of the press in public debate by using discourse analysis of its most opinionated forms, such as newspaper editorials; and it recommends examination of journalists' attitudes by interviewing and surveying professionals. It is based on several premises: firstly, the identification of the patterns in news reporting is impossible without a systemic analysis of the frequency of appearance of the features that constitute reporting practice; secondly, academic discussion on the role of the press in interpreting and constructing issues in public domain has to include qualitative analysis of the news text as a product of journalism practice; and thirdly, the most suitable way to address the question of the links between journalistic norms is to ask journalists what leads them in everyday work. The present academic climate stimulates each of these investigations as separate fields of inquiry. This thesis advocates the opposite, and argues it is time for a general account of all three aspects of the field: text, practice and context. Studies of news sources (Manning 2001) bring a valuable understanding of the relations between the media and politics or the media and science; studies on framing (Johanson-Kartee 2005) explain the media's interactions with other fields; the investigations of newsroom organisation (Tuchman 1972; Sigal 1973), and journalists' professional values (Weaver & Wilhoit 1986) are mandatory literature, as are the histories of national and international media for any discussion of news cultures; and rare, individual studies of editorial discourse (Van Dijk 1996) link ideology and news media. But if one wants to make a comprehensive study of the media coverage of an issue that caused a dispute in the public arena, and identify the links between journalism and public debate, it is best to approach journalism as a field and to deconstruct its constitutive elements. This thesis has demonstrated that the authority of the field to present issues in the public domain comes from the belief that journalists' mediation of reality has clear rules and is based on a set of norms developed under the umbrella of objectivity seen as a method, an account and an attitude in relation to the reality.

The three-part analysis is advised as a model of journalism investigation because it allows the analysis of journalism in its totality. This type of examination captures the elements of journalism practice that have been regarded as less worthy academically speaking, and therefore neglected in journalism scholarship. These elements include the habitus, or the journalist's socialised subjectivity, as

an element that determines the creation of the news text. The question of how the journalist's habitus influences the text that emerges is the question of the particular historical route by which journalists arrive at a certain position. Trajectories constitute journalism *doxa*, a set of implicit strategies that help newsmakers to deal with a complex reality. Chapter 5 showed, for example, what story-telling frames were used in the coverage of genetic engineering, but the full meaning of the choice of frame could not be analysed without prior investigation into the totality of the 'frame context' – the historical development, structure and characteristics of the New Zealand journalistic field (Chapter 2) or understood without further discussion about the principles of journalism, the newspaper's profiles, and the author's individual strategies (Chapter 7).

The tripartite analysis of objectivity, as the preceding investigation has demonstrated, provides a ground for inquiry into journalistic production of definable, if not unquestionable, meaning of the issues in public domain. Objectivity, as a concept that belongs to epistemological questions, is incorporated into the formation of meaning in its most rudimentary form. This thesis has argued that investigation of the norm of objectivity seen as a method, an account and attitude explains how an idea goes beyond the mode of delivery. Despite all the differences, the myth of certain steps a journalist has to take to reach 'objectivity' has lasted for more than a century. The analysis of newspaper coverage of GE issue has shown that the practice of keeping alive the myth of objectivity intervened in the field of journalism by reducing its capacity to function as a forum for public debate.

The findings of the thesis indicate that the operational framework for investigating the objectivity norm might help journalists to identify the outmoded elements of the practice, namely the part of their everyday work that does not demonstrate flexibility to respond to the wider social, political and cultural changes. This study made several references to the interference of 'para-journalists' into journalists' mediation of reality. The objective was not to contribute to a demonisation of public relations, but to highlight the outdated elements of journalism practice. Journalists belief that they can turn news into a power and improve democracy by providing knowledge about the issues in the public domain require a modern

response to the contemporary situation where public relations significantly contribute to the production of meaning in the society (as discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7).

Finally, the deconstruction of the objectivity norm, along the lines of the method, account and attitude elements might help readers to better understand the news and the way it is socially constructed in any news culture. In order to become universal and capture the logic of the specific journalistic field, the framework has to stay flexible and be open to adjustments. The method of newsgathering might be very similar across the globe, but the way the press raises its voice in public debate (the 'account' segment of the framework) and journalistic values ('attitude') certainly differ. This thesis has focused on New Zealand journalistic practice in order to identify what influenced journalists when reporting on GE and to discuss how elements of New Zealand journalistic practice relate to the forum-creating capacity of the press.

