This is the published version:

Hirst, Martin 2012, The cultural politics of journalism: Quotidian intellectuals and the power of media capital, in Scooped: the politics and power of journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand, AUT Media, Auckland, NZ, pp.48-64.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30041250

Copyright: 2012, AUT Media.
CHAPTER 2:
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF JOURNALISM:
QUOTIDIAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE POWER OF MEDIA CAPITAL

Martin Hirst

If journalists exercise some power of influence and persuasion in public interest discourse, from where it is derived? What is the source of legitimacy that allows journalists to exercise power in the public sphere?

Two sources suggest themselves: the first is the apparent professionalism of journalists as a category of intellectual labour. This source is derived from notions of a Fourth Estate model of journalism and rests on the principle that journalists act on behalf of the public interest. The second source is less direct and relies on the economic and social power of capital commonly expressed as the power derived from ownership and control of media resources. What unites these two aspects of the news media is the increasingly visible contradiction between journalism as a public service and the news media's status as a business. This chapter argues that the perceived power of journalists to act on behalf of the public is limited and controlled by the more rigorous power of media capital. Consequently the power of journalists is deflected into safe areas of what Daniel Hallin (1989) calls “acceptable consensus” and “legitimate controversy”. Any challenge to this codification of power is seen as ‘deviant’ by capital and resisted as a challenge to its rule.

In the second half of the chapter these issues are dealt with in relation to conceptualising journalists’ class place in the generalised system of commodity production – the capitalist mode of production (CMP).

This is an argument that does not focus on the particular conditions in New Zealand; nor does it attempt a full account of the position of freelance journalists or the various forms of alternative journalism. A few concluding comments will address these issues in relation to the political economy schema developed here. I am using the term schema to describe a theoretical modelling of the matrix of social forces and power dynamics that construct a class place for journalists in the social relations of news production. It is an analytical model operating at the level of the mode of production and social formation (Poulantzas, 1978a, 1978b).

The first section deals with what I describe as the public intellectual role of journalists. The news media is seen as acting on behalf of the public interest and it is this agency role that legitimises journalists’ power to hold public figures

---

1 I am using ‘media capital’ to represent the economic power of capital in this context – and in the political economy sense that it is a particular form of capital: investment in the news and entertainment industry.
to account, to question and examine public affairs. Journalists are seen to be working for the public interest, holding the other branches, or estates of the public sphere, responsible. Of course this also establishes another set of power relationships: those between the journalists, their editors and the people who hold the real power in society – the captains of industry, senior politicians, corporate lobby groups, influential ‘think tanks’ or figures in public life. It is in this context that we can talk of journalists being members of that broad group, which often denies its own existence: the public intellectuals.

Section two critiques the idea of journalist as public intellectual by examining the technical and social divisions of mental work in the newsroom. This approach situates journalists in the social relations of news production using a similar schematic to that set out in Classes in Contemporary Capitalism in the early 1970s by the Marxist thinker Nicos Poulantzas (1978a). In general my argument is that while journalists play an important role in the public sphere, as intellectuals of everyday life, their power is circumscribed and directed by their conflicted relationship with media capital. In the second half of the chapter, this is described in terms of class location and class position to indicate that newsworkers occupy contradictory places within the class structure of contemporary capitalism.

**Journalist as the everyday intellectual**

The news media is an institution that helps to sustain the everyday intellectual life of a society. In one sense, journalism is a key social force for the popularisation and dissemination of ideas and journalists, broadly speaking, can be described as the quotidian intellectuals who provide the public with a means of understanding the world around them. However, in another sense, journalists often play a key role in circumscribing the range of ideas discussed within the ‘normal’ parameters of public discourse. Put another way, journalists’ intellectual labour helps build a ‘common sense’, or shared worldview based on broadly accepted normative values, but, at the same time, it also subtly reinforces the ‘hegemonic’ or dominating ideological ideas promoting class harmony under the benign rule of capital (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Forgacs, 2000 [1988]; Morton, 2007). This is not to suggest that the shared worldview is necessarily clear, correct, or the only one available, but it does – to some extent – become hegemonic; in the public sphere it typically overpowers, drowns out, ridicules and attacks, or simply ignores, oppositional or counter-hegemonic argument.

