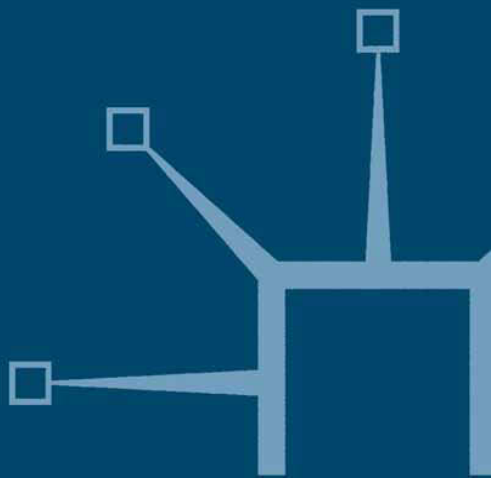


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Impossibilities and Strategies

Steffen Böhm



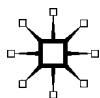
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For my parents, Ingeborg and Matthias

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
Part I Introduction	1
1. Positioning Organization Theory	3
Part II Philosophy	27
2. Dialectics? A Note on the Politics of Thought	29
3. The Political Event: Of Destruction	42
4. The Political Event: Of Deconstruction and Impossibility	52
Part III Organization	69
5. Positioning Organization: The Hegemony of Management Knowledge	71
6. Depositioning Organization: The Politics of Resistance	104
7. Repositioning Organization: Impossibilities of 'The Movement'	138
Part IV Conclusions	177
8. Repositioning Organization Theory	179
<i>Notes</i>	193
<i>References</i>	202
<i>Index</i>	222

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London, May 2005

Part I

Introduction

1

Positioning Organization Theory

Positioning has had a bad press in organization theory in recent times. A position is often regarded as something negative because it involves fixing, placing and locating. In short, taking a position is seen as something limiting. In today's so called postmodern times, a position is there not to be affirmed but deconstructed, dislocated, displaced and dismantled. Positioning is seen as an inherently modern event, and the purpose of the postmodern project, it seems, is to question and go beyond any type of positions that have come to be taken for granted. The 'post' in postmodernism signifies a movement away from the established truths of the modern era – a movement that questions any truths and eras. In fact, movement often seems to be all there is today: organization is seen as a verb rather than a noun; organization is a process that continuously emerges, it is said. In contrast, those who take positions have found it difficult to defend themselves against the growing dominance of this world of movement. This book is about recovering the discourse of positioning and highlighting the necessity for taking position.

For me, the problem of positioning is a political one. As I will argue in this book, positioning is about organizing and emplacing social reality along specific lines. Positioning is about establishing particular relations of power and knowledge and producing subjectivities in a specific social formation of time and space. Positioning is political because it involves a social decision about how society is to be organized. In this book I will point to the shortcomings and dangers of those organization theory discourses that continuously celebrate movement and process – discourses which I call the 'depositioning project.' I will argue that by fetishizing processes of depositioning these organization theory discourses are not able to politically engage with the important questions and challenges faced by today's society and organizations. In this book I will show that by continuously attempting to deposition all positions and denying the possibility of making a decision about how society should be organized the depositioning project is not only theoretically questionable but also politically dangerous. This book, then, is

a call for a renewed interest in positions and processes of positioning, precisely because this involves political and social questions which organization theorists often seem to ignore. This book argues for a politicization of organization theory, which, for me, is not only a significant theoretical contribution but also of urgent practical importance, as the academy struggles for relevance in all spheres of social reality.

Positioning organization

To introduce the problem of positioning, let us start by reflecting on the word 'position' itself. In my view this not only helps us to position 'organization' itself but also position this book in relation to the wider organization theory literature. In German one possible translation for position or positioning is *stellen*, which in turn can be re-translated as to put, to set, to place, to bring forth, to present, to figure. Hence, *stellen* is clearly a positive movement of bringing something into position. It can be seen as a productive movement as it is adding something to a particular space and time, which, in the realm of positivism, makes it subject to prediction, forecast and control. Before I consider the relationship between positioning and organization, let me briefly introduce some aspects of Heidegger's philosophy, which is particularly concerned with the problem of positions and positioning.

In his essay 'The Age of the World Picture' Martin Heidegger (1977b) makes two fundamental claims: first, modernity conquers the world as image; and second, because the world is an image, the human being becomes a subject. For Heidegger, the world-image is not an individual, psychological imagination, but a structured image, or what he calls a *Gebild*. This structured image secures, organizes and articulates itself as a worldview; it emplaces being into a centred subject position. This world-as-image, is the structured perception of what Heidegger calls the *Gestell*, the emplacement of modernity in a definite place. In Heidegger's view, modernity is continuously emplaced by modern technics, a term which must not be reduced to technology. For him, modern technics is a term that does not just allude to the *form* of a particular technology (for example, a power plant; see Heidegger, 1997a) but to the wider processes of economic, cultural and political *formation* of society. Rather than being restricted to a certain technology, technics is a concept that highlights the general *organization* of the social as such. Hence, technics is the ongoing emplacement, or positioning, of the human in relation to the world. What we see of this world is not the world itself but the structured and organized image of this world. Thus, our seeing is based on the way the world is emplaced as the particular organizational regime of modern technics.

According to Sam Weber, this positioning, organizing or emplacing, points to 'the various ways in which everything, human beings included, is

“cornered” (*gestellt*) and set in place’ (1996, p. 72). However, emplacing is not simply a ‘placing of something but the staking out of place as such... A place that has to be staked out is one that cannot stand on its own. It must be defended’ (1996, p. 71–2). An emplacement can never be taken for granted. ‘Places must continually be established, orders continually placed. As emplacement, the goings-on of modern technics thus display a markedly ambivalent character’ (1996, p. 72). What Weber names here ‘goings-on’ is the translation of the German word *Wesen*, which is popularly translated as ‘essence.’ For Weber (1996, p. 62), however, Heidegger is not so much concerned with the absolute origin or essential content of a phenomenon but the way something comes into place and continuously stays in place, which includes, as mentioned above, a continuous defending of that place. The term ‘goings-on’ thus points to the process of emplacing a place, a process which is embattled and contested.