Finally, it is worth noting that one segment of the investigation of the links between journalistic norms and public debate—journalists' own views of their position, role, and function in the society—did not completely work as planned. As explained in Chapter 5, the intention was to doe a comprehensive survey of New Zealand journalists who covered the genetic engineering story. The questionnaire was sent to 54 journalists but only 14 responded. Other scholars (see Lealand 2004) have had the same problem with New Zealand journalists. The scope of this study did not allow an excursion into this segment of the journalists' professional identity. Although the question is interesting – low response rate might be an indicator of low level of self-reflexivity but also an indicator of aversion to academic scrutiny – it is left for some future investigation. Only a new study, focused exclusively on journalists' self-reflection, would indicate what direction in the 'attitude' segment would be the best for New Zealand journalists to take.

8.5 Suggestions for future research

The analysis of media coverage of the genetic engineering issue has documented the importance of addressing journalism as a field. By investigating the historically established structure of the field, the practical logistics of the reporting process, the discursive potential of the news text and journalistic professional attitudes, this thesis has looked at journalism from inside, investigating 'what journalism is' and not 'what it should be' (Josephi 2005). The method-account-attitude objectivity framework provides a solid ground for capturing specific internal, 'interorganisational' (Benson 2004, p.281) segments of the journalistic field. Each segment of this framework has a potential to be further developed.

The 'account' segment of the investigation, for example, offers several other lines of investigation. This study focused on editorials because this journalistic form most openly reveals a newspaper's position on an issue. The analysis of the newspaper editorials discussed in Chapter 6 aimed to discover how one journalistic form, the 'news', influences another journalistic form, the 'editorial', and how the newspaper's voice in public debate represents, interprets, and constructs reality. It showed the press' ambition to persuade readers as to why certain points of view should be taken into account when considering an issue of public concern. But the newspaper's role in providing a forum for public debate does not stop here. The opinion pages are open for non-journalism discourse as well. In the coverage of genetic engineering, many opinion pieces were written as commentaries on particular GE events by the agents of these events, political party leaders, lobby group experts, academics, artists, and intellectuals. Some of these opinion pieces were written as a response to newspaper editorials. The power of argumentative discourse, the interpretation and construction of reality on 'dialogue' pages in the press is certainly worth exploring from many angles. This study focused on the voice of the newspaper segment of public debate, specifically editorials.

This research suggests two other areas that might be particularly instructive to follow up. Firstly, the issue of journalistic practice can be further diversified into reporting and editorial practice, and 'reporting' practice into political, science,

environmental, business, and health reporting. Although an investigation of the general characteristics of newspaper journalistic practice – its formation, existence and consequences – does not require such specification, more detailed research on particular segments of the newsroom would offer useful material for comparing and discussing the influence of journalistic sub-cultures on the development of the norm and, through the norm, on public discussion about issues of community concern. Secondly, as noted in Chapter 4, the analysis of 'news' as a journalistic form can be further divided into a comparison of trends in hard news, news reports, interviews, and features (as 'news' forms) and commentaries, columns, opinion pieces and editorials (as 'opinion ' form). Such detailed analyses might be of practical use for the news media, not only for discussion about everyday practice but in the development of more precise professional guidelines for the future. Such a study would also offer substantive understanding of the workings of the press that could lead to generating new theories.

The need to conceptualize professional practice can be identified in the relationship between journalism and public relations. The power of press releases in presenting the issues in the public domain, issued by political parties, research institutes, and companies still waits to be investigated comprehensively. The process of the well-packaged media delivery, related to the rise of professional public relations, plays a progressively important role in the news process, with significant consequences for the autonomy of the journalistic field. This thesis has shown that the war of press releases in the public debate about genetic engineering became a substitute for investigation and comprehensive discussion of the issue. Although most journalists interviewed in this study downplayed the use of press releases in their coverage, none of them denied the so-called factuality of the release as a document that states a position on the issue. The objectification of the dialogue between politicians and scientists, scientists and environmentalists, economists and government officials into a 'dialogue of quotes' between their public relations representatives is a reflection of the increasing power of public relations. Journalists' reluctance to admit how heavy the reliance on press releases is, indicates the scope of the current change. This study focused on the issue of press releases only in relation to the field of journalism. Equally interesting would be a comparative study of news articles and

press releases as well as a more detailed analysis of the particular components of press releases that make them suitable for newspaper use. It would, for example, be worth exploring the life of a press release – from its creation in one field to its use in other fields. For instance, one could track both the journalist's use of a press release in a news text (partly done with the news story *Trade fears for GM labels* in Chapter 5) and a press release's interpretation in another text such as parliamentary debates. This would provide a ground for the comparative analysis of the influence of public relations on media and politics as arenas for public debate.