It is commonplace that journalists and the news media play a gatekeeping role; perhaps not telling us what to think, but certainly providing strong indicators of what to think about and how to go about thinking about these things. So, it is obvious that journalists do think about things – in fact, they are
engaged in a form of mental labour (Poulantzas, 1978a; Sparks, 2006). The
thinking work of journalists is then presented as a series of factual accounts
and opinion-inflected analyses of the world around us and, because the power
of journalism is legitimised by its supposed public interest and professional
motivations, it becomes a guide to social action. While not perhaps on the same
publicly recognised level as intellectuals such as scientists, theologians, eminent
scholars and literary figures, journalists deserve to be considered among the
ranks of public intellectuals, and in many accounts that describe the history of
public life they are accorded that position. In the New Zealand context journalists
are included in the cast of public intellectuals discussed by Laurence Simmons
as those “who provide a bridge between specialist areas of knowledge and the
general public” (2007, p. 10). The place of journalists as public intellectuals is
implicit too in the title of Simmons’ book, Speaking Truth to Power. At the same
time, many New Zealand reporters and editors shy away from the description
as intellectuals; journalists and ex-journos of a certain age often proclaim their
disdain for ‘pointy-head’ ideas and personalities.

Thomas Bender (1997) suggests that the Kuhnian sociology of scientific
revolution might help explain the history of public intellectuals in the 20th century.
Scientific work was “structured and validated” by self-selecting communities
of scientists, inculcated into the methodology and social practices of their field.
Scientists operate within “highly organised disciplines” that are “working in the
case of paradigms” (p. xiii). Bender realised that a similar structuration of
field could be applied to public intellectuals, particularly if one were to look at
intellectuals in relation to the institutions that gave their work social status and
meaning. Bender’s focus is on academics as intellectuals with their own social
and cultural paradigms and institutions. Despite the circumscribed scope of
journalists’ autonomy compared to academics, it is nonetheless feasible and
fruitful to examine the field of journalism in a similar way within the cultural
paradigms and institutions of news production (Benson, 2006; Bourdieu, 1998).

The intellectual work of journalists occurs within a range of institutional
settings particular to the news business that are in tension and potential conflict
with each other. The first is the institution of the newsroom; in this space
the journalistic ideology of serving ‘public interest’ is one of the determining
cultural practices. The second setting is the journalistic enterprise – often
today associated with privately-owned or semi state-managed media capital,
including entertainment, broadcasting, publishing and data-mining enterprise
– where the dominant cultural practices are over-determined by the economic
structuration of commodity production (for example see Benson & Neveu, 2005;
Bourdieu, 1979, 1998, 2005). A third setting is the institutional relationships
that journalism has with other fields, in particular other areas of intellectual
and mental labour (technology, law, ethics, public administration, managerial
power). It is the power differentials between the newsroom, capital embodied in the media enterprise and structural relations between fields that determines how journalists 'read' or 'intuit' their position within a journalistic field that, as Bourdieu notes, is heavily impacted by market forces. What is vitally important in Bourdieu's analysis is the idea that journalism has its own social force that, in a sense, pushes back at the external world. This sense of agency is also an essential element of any political economy discourse around power in and around the news production process.

As social actors, journalists can help define and direct the wider public discourse about politics and other social phenomena within a relationship of 'symbolic domination' of, or conversely symbolic subordination to, other fields (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). Within the field, individual journalists have agency; that is, they can act, singularly or in concert, in ways which can either conserve or transform the "relations of forces that is constitutive of the field" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). In other words, the actions of journalists within the field help to define and direct the motion of shifting power relations that are expressed as the taken-for-granted ideological "doxa" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). Throughout social life, this common sense system of beliefs actually reflects and refracts "the opposition between the dominant and the dominated" social classes and is "inscribed in the division of labour" (Bourdieu, 1979). These insights become increasingly important when we move to locating journalists within the fractured class relations of late-monopoly capitalism.