According to Heidegger, positioning is inherently related to the question of organization: the ordering and forming of social relations, the representation of the world, the subjectification of human beings. The word ‘position’ points here to the fact that modern life is, to a large extent, about the attempt of putting ‘things’ and ‘beings’ into a definite and secure place. Notions like home, homeland, nation and family spring to mind here – they are all closely connected to this modern emplacement, this modern form of organizing the social.

Taking Heidegger’s philosophy of positioning as guideline, one could say that a lot of what is done in the name of ‘organization’ in fields such as Organization Studies, Organizational Behaviour, Organizational Development, Organizational Psychology, Sociology of Organization, and Management and Business Studies is restricted to notions of organization as a secure position. Chia, for example, speaks of organization as ‘simple location.’ That is, in his view, what we call ‘organization,’ is usually reified, simply located, or positioned, as it were, as a ‘discrete, bounded, economic-administrative’ (1998b, p. 6) entity. In other words, ‘[t]he noun “organization” is usually taken to refer to...some very specifically constituted formal organizations’ (Parker, 2002a, p. 183–4). It is this formality that characterizes the discourse of organization, or rather organizations. Hence, organization is restricted to the realm of formal entities and institutions where social organization seems always already formed, predetermined and given. In such a view organization is about the administration and maintenance of an ordered, technical world that is characterized by clear divisions of labour, professionalism, bureaucracy and rational bodies that can be placed, measured and represented. As Cooper notes, the ‘normal’ view of organization is thus dominated ‘by a form of knowing that specifies the world in terms of increasingly particularized structures and grids’ (1998, p. 137). It is guided by a ‘principle of simple location to “place” knowledge in knowable (that is, coherent, self-contained) spaces’ (*ibid.*). In such a

view, then, organization is about the clear positioning of 'things' and 'subjects' into a simple, formal, hierarchical and well-bounded location. Thus, organization as simple location, as positioning, is the positive emplacement (see also R. Munro, 2002) of knowledge into a predefined grid; this is the realm of positivism, something I will come back to later in this section.

In this 'normal' view organization is about the administration, or maintenance, of the order of things. Hence, the debate in much of what can be called organization theory is centred on different models of how to organize formal organizations most effectively and efficiently. This is the realm of pragmatism and management, which, as Parker notes (2002a, p. 184), has become the dominant conception of organizing nowadays. For him, out of a wide variety of potential organizational models, 'it seems that the credibility of many aspects of these alternatives is being questioned through the generalized application of managerialism as the one best way' (*ibid.*). Parker argues that management has emerged as a 'generalized technology of control' and produced a 'hegemonic model of organization' (*ibid.*). As Parker argues further, the hegemony of management is not a national, regional or Western phenomenon. On the contrary, in his view, managerialism has become the universal organizational principle. This coincides with Hardt and Negri who argue that an Empire has emerged, which, for them, is a theoretical concept that points to the global, boundary-less organizational regime that rules over the entire civilized world (2000, p. xiv). Thus, the 'hegemonic model of organization,' as Parker calls it, is characterized by a view of organization that cannot be disconnected from managerialism and global capital. One could say that management is the hegemony of organization.

Now, when I here talk about 'hegemony' I broadly refer to Laclau and Mouffe's Gramscian usage of the concept; for them, hegemony points to the 'unity existing in a concrete social formation' (1985, p. 7). This is to say, hegemony can be seen as a concept that highlights the fact that social reality is firmly positioned or emplaced within particular historical formations that traverse the spheres of the economy, state and civil society, and that endure over time and space. In relation to the positioning project of organization, for example, one could say that management describes the particular way organization and organization theory has been positioned or emplaced in relation to the hegemonic discourses of capital, not just within the economic realms of the workplace, but also in the spheres of the state and civil society at large. Capital and management are hegemonic because they continuously 'corner' organization, to use Weber's (1996, p. 72) expression; they set organization into a particular place, a place which is continuously defended. Gramsci also talks about an 'historical bloc' that produces 'not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity' creating a 'universal plane' and thus a hegemonic social relation (1971, pp. 181–2).

As I will show in Chapter 5, in organization theory the hegemony of managerialism is particularly apparent in the field of knowledge management, which has become one of the most popular organization and management discourses over the past decade. Knowledge management is predominantly concerned, one could argue, with positioning individual and organizational knowledge within the restricted realms of management, which is always already connected to the wider 'goings-on' of capital. That is, knowledge management is a particular management technique to further commodify social relations. What is particularly interesting is that business academia and the management world are both equally invested in the knowledge management phenomenon. As academic theory is increasingly pushed to be practically relevant to the business world, knowledge management is regarded as the ideal vehicle to cross the boundaries between theory and practice. It is clear that within such a view knowledge is always already restricted to the hegemonic interests of managerial institutions: knowledge is seen as something that can be commodified and exploited for the reproduction of a particular value system.

What the example of knowledge management also highlights is the fact that the concept of organization is usually reserved for the description of what is going on inside and around managerial institutions, companies and workplaces. That is, organization seems clearly positioned and defined as a formal entity within established structures of modernity and capitalism. As Cooper notes, the academic discipline of organization studies can be seen to be 'almost naturally disposed to expressing itself in structural terms, where structure becomes an end in itself' (1976, p. 1001). Thus, organization is usually taken for granted as the unit of analysis, as an object of study that can be identified, encircled, then grabbed and finally fully exposed to the mechanisms of the academy's 'critique.'