Letters to the editor, excluded from this study as a 'non-journalistic' form, are also worth investigating. These texts are part of newspaper discourse and suitable for further investigation of the concept of 'common sense' and its relation to news media. The central position of the concept of 'common sense' in journalism, similar to the place of 'consensus' in political life, indicates that dissemination of information is more complex than the early mass media scholars assumed. This study presented the internal components of the journalistic field that directly correspond with the informative and argumentative function of the press and leavefor future studies the discussion of audience or responses coming from other social fields.

8.6 Summary

The academic debate on contemporary journalism flourishes around its interactions with other fields and questions of growing economic pressures, the globalisation of media industries, the influence of technological changes on journalistic protocols, audience apathy, and the pessimism found among journalism professionals. The central theme in these discussions, identified in this thesis too, is the question of the future of journalism in a rapidly changing world. The blurring boundaries between the agents of mediated reality, journalists, public relations and readers, were highlighted in the *The state of the news media report 2005* as a weakening of the profession as a civil institution: "What was called journalism is only one part of the mix, and its role as intermediary and verifier, like the roles of other civic institutions, is weakening" (*The state of the news*

media report 2005). Journalism certainly does not have the uncontested centrality in the public sphere it once had (Hallin 2006), but what does it have and where does it stand in relation to society?

This thesis argues that the question of the future of journalism cannot be addressed if there is no answer to the question of what is the present of journalism. The preceding chapters have focused on the norm of objectivity, believing that the norm, written or unwritten, is vital for understanding the 'invisible structures' that define the relationship between journalism and society. The study's investigation of the norm of objectivity as a method, an account and an attitude is offered in a firm belief that it might work as a robust framework for discussing the practice of journalism. Looking at journalism as an 'independent' variable in the constitution of meanings in the public domain means to look at its practice both as a part of news culture and a constitutive element of the journalistic field. It is the practice that reveals the logic of the journalistic field, its influence on the news text as the product of the field and its interactions with other social fields.

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Interviews

Alan Samson, interview, 1 February 2005

Gavin Ellis, online interview, 16 February 2005

Tim Pankhurst, online interview 22 March 2005

Margie Comrie, online interview, 17 April 2005

Christine Langdon, online interview, 10 May 2005

APENDIX 1.

Publications of thesis material

Journal articles

Rupar, V.(Forthcoming) Newspaper's production of common sense: The "greenie madness" or why should we read editorials? *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, London: Sage Publications.

Rupar, V. (2006) Reflections on journalism and objectivity: An episode, ideal or obstacle?" *The New Zealand Journal of Media Studies,* Vol.9 No.2, available at http://www.nzmediastudies.org.nz/issues.php?issue=2&title=Volume+9 (ISSN 1173-0811).

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Rupar, V. (2002). Keeping our options closed: The dominance of the conflict story-telling frame in media coverage of the Royal Commission's Report on Genetic Modification in New Zealand. *Political Science 54*(2), 59-67. School of History, Political Science and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington in association with the New Zealand Political Studies Association.

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Rupar, V**. (**2005). How did you find that out? The transparency of the newsgathering process and a meaning of news: a case study" (earlier version). The *3rd Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities*, Honolulu, Conference proceedings CD-rom.

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APPENDIX 2.

Survey

The research question regarding which journalistic norms determine the coverage of an important issue such as GE in the public domain was addressed by using the survey method. A questionnaire, with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the survey, was sent to 54 journalists and columnists whose names were identified in the bylines of articles relating to GE. I also enclosed a pre-paid envelope in order to save respondents' time and money when returning the questionnaire. Despite two email reminders (sent after a month, and then two months from the initial contact), only 14 questionnaires were returned. The response rate was 26 percent.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire for the study entitled: *Media coverage of the environment: The influence of journalistic professional norms on the public debate on genetic engineering in New Zealand*

Name of researcher: Verica Rupar

Background: This research seeks to examine the socio-political dimensions of journalism, namely, the role of the press in society and the relationship between media and environment. The analysis is focused on conventions of news presentation and their influence on the character of the story that emerges with specific reference to media coverage of genetic engineering.

The questions listed below draw on surveys conducted by: The Pew Center for Civic Journalism, Project for Excellence in Journalism, and Armin Scholl and Siegfried Weischenberg's study on Autonomy in Journalism.

The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. When completed, please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to post the survey back to me.