According to Bourdieu, any particular field is defined by "its own laws", its position relative to "the world at large" and its dialectical relationship ("attractions and repulsions to which it is subject") with other fields, such as the economic or legal system, education, religion, social manners, the arts and literature. Each field - art, law, literature, politics, journalism, etc - has a level of independence from other fields and the wider social formation. This is a concept familiar in materialist sociology; the 'relative autonomy' allocated to various social actors, social forces and fields, and defined by Bourdieu (2005, p. 33) as the field or individual's "own law of functioning, without being completely independent of external laws". For Bourdieu the relative autonomy of this cultural matrix is as important as economics - market forces - in explaining what journalism is and does and what its greater social impacts are. However, it is the constant pressure of market forces pushing against journalism's democratic ideals, culture and practices that structures the power relations - the "force field" - of the "social space" that is news reporting (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 40). It is the tension between the economic and the symbolic weight of journalism - the dialectic embrace between the journalistic scoop and the profitability of a news brand: "Economic competition between networks or newspapers ... takes place concretely in the form of a contest between journalists" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 41).
Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ is perhaps most easily understood as another word for an individual’s lived experience of ideology, but with the addition of a sense of doing, or agency: “an embodied sense of the world and one’s place within it – a tacit feel for the game” (Zavisca & Sallaz, 2008, p. 7). Further, ‘habitus’ also involves the active construction of meaning and ideology by those who are living within it: “an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression” (Bourdieu, 1979). Atton and Hamilton paraphrase it as the “personal social history and context” (2008, p. 131) of individuals within a field structured by the matrix of operational social forces. For Bourdieu, and for political economy, it is the economic which “most directly express the division of labour (between the classes, the age groups and the sexes) or the division of the work of domination”. Journalists participate in the “work of domination” and also “make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world” (Bourdieu, 1979) which means their intellectual labour has a dominant ideological function.

Bourdieu argues that journalism is a low-autonomy field in that it is subject to both political and economic forces operating externally; but perhaps paradoxically, the journalistic field also has an ability to “more and more” impose itself on other fields of cultural production. It does so also in contradictory ways: on the one hand journalism is the “critical tool” of democratic discourse; on the other, it is a “relay of the structure of oppression” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 42). One explanation for this dialectic – one amplified by a Marxist reading of Bourdieu – is that ideological or cultural-political contradictions within the field are intensified by economic conditions. There are two aspects to this in the present historical moment: the precarious financial position of the mainstream news media and the pressure exerted from advertising, coupled with the “current situation of precarious employment” which, within individual journalists, produces “constraint and censorship” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 43).

Bourdieu suggests that the difficult employment regime in the journalistic field – and it has intensified since Bourdieu’s work as published – is the result of two tendencies endemic to the capitalist cycle of production: over-consumption and under-production. In this case Bourdieu (2005) is referring to the cultural economy when he mentions “widespread under-employment within the intellectual professions” and “overproduction of university graduates”, both of which contribute to a “reserve army” of intellectual workers. It can be suggested that this underemployment of intellectual labour is a driver of the phenomena of blogging, user-generated content (UGC), amateur reporting and alternative journalism that, in their own way, have also come to bedevil the field of journalism as yet another external threat to the doxa of professional autonomy. In the second section we turn to examining how the power and capacity of journalists to articulate a public intellectual identity is compromised.
and deflected by the stronger power of capital as manifest in its control over the division of labour. On this basis it is possible to outline a schema for re-assessing the status of journalists as public intellectuals on the basis of their class place in the social relations that structure the news production process.

**Journalism, journalists and class**

The political economy tradition represents the capitalist media as one of the "main mechanisms" of class control and "propaganda" (Sparks, 2006, p. 111), but for critical scholars this is not enough. Sparks argues that a democratic-popular account must explain the news media's role in "the system of class rule" and the "apparent anomalies" of the few dissident voices that are allowed (p. 113). Sparks reminds us that, when looking at journalism in this context, it is useful to remember that the news media operates to promote the interests of the capitalist class to an audience, the bulk of which is actually working class or "middle class". Reporters and editors themselves are broadly part of this middle class strata, even though in their potential role as public intellectuals, this is not always clear or apparent even to journalists themselves. Journalists are often described as seeking the respectability of professional standing and adhering to supposed norms of objectivity, fairness and balance (Hirst & Patching, 2007). It is on this basis that many sociological accounts lump newsworkers into the amorphous 'middle class' which is also divided further along 'professional', 'managerial' and 'white-collar' lines, each with its own "political allegiances" (Budd, 1970).