Within such a framework, the role of organizational scientists is to study the structures, forms and institutional processes, as well as the behaviour of people within these organizations, for which they have developed scientific frameworks, theories and concepts. As Burrell poetically notes, '[i]n this they have forced organizational analysis on to a procrustean bed on which it groans and squirms because it is not the right size to fit the cramping framework into which it is being pressed. Yet the forcing goes on.' With such an approach, so he goes on, the subject of organization is made into an object that is pressed 'into an understandable and simplifying framework. This, after all, is what science does.... Science begins by *placing* the perpetually dynamic into a field of stasis' (1997, p. 18, emphasis added). This is echoed by Dale (2000) who links the event of organization to modern disciplines such as medicine which have to anatomize the human body in order to make it subject to study and intervention. In her view, the body of the modern subject is one that is 'under the knife:' it is positioned on a deathbed in order to be dissected and divided. What Dale thus spells

out is that the body's positioning, that is, its positive emplacement in the modern world, is always already connected to its simultaneous death: the body has to be killed in order to be 'positively' recreated as modern subject.

What I have argued in this section so far is that the event of modern organization is inherently connected to the positioning of being in an anatomized, increasingly managerial grid, which literally kills the body in order to construct a structured image of the modern subject. In such a view, organization is a positioning exercise – the military connotations of such a conception of organization are obvious. This is to say, what is usually done in the name of organization, in organization theory and elsewhere, is restricted to an economy of positioning that is committed to 'securely' emplacing things and subjects into formal, managerial, linear, static, hierarchical locations which enable modern organizational phenomena such as positivism, pragmatism, representationalism, institutionalism and managerialism. Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) as well as Burrell and Morgan (1979) – and many authors since then – have argued that this formal and rational view has become the predominant ideology of organization theory. This ideology accepts that organization theory is something that positively posits knowledge within established grids of a scientific-managerial field, which is mainly concerned with 'providing explanations of the status quo' (1979, p. 26).

Today, the critique of positivism seems well established in certain circles of organization theory. One could even maintain that this critique itself has become the dominant discourse, which, in turn, simply assumes the continued dominance of positivism. As Fournier and Grey write: 'the positivism of the mainstream is rarely explicitly argued for and defended (see Donaldson, 1996 for a rare exception). In general, some (often rather weak) version of positivism is simply assumed' (2000, p. 19). In their view, 'positivism' and 'the mainstream' are often treated as imaginary signifiers used by 'critical' researchers to legitimize their work. Having said that, one should not nullify or downplay the danger of positivistic organization theory, which continues to be a dominant orthodoxy (see Baum, 2002). The way 'Donaldson,' for example, has become the scapegoat for many 'critical' scholars and a signifier that one can pick out and rubbish characterizes this danger. Just because Donaldson is one of the (last) few *explicit* defenders of positivism, one should not assume that the field of organization theory at large has fundamentally gone beyond positivism. One could argue that Donaldson continues to be given space in organization theory because the field at large is still positioned along the lines of positivism.

Positivism is usually referred to as epistemology, as a specific way to construct knowledge about the world. For Burrell and Morgan, for example, positivism seeks 'to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 5). However,

taking the philosophy of Heidegger into consideration one could suggest that the project of positioning organization, although very closely related to the specific intellectual discourse of positivism, points to something much broader than positivism. Positioning is not only an epistemology of constructing knowledge. Following Heidegger, one could, instead, argue that it works at the level of the ontological. This is to say that positioning is concerned with the emplacement of modern being and life itself, and not only with the knowledge of such an emplacement. For example, when Burrell and Morgan and other critics argue against positivism, they still produce their critique from within the modern apparatus of positioning. That is, their book, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, can be seen not only as a positioning exercise (they position social and organization theory within four paradigm boxes), but also as a product of modern emplacement, the technics that organizes life and aims to put everything into a formal, hierarchical position (for example, the book is the product of an academic institution). Therefore, when I prefer the terminology of positioning over positivism I mean to suggest that the positioning project of organization does not only have implications on the level of epistemology; instead, positioning points to the ontological dimension of modern organization – it emplaces and organizes social reality itself.

What is important from a Gramscian (1971) perspective is that this ontological positioning and organizing of social reality is hegemonically produced within the realms of the economy, state and civil society. What we refer to as ‘organization’ is historically shaped; it is dominated by the economic spheres of production, bureaucratically controlled by the state and legitimized by civil society. According to Gramsci, all these spheres of modern social reality are aligned, as it were, in an ‘historical bloc’ that produces a hegemonic relation of social organization.

In the language of Foucault this modern form of positioning and organizing is an apparatus, which must be seen as a particular power/knowledge regime that organizes modern social relations from within. Foucault also refers to this organizational regime as discourse, which, for him, is not simply a language but indeed a structuring principle of social reality as such. Discourse, as the structuring apparatus of reality, produces the subject through various disciplinary ‘micro-techniques’; let us think, for example, of those institutional discourses that produce prisoner inmates, hospital patients, school pupils, and asylum seekers. These positioning techniques can take various forms; for example, examining, evaluating, observing and recording. For Foucault, these techniques act as biopower in the sense that they ‘in-form’ subjectivities and social bodies (see Foucault, 2004, p. 239ff).

Hardt and Negri (2000) take up Foucault’s concept of biopower to assert that today these disciplinary ‘machines’ are not confined to

specific institutions anymore but, instead, organize the entirety of life. This does not mean that disciplinary institutions, such as the police, disappear, but that their powers extend far beyond individual institutions to increase their overall pervasiveness and ability to control larger aspects of life: today life itself has become the object of policing (I. Munro, 2002; see also, Rose, 2001). Hardt and Negri thus talk about the coming of a control society that positions all life within the organized networks of Empire. This leads them to claim that 'there is no more outside' of the contemporary emplacement precisely because Empire's biopower positions life itself. Such line of argument suggests again that positioning and emplacing have to be seen as profound ontological, world-producing processes.

This biopower should, however, not be seen as something that organizes life in *totality*. For Foucault, modern relations of power and knowledge are not totalitarian regimes in the sense that there are no holes of resistance against dominant modes of emplacement. Instead, Foucault claims that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (1998, p. 95). Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe argue that 'there is no single underlying principle fixing' mechanism through which the social can be constituted (1985, p. 111). Instead, for them, society is something that is inherently open and characterized by a field of difference. This also implies that the Gramscian term 'hegemony' does not point to totalitarianism; instead, hegemony describes the dominance of an inherently unstable discursive regime. Applying Foucault's term of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe argue that every discourse is characterized by, what they call, a 'field of discursivity,' which is a 'surplus of meaning' that subverts the very discourse it is emplaced in (*ibid.*). This points to the second aspect of hegemony: while, following Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that the concept of hegemony refers to a certain *unity* in particular discursive formations, they also highlight that this unity can only be a *contingency* (1985, p. 65).