1. What is the most important role your newspaper plays in the community:
    - news explainer, providing knowledge
    - news breaker, getting the story first
    - investigative watchdog
    - catalyst for community conversion
    - community steward
    - disseminator of just the facts
    - other

2. What percentage of your news gathering is done by phone?
    - 0-19
    - 20-39

- 40-59
- 60-79
- 80-100

3. What percentage of your news gathering is done by email?
    - 0-19
    - 20-39
    - 40-59
    - 60-79
    - 80-100

4. What percentage of your newsgathering is done in the field?
    - 0-19
    - 20-39
    - 40-59
    - 60-79
    - 80-100
5. What percentage of your newsgathering is initiated by press release?
    - 0-19
    - 20-39
    - 40-59
    - 60-79
    - 80-100

6. Do you believe it is desirable to ascertain what is on the minds of your readers?
    - yes
    - no

7. Do you use that information (q6) to help shape your news coverage?
    - yes
    - no

8. Does your newspaper use polls to help spot trends important to your news coverage?
    - yes
    - no

9. Do you think that attempting to engage the public on hot topics is a proper role for the newspaper?
    - yes
    - no

10. Have you convened conversations about the GE issue outside the newsroom?
    - yes
    - no

11. Should a newspaper have broader community role beyond printing the news?
    - yes
    - no

12. If yes, explain?
    - define agenda/ be opinion leader
    - be a community leader/ good corporate citizen
    - open/facilitate discussion of issues
    - catalyst for change/seek solutions
    - as a member of community contribute staff/monetary resources
    - encourage community building
    - educate/explain complex issues
    - watchdog/seek truth
    - other

13. Does your newspaper require inclusion of possible solutions into a stories?
    - always
    - most times
    - sometimes
    - never

14. Do you make a conscious effort to ensure that all possible stakeholders are represented in your stories?
    - always
    - most times
    - sometimes
    - never

15. What frames have you found useful from writing the GE story?
    - Impact on people/Stakeholders/Community
    - Important issues
    - Problem identification and solutions
    - Community needs/Concerns
    - Conflict is a good frame
    - Explanatory/Historical/How we got here
    - Trends/Change
    - Outstanding Individuals
    - Other
    - Storytelling/Narrative approach
    - Connection to broader issues

16. What core competencies do you most value in hiring today's reporters and editors?
    - Writing/Grammar skills
    - No change in skills desired
    - Intelligence/Ability to think critically/Problem solver
    - Attitude/Dedication to journalism/Enthusiasm
    - Ability to execute enterprise/Initiative/ Aggressiveness/Curiosity

- Reporting skills
- Accuracy/Fairness
- Other
- Broad knowledge/Diverse background
- People skills
- Community awareness/Understanding
- Verbal skills
- Computer/Internet literacy
- Able to learn/Adaptable
- Experience
- Investigative/Research skills
- Ethics/Integrity
- Creative/Go beyond obvious
- Healthy scepticism

17. Are you satisfied with your newsroom's level of interactivity with readers?
    - yes
    - no

18. For the future, do you believe the health of the newspaper business depends on:
    - more interactivity with the readers
    - less interactivity with the readers
    - the same as now

19. Do you agree that the journalists should be independent of management:
    - strongly agree
    - agree
    - neutral
    - disagree
    - strongly disagree

20. Which aspect of the GE story is the most important:
    - economy
    - health
    - environment
    - science
    - politics

21. How would you assess parliamentary parties' press releases in general?
    - information in press release is reliable
    - press-releases are well prepared
    - there are too many press releases
    - press releases tempt to uncritical reporting

22. How would you assess Government's press releases on GE?
    - information in press release is reliable

- press-releases are well prepared
- there are too many press releases
- press releases tempt to uncritical reporting

23. How would you assess Green Party's press releases on GE?
    - information in press release is reliable
    - press-releases are well prepared
    - there are too many press releases
    - press releases tempt to uncritical reporting

24. Do you personally agree with Royal Commission's Report on GE – Recommendations?
    - yes
    - no

APPENDIX 3.

Content analysis coding schedule

CODE	*Herald*	*Press*	*Dominion*	TOTAL
1. JOURNALISTIC FORM				
JOURNALISTIC FORM: News				
JOURNALISTIC FORM: Opinion				
2. SOURCE				
SOURCE: Government				
SOURCE: Green Party				
SOURCE: Maori				
SOURCE: Science				
SOURCE: Business				
SOURCE: Organic farmers				
SOURCE: Federated Farmers				
SOURCE: Environmental groups				
SOURCE: Life Sciences Network				
SOURCE: Royal Commission				
SOURCE: Other				
3. NEWSGATHERING				
NEWSGATHERING: Explained				
NEWSGATHERING: Not explained				
4. STORY TELLING FRAME				
STORY TELLING FRAME: Problem identification and solutions				
STORY TELLING FRAME: Conflict story telling frame				
STORY TELLING FRAME: Connection to broader issues				
5. CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME				
CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME: Politics				
CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME: Economy				
CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME: Health				
CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME: Environment				
CONNECTION TO BROADER ISSUES FRAME: Other				