Kaul (1986, p. 52) notes that an ideological adherence to professionalism is one cultural-political outcome of the class struggle within journalism and rightly suggests it is an expression of the values of social capital aimed at "accommodating [newsworkers'] status ambitions while subverting their economic claims" that "remain disputed" (p. 48). Sparks also argues that there is potential for class conflict within the social relations of news production "both over pay and conditions and much wider issues such as editorial content" (p. 125). Thus, to grasp the relations of power that operate in the news media it is important to first establish the class nature of journalism as a set of work practices with technical, mechanical (technological), economic (labour value) and social (domination-subordination) characteristics (Bourdieu, 1979; Mosco, 1996). Placing journalists initially in the class space of a "new middle class" of "salaried managers and professionals" (Burriss, 1980, p. 17) is a useful place to start as it associates them with the mental labour of others in this strata; for example, teachers, mid-level managers, engineers and salaried professionals in law, public administration, education, health and the sciences.

Journalists' economic and ideological relationships with the news media and media capital are further complicated by the commodity-form that news
takes. As an agent of the collective worker or “social labour” (Hope, 2011, p. 107) involved in the news production process, journalists are also buffeted by economic and social pressures linked to their role in the social relations of news production (Hirst, 2001, 2003, 2010).

Journalists and news workers are working actors in the field of news practice that is itself structured by the relations of generalised commodity production: the contradictory and antagonistic relations between capital and labour over the division of value, wealth and power (Ornebring, 2010). Much of contemporary Marxism accepts that classes are defined “principally but not exclusively by their place in the production process: ie in the economic sphere” (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 14). This means that the role of the labourer in the production process, in the generation of value and return on capital invested in the enterprise, plays the principal part in determining the attributes of class, but it is not, by itself, sufficient. Political and ideological relations also form part of the matrix of social forces that impact on class attributes. It is the “mutual constitution” (Mosco, 2004) of the economic relations in contradictory combination with the ideological and political that animates the social relations of production.

The second important element in this mutual constitution of social forces is the role of individual and collective agency. Despite the routine suppression of class tensions, for social actors in a class society there is no escaping the class struggle. The formation of class attributes is “one in the same process both class contradictions and class struggle” (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 14). At the centre of these social forces is the division of labour. In this respect, Burris (1980, p. 19) suggests the class location of the new middle class retains a “common position” with labour in its general commodity form based on non-ownership of capital (subordination in property relations) and the “alienation” of exploited labour. However, within this stratum there are further hierarchical divisions of labour defined by degrees of managerial control of the enterprise, levels of autonomy and control over the 'exercise' of your own labour, and levels of control over the labour of others.

These same social relations and contradictions also structure class locations within the newsroom as an important field of "cultural production" where differentiations in the division of social labour reflect the “fundamental contradictions” in the social order “between the dominant and the dominated” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 3). To a large degree journalists retain aspects of a common economic class position with the working class, but ideological and cultural-political dimensions of the labour process (issues of power, control, subordination and domination) also play a role in the social 'structuration' of the middle class that separates it from the working class ideologically.

These "regional structures" (Poulantzas, 1978b, p. 13) of the mode of production correspond to the "economic, political, ideological and theoretical
instances" or expressions of the dialectic (the class struggle and balance of class forces) both within the economic relations of production and the social-cultural superstructure. This series of contradictions is expressed in what Poulantzas calls "class places". There are two spaces: the class location of the subject/actor and the class position. Location corresponds to the place in the economic relations and position to a more subjective place in relation to the balance of ideological and political social forces (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 15). When we come to examine the class status of journalists this distinction becomes important as an expression of the various divisions of social labour - technical, managerial, ideological, dominant or subordinate. In this materialist interpolation, the 'field' of journalistic practice is articulated within the social relations of news production, determined in the last instance by the economic. It also situated in dialectical proximity to and in struggle with the ideologically-fractured fields of science (including technology and theory), culture, politics, economics, the arts, literary production, etc. In other words, this schema clearly situates journalism as intellectual or mental labour expressed as social practices in the field and on the broader terrain of social (political and ideological) struggle. It involves examining the allocation, distribution and relative strength of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic values of cultural and symbolic capital, common sense and knowledge.