Within such a view, then, one could say that the hegemonic positioning forces of modernity can never be all-encompassing; the modern structured image, Heidegger's *Gebild*, can never give us a full picture of reality, as there will always be a shadow in that very image. The forces that seek to fully position or emplace reality will always be accompanied by forces of resistance, subversion or depositioning. In this sense organization can be understood as impossibility. That is, organization is never quite fully accomplished; there are always forces that resist organization and hence render it impossible. Following Parker (2002a, p. 182ff), one could say that the particular positioning of organization does not take account of all the potentials of organizing. For him, the particular emplacement of organization as management describes a limitation and restriction. That is, the apparent unity of dominant discourses, such as capital and management, is always already subverted by a multiplicity of alternative voices of organiza-

tion. Management is thus an embattled phenomenon that needs to be continuously defended against resisting, deposing forces and emplaced in order to reproduce its dominant position within society.

Depositioning organization

Over the past two decades there have been important developments regarding the attempt to broaden the concept of organization and formulate a critique of restricted economies of organization that have been dominating organization theory and other fields of enquiry. Organization and management scholars, whose work has often been described as 'postmodern' or 'critical,' have increasingly been arguing that social reality is not something that is fully organized and neatly locatable within structured grids (for example, Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Chia, 1995; Hancock and Tyler, 2001a; Reed and Hughes, 1992; Hassard and Parker, 1993; and Linstead, 2003). It has been their concern to go beyond restricted notions of organization as a *form* and argue for the conception of organization as a social *formation* process that is characterized by heterogeneous forces of power and knowledge. Rather than being restricted to the effective and efficient management of modern forms of positioning, their work has attempted to develop, what Chia calls, a 'social theory of organization' which does not neglect 'the wider questions of the organizational character of modern social life' (1998b, p. 6). These authors have attempted to 'open the field' of and for organization (Cooper, 1976), which might enable us to imagine what could be called a 'general economy of organization' (Jones and Böhm, 2002) that is not restricted to the management of organizations, but is indeed more interested in organization as a 'basic' social process. Instead of a noun, which points to the managerial and institutional aspects of organizing, organization has increasingly been seen as an ongoing process 'that occurs within the wider "body" of society' (Cooper and Burrell, 1988, p. 106), a process that is characterized by heterogeneous and contested forces of positioning and depositioning, organizing and disorganizing (Cooper, 1990).

What has thus been argued is that there is a need to go beyond restricted notions of the organization of positioning, which include the organization of economic production and prediction, and move towards a 'general economy of organization' that would point to, what Cooper and Burrell (1988, p. 106) call, the 'production of organization.' This notion of a 'production of organization' could be seen as the questioning of the position of organization – it is a dislocation, displacement or depositioning of traditional conceptions of organization. However, what Cooper and Burrell have in mind is not simply an invention of another (economic) logic of organization; it is not another organized territory. Their depositioning of organization does not only question organization as an economic object

but also the presence of words such as 'organization' and 'position' themselves. Depositioning, then, can perhaps be understood as a movement which claims that 'every position is *of itself confounded*' (Derrida, 1987, p. 96, emphasis in original). Derrida calls this movement *différance*, which is a concept that questions the idea of a full presence of phenomena such as 'position,' 'organization' and, instead, sees their meaning to be continuously deferred, postponed in space and time. *Différance* thus points to a certain undecidability over the presence of objects of reality, such as 'position' or 'organization.' *Différance* depositions the basic presence of any position and organization; it puts into doubt and resists the reality of organization that is continuously produced by the 'goings-on' of the modern positioning project.

What has thus been under way in organization theory, at least since Cooper's seminal essay 'The Open Field' (1976), if not before, is a putting into question of the established positions of organization. This questioning has not only been a critique of the restricted economic rationality of dominant forms of organizing, but has indeed generally exposed the precarious and undecidable nature of positions of reality that are taken for granted. One could say that within the realms of the depositioning project established positions of organized reality have been shown to not have a single, unique or fixed place – their representational structures have been turned into liquid flows. The outright positivity of the organization of reality has thus been put into doubt; the presence or position of organization has been exposed to a negative movement of disorganization. What has been questioned are common sense perceptions of organization that seem to be 'unable to recognize the obvious point that every positive – that is, *positioned* – object or event depends for its existence on a negative background that cannot be made obvious' (Cooper, 2001a, p. 336, emphasis in original). Organization has thus been depositionsed; it has been exposed as 'a process of undecidability that pervades all social organization' (Cooper, 1990, p. 182).

Cooper points here to Derrida's concept of 'undecidability' – to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 – which implies that depositioning is not a fixed signifier or something that has clear boundaries; instead, it is a multiplicity that works on a host of different registers. Following this logic, it is clear that my task in this book cannot be to discuss *all* approaches that have been challenging and subverting dominant conceptions of organization – if this were at all possible. If Foucault's claim about the interdependency and simultaneity of power and resistance is true, then forces of positioning and organization are always already accompanied by a multiplicity of forces of resistance. This is also highlighted by Cooper (1990) when he maintains that processes of organization always already depend on processes of disorganization. Within such a view, organization is an inherently undecidable process. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, the concept

of undecidability is used by some organization theorists to emphasize the plurality and relativity of organized reality. For Derrida (1987), however, the notion of undecidability is not a celebration of plurality and relativity (see also Jones, 2003c). Instead, undecidability calls into question the very way one makes decisions, or, rather, how one often does not really make decisions at all, because many so called decisions have already been decided beforehand.

The way a decision about depositioning an established truth can sometimes not be a decision at all, can, perhaps, be briefly illustrated by the following two examples:

In 1969 Peter Drucker, the famous management guru, wrote a book called *The Age of Discontinuity*. He predicted that society would change dramatically in the run up to the millennium. This change, he argued (1969, p. vii–ix), would be characterized by four major discontinuities: (1) new technologies will create new major industries and businesses; (2) the world will become one market, one ‘global shopping centre,’ which will replace traditional national markets; (3) society will be pluralistic and traditional institutions, which over-organize our lives, will be revolted against; and (4) knowledge will become the central capital which will have immense effects on the way the economy and the whole society functions. What Drucker predicts here is a fundamental change in the way the capitalist economy works. In his view, there is a worldwide knowledge economy on the horizon which will be characterized not so much by bureaucratic and hierarchical corporations and public institutions, as by agile entrepreneurs that can flexibly and rapidly apply new technologies and exploit business opportunities. The age of discontinuity Drucker predicts, then, describes capitalism as a global, decentralized and anti-institutional economic system, which he hopes will bring new prosperity to the world.

Twenty-three years after Drucker’s prediction Fukuyama (1992) published a book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. In some ways this book can be seen as the consummation of Drucker’s *The Age of Discontinuity*, as it sees capitalism and democracy to have triumphed on a global scale. Fukuyama writes:

What is emerging victorious...is...the liberal idea. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy, and no universal principle of legitimacy other than the sovereignty of the people. (1992, p. 45)

According to Fukuyama, the triumph of capitalism and the liberal-democratic idea, which became irreversible with the fall of the Berlin Wall and ‘the communist project,’ has led to the end of ideological struggles and therefore the end of history itself. Today, he asserts, ‘we have trouble imagining a world

that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist' (1992, p. 46).

Here we have two related examples of depositioning discourses. Drucker, on one hand, celebrates the innovative character of capitalism that is able to continuously reinvent itself and discontinue its own positionings. In the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) one can say that Drucker describes the deterritorializing, or depositioning, powers of capital; it questions and discontinues established territories of its rule in order to search for new territories to be colonized. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 54) make quite clear, these deterritorializations are immediately reterritorialized, or repositioned, within the specific value system of capital. In this sense, Drucker's age of discontinuity is also one of continuity; the continuity of capitalism and its specific way of organizing social relations. Similarly, Fukuyama's discontinuity of history – because major ideological struggles are supposed to have ended, and capitalism and democracy have triumphed or will soon triumph on a worldwide basis – is also the continuity of a particular liberal idea about how the political economy of society should be organized. Drucker's and Fukuyama's rhetoric of discontinuity and depositioning can thus be seen as the continuation of a particular history.

These examples illustrate how discourses of depositioning are, in fact, continuing a well established hegemonic discourse of capital. Following Derrida, one could say that the decision to deposition and discontinue is not really a decision at all; it appears as a decision, but it is nothing more than the continuation of a discourse that has been decided upon well in advance. Drucker's and Fukuyama's discourses of discontinuity and depositioning are not events of undecidability; instead, they are part of a well positioned hegemony that is anything but questioned by these authors. According to Derrida, undecidability does not mean that one can never make a decision. As Jones (2003c) argues, in Derrida's view, one *must* make a decision, which is to say that one must not only continuously deposition but, indeed, find a position to critique established relations, to critique society. As I will argue in Chapter 4, this decision involves a certain closure, a limiting, of the infinite possibilities that are opened up by discourses of depositioning.

Part of my critique will be that, although many discourses in organization theory are very effective in depositioning established forces of positioning by showing the undecidability of all organized phenomena, very little has been done to reassemble the remaining fragments in order to politically speculate about possibilities of decisions that could, perhaps, reorganize and reposition society. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), such decisions have to involve the question of hegemony, a concept which I will discuss in more detail in the next section as well as Chapter 4. As I have already mentioned, the concept of hegemony points to the view

that there are discourses that produce social relations by traversing the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. That is, although society is 'structurally undecidable' (Laclau, 1995, p. 93), Laclau and Mouffe maintain that there are hegemonic discourses that can be seen as social decisions about how to organize social reality. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 54), one could say that hegemony is possible because forces of deterritorialization are reterritorialized on a level of an abstract signifier. Although reality might be described by a multiplicity of local forms of life and a host of depositioning discourses and deterritorializations, there are forces, according to Deleuze and Guattari, which always already reterritorialize everything. As I will show in Chapter 5, capital is such a hegemonic 'machine,' which – although it makes possible all sorts of deterritorializations – always already reterritorializes these deterritorializations on the level of the specific value system of commodity production.

In Chapter 6 I will argue that there is a tendency for some depositioning discourses to not adequately deal with hegemonic, territorializing forces such as capital and, instead, focus on micro-political processes within the restricted boundaries of companies and other organizations. One could say that organization is often not seen as a wider social process that is inherently linked to the 'goings-on' of the state and the extended realms of civil society (Morgan, 1990). Many depositioning discourses within organization theory, for example, emphasize the social construction of reality within local organizational communities. That is, rather than showing how the local is produced through the complex interactions between the realms of the economy, state and civil society, social constructionists often highlight the multiplicity and plurality of local truths and their contingencies within organizations.

Weick (1979, 1995), for example, emphasizes, what he calls, 'sense-making' processes through which people negotiate their social realities on 'the ground' of organizational communities. For him and other social constructionists, reality is constructed by 'muddling through' micro-organizational problems and renegotiating one's social place at every second. As I will show in Chapter 6, some Foucauldian organizational scholars (I will, for example, discuss Knights' work) also concentrate their analyses on micro-political processes of organization emphasizing the plurality of local truths.