Poulantzas lays out a helpful schematic that establishes the parameters of the class struggle and the balance of class forces in relation to these sub-regions of ideology, politics and economics that creates a framework for analysing "those cases where a distance arises between the structural determination of classes [economic class location] and the class positions [of the social actor] in the conjuncture" (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 15). For journalists as a social grouping their economic location may well be that of workers (social labour), but their class position (their habitus and their conformity to the norms of doxa) may diverge from this because of the relatively important role of ideological and cultural-political practices in the journalism field. A concrete and immutable location in the relations of production cannot, therefore, be automatically ascribed to journalists based only on their economic status as wage labour. For instance, while Sparks (2006, p. 124) argues that for some news workers their proletarian status is obvious—blue collar workers in the manufacturing side of the business, particularly printers—it is not so clear cut for some categories of journalists, particularly if they are independent producers—freelancers—who have a totally different economic relationship to the news industry.

Sparks (2006, p.125) asserts that most journalists are "poorly-paid wageworkers" who we should regard as "white collar", undertaking "routine tasks", or "more junior writers". But it is perhaps not that simple. To understand the class location and class position of journalists it is necessary to interrogate
The matrix of social relations and dialectical movement (contradictions in motion) that create the complex “social and technical” divisions of labour that occur in the news production process (Sparks, 2006, p. 123). This can be usefully done by reference to Poulantzas’ schema of structural determinants that define the “social division of labour, social class, fractions, strata and categories” that make up “class places”. These are relations of ideological domination and subordination, relations of political hegemony and the economic relations of exploitation and economic alienation (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 15).

The division of labour in news production

The struggle over the rate of exploitation or ‘productivity’, and the total value pool of accumulated economic capital relies on increasing specialisation and the division of labour to maintain control and to squeeze surplus value out of the production process. The constant separation and reintegration of technical skills of production with the craft skills of reporting at various times is an example of the division of labour being used to increase productivity in the news-making process (Liu, 2006; Ornebring, 2010). The last big battle over such divisions was in the 1980s, Rupert Murdoch’s ruthless smashing of the print unions at Wapping in 1986 the purest example.

The shifting technical and social divisions of labour within the newsroom and the broad strata of what Poulantzas calls the “new middle class” (NMC) can be assessed as one aspect of the “recomposition” of social labour in response to the dialectical pressures of accumulation and competition (Fieldes, 1996, p. 25). This process includes the growth of so-called ‘white collar’ and ‘professional’ categories, including a journalistic ‘middle class’. This is a category of social labour which self-identifies with a perceived social status “that cuts across blue- and white-collar occupational divisions” (Fieldes, 1996, p. 27). This represents a class position based on a subjective ideological “ambiguity about class” (Lee & Turner, 1996, p. 22). The new middle class also appears socially as a series of “intermediate positions” defined by “similarities” in lifestyle, income, outlook, education and “horizontal mobility” (Burriss, 1980, p. 19). But, more than this, in terms of class location within the relations of production, the NMC represents a “crystallisation of social and political forces” expressed in both the “technical” and “social” division of labour (Burriss, 1980, p. 20). The technical division of labour relates to various “occupations” (job descriptions) and the social division creates the “structure of class relations” (Burriss, 1980, p. 21).

Dealing with the mental (intellectual) labour of news workers inhabiting the contradictory class locations (the technical division of labour) and class positions (the social division of labour) requires us to understand how these divisions have impacted historically on the structuration of the cadre of journalists and
ancillary news industry employees. Burris provides a number of key points that outline a schematic for analysis of differentiation and the division of labour among occupations within the category of social labour described as the new middle class:

- the division of labour is driven by the needs of capital accumulation, expressed as "greater productivity and efficiency" of labour power (p. 20);
- social capital continually reorganises both occupations and social relations of production to impose strict "work discipline" on labour power;
- differentiation of both occupation and social relations is a product of "protracted struggle" over "control of the labour process";
- differentiation is reflected in an "inflation of educational prequisites for employment" in the category of mental or intellectual labour (p. 20).

It is not hard to see how all of these tendencies are apparent in journalism and news production. New Zealand examples are also plentiful:

- the closing, or shrinkage of national news agencies, such as the New Zealand Press Association (Chisnall & Beswick, 2011);
- abolition of the cadet system in favour of undergraduate and postgraduate training and qualifications (Hirst, 2010; Pearson, 1994; Thomas, 2008);
- new divisions of labour emerging in the establishment of so-called "sub-hubs" that centralise pagination and other technical aspects of news production in high-tech and high-speed turn-around (Tabakoff, 2008).