While such analyses can be useful – sometimes they are indeed important political resistances against universalizing discourses within organizations – I will point to some limitations of such depositioning strategies. In my view, such depositioning discourses often fetishize local processes of organizing without showing how organization is a wider social process that involves the realms of the economy, state and civil society. Capital and management must be seen as hegemonic social relations that produce local organization processes. If we want to understand organization processes,

we have to look beyond the local and study the complex interactions and hegemonic links between the economic realms of production, the bureaucratic control mechanisms of the state and the way civil society legitimizes or does not legitimize these processes of organization. Precisely because this hegemonic aspect of social reality construction is not always fully recognized by depositioning discourses I will argue that the emphasis of local processes and plurality can have certain depoliticizing effects. It is for this reason that I will call for the need to take the concept of hegemony seriously, because it is through the understanding of hegemonic links between different realms of social reality that we can imagine different, repositioned organizational futures.

Repositioning organization

As we have seen in the previous section, Derrida's work is often utilized to legitimize various depositioning discourses. However, the following ideas by Derrida on the strategic intent of his way of depositioning are less frequently discussed within the realms of organization theory.

'The time is out of joint.' Derrida uses this phrase from *Hamlet* to introduce his interest in Marx. For him, 'the time is out of joint' because 'a new "world order" seeks to stabilize a new, necessarily new disturbance by installing an unprecedented form of hegemony' (1994, p. 50). 'The time is out of joint. The world is going badly' (1994, p. 77). Are these really Derrida's words, one is tempted to ask? And he repeats: 'The world is going badly, the picture is bleak, one could say almost black' (1994, p. 78). Derrida goes on to repeat these phrases several times, as if he wants to make a point. It seems he wants to make sure that everybody realizes that deconstruction is not some relativistic, idealist method of reading and writing, as is sometimes assumed. Instead, and this is what Derrida practices with *Spectres of Marx*, it is an intervention, which does not shy away from analyzing the politico-economic world and making political judgements about its 'goings-on.'

Why, then, is the 'world going badly' for Derrida? In, what he calls, a 'ten-word telegram' he lists ten areas of urgent concern that, in his view, indicate the problems, contradictions and insufficiencies of the 'new world order.' This 'telegram' (1994, p. 81–4) could be summarized as follows: (1) massive unemployment, underemployment, social inactivity and poverty which national statistics, such as the unemployment rate, often do not calculate anymore; (2) massive exclusion of the homeless, migrants and state-less people from any participation in democratic life; (3) the ruthless economic wars between nation states which control the interpretation and application of international law; (4) the contradictions of the 'free market' discourse, which are often combined with discourses of protectionism; (5) foreign debt and connected mechanisms drive a large proportion of

humanity into despair; (6) the arms industry and the arms trade are fully embedded in the normal 'goings-on' of scientific research, economy and labour; it cannot even be cut back without running risks of social and economic deprivation; (7) the spread of nuclear weapons is maintained by the very countries which say that they want to protect us from them; (8) inter-ethnic wars driven by a primitive conceptual phantasm of community, nation state sovereignty, borders, native soil and blood; (9) the growing powers of that properly capitalist phantom-state which is the mafia on every continent; (10) the limits of international law and institutions that are largely controlled by particular nation states and images of national sovereignty.

This list can, of course, be continued. Although written more than a decade ago, many of Derrida's telegraphic points still hold true, which is not to say that one can and should not contest Derrida's assertions and judgements. However, in the first instance it does not matter so much whether this list represents the problems and antagonisms of this world 'correctly' – Derrida would be the first to say that a list or programme can never fully represent a problem or phenomenon. What interests me here, first of all, is that for Derrida 'things are not OK;' for him, the liberal-democratic consensus that characterizes the language of the 'end of history' cannot be the final word. Derrida's telegram to us, his readers, claims that 'the time is out of joint' precisely because, in his view, this time, 'our' time, this epoch, 'is going badly.'

Derrida's 'telegram' can be seen to be addressed at, what he calls, the 'gospel of politico-economic liberalism,' sung by Fukuyama and others, which relies, in his view, on 'the event of the good news that consists in what has putatively actually happened (what has happened in the last quarter of the century, in particular, the supposed death of Marxism and the supposed realization of the State of liberal democracy)' (1994, p. 62). For Derrida, this 'event of the good news' is a 'gospel' because it preaches a 'trans-historical ideal' (*ibid.*), which is often contradicted by the actual events of capitalist reality. He therefore asserts that 'a thinking of the event is no doubt what is most lacking from such a discourse' (1994, p. 63). In Derrida's view, the 'gospel' of politico-economic liberalism, of the type provided by Fukuyama and Drucker, can only think of an event that delivers 'the good news:' for example, 'the victory of the liberal idea,' 'the end of all ideologies,' 'the end of all struggles,' 'unlimited economic wealth,' and so on. For Derrida, a real political event would look different. Instead of celebrating 'the good news' of the liberal-democratic ideal, his conception of an event would put that very ideal into question (Derrida, 1994, p. 87). Derrida's political event is one that puts into question the celebrated ideals of a given historical order that are taken for granted. It is a questioning of the continuity of 'the good news,' which portrays itself as discontinuity and de-positioning (for example, the end of history, or the age of discontinuity).

There are thus two types of depositioning. The first type is a 'major' discourse of depositioning, to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) terminology. It is a discourse articulated by a dominant regime as it calls for 'the end of history' and 'the age of discontinuity,' which means nothing but the continued positioning of the 'eternal image' of capitalism and the liberal-democratic order. This major discourse immediately positions all language (of depositioning) in relation to the hegemonic content, that is, capital and democratic liberalism. One could also say that every depositioning or deterritorialization is immediately reterritorialized on the strata of an established continuum of history. Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 160), however, this major discourse, or what they refer to as hegemony, is itself very fragile. That is, a majority can never be all-encompassing; there will always be gaps that can be populated by, what they call, a 'field of discursivity' (1985, p. 111). The openness of the major discourse thus enables the second type of depositioning, which could be described as a 'minor' discourse (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). This minority does not stand outside the majority; it does not constitute a voluntaristic place of opposition. Instead, the minor is an immanent, yet subversive, part of the major. One could say, the minor discourse of depositioning continuously engenders the gaps left by the major in order to produce new figurations of struggle. A statement like 'the world is going badly' can be such a minor discourse. It comes from within the very world that 'is going badly;' yet it resists the way the majority organizes the world and thus aims to 'brush history against the grain' (*THP*, 248).