Productivity gain has always been the motive behind such changes and, in the case of outsourcing journalism education to the tertiary education system, cost-cutting as well. The dialectic in the process is indicated by both a "general dequalification" of the social labour of the NMC and the emergence of a "highly qualified stratum" to manage the extraction of surplus value and the control functions of social capital. For example, locating pagination in a sub-hub creates the conditions for a small group of senior managers to control the workflow and outputs of a large number of sub-editors and to concentrate their working day on repetitive technical tasks that require little more than a grasp of grammar and an eye for detail in design.

These elements together reveal the "mixed and contradictory consequences" of the ongoing re-division of labour within the NMC. There are other important tendencies at work which also inform the dialectic (the struggle over domination and subordination) of the social division of labour. The most obvious of these are gender, ethnic, linguistic and various cultural-political divisions across the subordinate class locations of social labour (Castells, 1999). These subdivisions are particularly important to the division of social labour in the news industry.
The 'feminisation' of the lower ranks of journalism and a well guarded glass ceiling are well documented (Froehlich, 2005; Ross, 2001). Ross points out that the professional ethos of the modern newsroom is "practically and ideologically" organised around a principle of woman as "interloper" in a male domain (2001, p. 535). This may have changed over the last decade as more younger women enter the news workforce, but that in itself reflects the ongoing re-division and recomposition of the workforce. The feminisation of the newsroom may also contribute to the depression of average wages (labour costs) across the industry. Feminisation may also be a response to the changing structure of the news industry, with a focus on lifestyle journalism, niche magazines in the women's market and the pressure on males to work in higher-paid professions such as engineering and law (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003).

On the basis of this analysis it is therefore sensible to conclude that journalists and news workers tend to occupy a proletarian class location within the matrix of social relations of production – they are indeed working class in terms of economic relations. Colin Sparks is in no doubt that ancilliary workers in the news industry – printers, set builders and clerical staff, for instance – are "without question manual proletarians" (2006, p. 124). However, the duality of the news commodity (surplus) value and ideological (use) value creates a contradictory set of attitudes that form the world view of most news workers. The ideological consciousness of journalists is a function of their contradictory economic location within the capitalist production process, as well as their social conditioning as part of an 'insider' political and cultural elite. In the case of journalists, occupying a contradictory class location, the principal economic determinant is their 'in between' status. They are not owners of the means of production, but wage-labourers who perform some of the ideological and political control functions of Capital (Poulantzas, 1978a, p. 209). For this cadre of mental labour, the ideological and the cultural-political often appears to dominate and determine their outlook and their class position.

In this schema the intellectual labour of news workers coupled with the economic forces of news production mean that journalists occupy "an ambiguous position" as "influential actors", but not "full-fledged members" of the "political world" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 4). It is this ambiguous position – or what I call a contradictory class location and consciousness – that concerns us here. In the political economy schema deployed in this chapter, the contradictions in the journalist's class position oscillate around the reporter's political-cultural identity as Bourdieu's "day labourers of everyday life" (p. 7). Economically attached to the working class through similar wages and conditions clauses in contracts, journalists are more inclined to adopt political and cultural ideas more closely aligned with those of the ruling class.
The class position of the everyday intellectual labourer

This chapter has demonstrated a schema that shows there exists a matrix of culturally and ideologically similar relations of production aligned with occupational (technical) divisions of labour within the NMC, of which journalists are a major cohort. News workers perform tasks of mental labour in a production process structured by the generally operating social divisions of labour corresponding to the technical role being performed. A common location in the social relations of production is the basis for an organic link common to occupational groups of mental labour within the CMP. In the case of news workers this aligns them broadly with particular strata of the NMC with which they share common characteristics in the "regional structures" (Poulantzas, 1978a) of cultural-political and ideological class position: “social positions adjusted to their properties” defined by their place in the division of labour (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 1). Bourdieu uses ‘taste’ as the metaphor for this process; for McNair it is “aesthetics and critical judgement” (2006, p. 551). Both formulations address the tendency for cultural-political forces to shape (over-determine) the economic relations. In the concluding comments these formulations are integrated into a discussion of present conditions.

In the current climate – in which the political economy of the future of journalism and the news industry is not settled – there is even greater insecurity for news workers as quotidian intellectuals, the ‘day labourers of everyday life’, in the current period of flux. It is a period defined by the collapse of trust in traditional media; the impact of encroaching technologies that lead to non-professional “produsage” (Bruns, 2005) and failing business models that lead to wage freezes and job cuts in newsrooms across the globe.

It is a process that reflects and reinforces the contradictory class location of newworkers expressed in the commodified form of their changing socio-economic status, in particular the divisions of labour that lead to loss of status, control and income. The proletarianisation of the mental labour and the commodification of journalists’ cultural aspirations combine to undermine ‘social deference’ towards elites and has ‘weakened’ the hegemonic cultural-political power of the capitalist news media. McNair sees this as a technogenic result of “innovation”, the “anarchic impact of [the] information revolution” (2003, p. 550). This subtle shift in the relations of subordination and domination between a NMC cadre in the news labour process finds a cultural expression in the dialectic of the front page; “dissent and intellectual diversity”, “Pilger’s dissident journalism”, “dislocation and disorder”, a “zone of dynamic ideological competition” (McNair, 2003, p. 551). The dynamic conjuncture that McNair is documenting is an expression of the “triadic movement” (Merrill, 1989) in the

59
dialectic of journalism – an ongoing shift in the balance of forces between social labour and social capital in the struggle over cultural-political subordination and domination that corresponds to the battle over the extraction and accumulation of value in the news labour process.

If we look empirically at the ways in which digital production technologies are introduced into and impacting upon the news media, it is possible to trace the outlines of a classic capitalist response to a periodic crisis in profitability. One impact of this economic crisis is that the editorial and gatekeeping function of the newsroom is being diminished; instead, control shifts towards a higher managerial layer of the NMC, more closely aligned with the core interests of Capital. As Nick Davies (2008) and others have demonstrated in recent studies, the remaining news hole is increasingly being filled with cheaply generated and published PR and wire-generated copy. As news websites become aggregators, as newspapers move more into features and lifestyle segmentation, and as broadcast outlets continue to reduce the volume of news on air, there is less and less original and investigative reporting being done. While this is not a uniform or blanket position yet, it is beginning to impact on serious newspapers and public service broadcasters.

The shifting divisions of labour create a situation in which the intellectual value of journalistic work is being diminished and it becomes more like the process work of car assembly or general manufacturing. This makes the creation of a positive intellectual identity increasingly difficult for journalists. Their work is becoming more routinised as it is further divided; for example, fact-checking, subediting and page make-up in the print industry is being outsourced. In many news organisations the first tranche of redundancies has been among subeditors. In New Zealand the outsourcing of subediting at both major national newspaper chains is almost complete. These responses from media capital reflect the strategy adopted in all sectors of the capitalist mode of production in response to the classic crisis conditions of late capitalism. The contradictions that are pushed to the fore in the current situation play themselves out through workplace struggles around the introduction of new technologies and work practices, in pay disputes, and in job negotiations between employers and unions.

A political economy schematic of journalism foregrounds the role of the news media as an important site of the struggle over class power in a capitalist society. Importantly, I situate this struggle in news content (the dialectic of the front page) and also in the newsroom, where it is a battle over the division of labour and the division of value between wages and profits. There is no doubt that such a contest is currently underway and it is expressed in McChesney’s “critical juncture” and McNair’s question about the immediate future of “cultural chaos”. Will this breakdown of traditional forms of social control in the newsroom fuel the “media-led expansion of capitalist modernity across the
globe”, or challenge the “injustices and excesses of globalisation and cultural imperialism”? It will, by necessity, be “all of the above” (McNair, 2006, p. 554).

It is also worth noting a subtle but continuing power shift in the cultural-political relations of news production towards alternative journalism and user-generated news-like content (UGNC) which has (momentarily) weakened the hegemonic discourse of the mainstream media (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Hirst, 2011). Simultaneously, since 2007 an endemic and global crisis of accumulation has affected the fortunes of social capital. Media industries are not immune; they are centrally located within the competitive forces of accumulation and dispossession that characterise global capitalism in crisis (Harman, 2010; Harvey, 2010; McNair, 2006; Thussu, 2007).