Benjamin's phrase 'to brush history against the grain' – taken from his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' – first of all means to recognize 'history' as something that is continuously constructed by 'those in power,' the majority. To 'brush history against the grain' calls for a minority act to interrupt the 'official' history. This act, he hopes, would unveil the 'goings-on' of that history: the continuity of time, the 'eternal return' of the commodity and commodity fetishism, for example. This act also hopes to see the lives of those that have been defeated by history – those that have been rendered nameless. It hopes to see the tradition of the oppressed minorities that are continuously being ignored by dominant discourses. For Benjamin, history, as it is continuously constructed by the majority, is a catastrophe. That is, for him the catastrophe is the insistence on history being natural, directional and progressive. He asserts: 'That things just go on is the catastrophe;' 'catastrophe is not what threatens to occur at any given moment but what is given at any moment' (*BGS V*, p. 550).¹ For Benjamin, the task of minority discourses is to halt the catastrophe of continuous history; that is, to discontinue that which is always already going on. So, when Derrida calls for the questioning of the liberal politico-economic ideals and asserts that 'the world is going badly' he sees, perhaps, the catastrophes of our time

and attempts to discontinue precisely these catastrophes. In Benjamin's language, he aims to bring the catastrophic narrative of history to a standstill (*BGS V*, p. 576–7). For Benjamin, it is this halting, or depositioning, of continuous history which is needed to politically intervene in a specific moment of opportunity. The halting of history, the discontinuation of the catastrophes of a given time, is, for Benjamin, a political event that enables possibilities of seeing history differently. It is a speculation about a different time that emerges out of seeing historical images differently.

What we see emerging here is a dialectical relationship between positioning and depositioning, between history as something always already given and history as something that can and should be questioned, halted and discontinued. What in my view is important for Derrida, Benjamin and the other philosophers I draw on in Part II of this book is not so much the fact that a critique of history and society is continuously needed. One is tempted to say that this need of a continuous process of depositioning – this questioning, exposing, subverting, and so on – is quite obvious. What seems to be more important is the question of how a discourse of depositioning is not simply celebrated for its own sake – which I would regard as having depoliticizing effects – but how depositioning is connected to a decision, a hegemonic event that is able to reposition historical relations along new lines. It is this event that points to a political decision about how society should be organized and positioned differently. This book is precisely about such a political event and how it is relevant to the theory and practice of organization.

Within the realms of organization theory, attempts to politicize the study of organization and explore possibilities of repositioning social and organizational arrangements are not new. Throughout its relatively short history as academic discipline, organization theorists have critiqued 'the mainstream' and questioned the narrowness of the approaches taken by functionalist and managerialist writers. Burrell's essay 'Radical Organization Theory' (1979), for example, was an early call for organization theorists to actively engage not only with organizational phenomena within the boundaries of companies and other organizations, but to see organization as a wider social concept and process that should directly lead to a critique of repressive socio-economic realities of capitalism. However, Burrell insists not only on a continuous questioning and critiquing of social realities, but his vision for a radicalized organization theory is to explore possibilities of constructing alternative – one could say, repositioned – social arrangements. It is precisely this necessary leap from a depositioning to a repositioning discourse which interests me in this book. In my view, this leap all too often does not occur, as organization theorists remain stuck within the narrow realms of the depositioning project, which, as I will show, has profound depoliticizing effects.

More recently attempts have been made to critique these depoliticizing effects of the depositioning discourses and explore possibilities of repoliticizing the terrain of organization theory. For example, it has been Parker's (1995, 2002a, 2000b) consistent attempt to point to, what he calls, the 'dangers of postmodernism' (1995, p. 553) and offer ways to engage with organization more ethically and politically. For him, 'we have a responsibility to be clear about why we wish to tell a particular story in a particular way and that is essentially the arena of politics.' He goes on to say that 'ethics and politics are essentially ways of saying "I think the world would be a better place if such and such were the case." This necessarily means a disagreement or agreement with the ethical-political claims of others, a process for which postmodernists are tactically ill-equipped' (1995, p. 558). Although, in my view, one has to be careful with referring to the signifier 'postmodernism,' as it has been used and misused in many different ways, one could generally say that Parker (see particularly 1995, 1999, 2002a, 2003) is deeply suspicious of the depoliticized nature of, what I have named here, the depositioning project in organization theory.

Other writers, too, have, as Fournier and Grey put it, attempted 'to sever the logical link between epistemological and moral or political relativism' and 're-infuse critique with some degree of political engagement' (2000, p. 21). One could name writers such as Contu (2002), Fleming (2004), Grey (1996), Jones (2003c,d), Reed (1997) and Wray-Bliss (2002, 2003), who – among others – have exposed the shortcomings of what I call here the depositioning project in various ways and pointed to politically more principled readings of organizational phenomena. In this context I would also like to mention the journal *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, which, since its appearance in 2001, has similarly attempted to politicize the field of organization theory and therefore broaden the conception of organization and increase its relevance for a project that would not only critique social regimes of organization but actively engage in imagining organizational alternatives of social reality.

One of the labels that has been attached to such critical discourses is that of 'Critical Management Studies' (CMS). As is the case with all labels and language categories, it is often difficult to define their exact boundaries. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000), Alvesson and Willmott (2003), Corbett (1994), Fournier and Grey (2000) and many others have shown, CMS is really a 'broad church' that is based on a wide variety of conceptions of critique. That is, although some authors would see themselves working within the specific historical tradition of critical theory, as it has been practiced by the so called Frankfurt School (see Chapters 2 and 3), others would emphasize the epistemological, theoretical and political limitations of critical theory. Some CMS authors also see critique as something quite loose, and simply regard critique as something that defamiliarizes us with our taken-for-granted world (Fournier and Grey, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the CMS project has been very important, as it has provided many scholars with a public space to critically engage with the realms of work, organization and management (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004). The CMS project has been able to deposition, as it were, common theories and practices of organization in a variety of ways. However, in contrast to the idea that CMS is a 'broad church,' a number of critiques have been articulated against the particular politics of CMS and the way it seems not to be as inclusive as often claimed. Instead, it is said that CMS promotes certain critical voices while excluding others (see Ackroyd, 2004; Barratt, 2004; Jack, 2004; Wray-Bliss, 2004). On one hand, it is not surprising that discourses like CMS will always exclude certain voices. As Laclau and Mouffe and others have shown, the very idea of a discourse is that power relations shape a social field in a particular way by erecting barriers and walls around it. On the other hand, however, the very task of critique is to expose and question the way these power relations work and show the political and theoretical limitations of discourses of critique. It is this broader project of a critique of critique that this book aims to contribute to.