In terms of class positions in news work, the confluence of these conditions means that there is the possibility of a cultural-political alliance of intellectual interests, perhaps between journalists and those outside the relations of production that historically shaped the journalistic field – the amateur and ‘citizen’ reporters. At the moment this is a potential, rather than a real tendency, but it is likely to be further fueled by the struggle over commercial control over the division of labour in the newsroom. The drive to increase the productivity (and thus profitability) of media capital involves bringing in more cheap (or free) user-generated content into the commodified ‘clickstream’. This is an expression of capital’s attempt to control the division of labour by harnessing as much social labour as possible in the extraction of value; for example, so-called ‘content farms’ which pay freelancers $5 for a 200-word ‘article’. It is likely (not inevitable) that this will lead to further struggles over economic and political-ideological issues within and around journalism. The dispute between Huffington Post founders Ariana Huffington, Peter Daou and James Boyce over intellectual property rights and a share of income from the site is one example of the potential disputes. None of it seemed to matter when the HuffPo was a gadfly independent blog site, but now that it is aligned with the media giant AOL (after a US$315 million deal), it has become a hot commercial property and ownership rights have become valuable (Cohan, 2011; Rafi Atal, 2011).

There is evidence too that media capital is rapidly establishing a presence in the space of UGNC, attempting to subordinate and commodify “the proliferation of journalistic reportage and commentary” (McNair, 2006, p. 552). CNN’s colonisation of ‘eyewitness’ reporting through the copyrighted format of iReport is one example (CNN Digital, 2010). The purpose, shared with Capital as a whole, is to harness the competitive process of accumulation and to appropriate the labour power of professionals and amateurs alike. The easiest methods present themselves on already existing digital platforms and social media (Hirst, 2011). It is no surprise then that supporters of alternative journalism (Atton, 2003; Atton & Hamilton, 2008) respond with alarm and hostility to this attempted takeover.
In line with Atton and Hamilton's formulation, many techno-positive accounts locate the practices of alternative and citizen journalism in a field structured around principles of cultural-political opposition to orthodoxies of capitalist media systems (Bowman & Willis, 2005; Bruns, 2008). In their 2008 work on alternative news movements, Atton and Hamilton even make the bold claim that alternative journalism is a "radical challenge" to the very epistemology of professional journalism through "overt advocacy and oppositional practices" (p. 135). Situating journalism within the class formation of capitalism is an essential aspect of increasing our understanding of both the mainstream and the alternative forms of journalism that are contending for the future of the field. If we take the social totality of the relations of news production into account, it is possible to establish some confidence in the proposition that there is an alignment of subjective class position between journalists working in the news industry and the growing cadre of non-journalists engaging in 'news-like' activities across all areas of media, but particularly online. The NMC's dissatisfaction with the increasing division of labour and its reaction to "proletarianisation" (Braverman, 1974) has the potential to move its cadre in an oppositional direction – towards alternative and counter-hegemonic forms in world view.

It is prudent to be cautious because this development of cultural-political consciousness is an uneven process and the ideological divisions among the NMC and traditional workers are still strong. Any residual power that journalism may have in relation to its fourth estate role is being rapidly eroded as editorial decision-making is moved from the newsroom into the managerial elites with titles like 'publisher' or 'editorial director'. The relations of subordination and domination are strong opposing forces that further divide social labour in the newsroom. Senior cadre perform the technical and managerial tasks of social labour which enforce the rules of accumulation; editorial leadership groups effectively police the cultural-political boundaries of common sense and direct key messages to appropriate class-differentiated audiences. Class position also aligns with some technical divisions – production, managerial, commercial, editorial – that correspond to the relations of domination and subordination in the labour process. However, despite these economic constraints, it does signal that a common class position in opposition to the hegemony of social capital is possible among amateur and professional intellectuals of the everyday, at least at the cultural-political level of intellect and outlook. Whether such a reconfiguration is possible in the New Zealand context is a whole other question, which I haven't explored in a specific way in this chapter. However, hopefully I have at least articulated a theoretical framework for examining these issues that will resonate with the readers of this book.
REFERENCES