Although I generally see myself working within the wider spheres of Critical Management Studies, I have chosen not to refer to, and engage with, the CMS label in this book. As the CMS discourse gains in popularity – a simple search on the Internet reveals that there are hundreds of management courses, journals, conferences, seminar series and books that claim to be critical – it seems that CMS increasingly becomes a logo used for a variety of different theoretical and practical purposes. My concern is that this logo of 'critique' is often all there is. Critique increasingly becomes an academic fashion, an obligatory passage point that one needs to pass through whether one is critical of hegemonic regimes of organization or not. Hence critique becomes restricted. It sometimes seems as if the logo 'critique' simply replaces the need for any real critique and radical politics to be practiced within the realms of organization and management studies (Böhm and Spoelstra, 2004).

As will hopefully become apparent throughout this book, I very much value the various contributions that have been made by the wide variety of those organization and management theorists who have explored possibilities of critiquing the established positions of the field and who have helped to politicize and perhaps reposition it along new lines. However, rather than celebrating the logo of critique, this book attempts to cut across the CMS discourse and show how the positioning, depositioning and repositioning projects are not only part of the wider spheres of organization and management studies, but indeed characteristic of CMS as well. That is, there are a variety of contradictions within the CMS discourse. Part of what this book tries to achieve is to show how some critical discourses are in danger of reinforcing those positions and organizational hegemonies they aim to deposition. Chapter 6, for example, discusses a range of critical

discourses in organization and management studies that fail to problematize and engage with the hegemony of capitalist social relations. Their critiques are limited to the realm of 'micro-politics' within organizations without actively considering the way hegemonic links between the spheres of the economy, state and civil society organize capitalist social relations.

The main focus and purpose of this book is to show that the concept of hegemony is of immense importance when thinking about alternative, repositioned regimes of organization. Part II will show how the concept of hegemony is indebted to the philosophical traditions of both critical theory and poststructuralism, which, as I will argue, share an understanding of philosophical thought being a movement between negativity and positivity. In relation to our concern with the positioning and organizing of social relations, this implies that it is not enough to continuously aim to disassemble, disorganize and deposition everything. As I will show in Part II of this book, what is of great importance for a whole range of political thinkers – from Benjamin to Adorno, and Derrida to Laclau and Mouffe – is the need for us to reassemble, reorganize and reposition. The idea of politics is not only to destruct but also to construct social relations.

Within the Gramscian tradition of the conceptualization of hegemony, politics is a broadened practice that goes beyond the specific realms of economic organization, that is, labour, class struggle and the workplace. For Gramsci (1971), political practice occurs in a field of relations between the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. As I will discuss in Chapters 4 and 7, we need to consider all three of these different, yet related, spheres if we want to get a grasp of the way social relations are organized and positioned within a particular historical juncture. Gramsci also refers to such a juncture as a 'historical bloc,' which indicates the way hegemonic relations are maintained not simply by owning the means of production but also leading social forces in the realms of the state and civil society. He used the concept of 'war of position' (see also Sassoon, 1982) to show that this hegemonic 'historical bloc' is never stable. Instead, social actors are constantly engaged with each other to position, deposition and reposition themselves. It is precisely this terrain that describes the realm of the political, which aims to organize, disorganize and reorganize consent (see also Burawoy, 1982) within the spheres of the economy, state and civil society.

Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), such a conception of hegemony sees organization as an impossibility, which means that social organization can never be fully accomplished. That is, there is a fundamental openness about organization. In contrast to some depositioning discourses within organization theory, however, this openness does not simply point to the disorganized and processual nature of organization. Instead, it opens up possibilities for radical political change. Thus, at heart of the conception of impossibility is the language of *political strategy*. This implies that impossibility is a dialectical articulation of the relationship

between structure and agency, between those forces that produce ideologically dominant social discourses and those actors who try to resist these very forces and explore different possibilities of social organization. One could hence say that impossibility articulates organization as the structure and consent to capitalism, but also the possibility of moving beyond dominant hegemonies by constructing resistances and counter-hegemonies. While forces of resistance are always present in any hegemonic structure, they can only be articulated as a counter-hegemonic force through a practice of political strategy. The impossibility of organization is not a call for the immobilization of action; on the contrary, it opens up possibilities for the strategic articulation of demands that aim to reposition regimes of social organization.

With my interest in the concept of hegemony I build on the work of a growing number of organization theorists who have made productive use of it in a variety of different fields, for example, organizational learning (Contu and Willmott, 2003), organizational change (De Cock, 1998), management education (Elliott, 2003), strategic management (Levy and Egan, 2003; Levy and Newell, 2002, 2005; Levy, Alvesson and Willmott, 2003), organizational culture (Ogbor, 2001), entrepreneurship (Jones and Spicer, 2005), constructivism (Spicer and Fleming, 2001), and industrial relations (Haworth and Hughes, 2003; Hyslop, 1988; Rose, 1994). What these contributions have in common is a commitment to not reduce organizational discourse and resistance to a micro-political struggle that occurs within the boundaries of organizations. Instead, organization is seen as hegemonic impossibility, which means that organizational processes are produced as well as challenged in the wider spheres of the economy, state and civil society. It is precisely this link between all three of these spheres which describes the terrain of the politics of organization and hence the possibility for repositioning organization theory.

For this reason Chapter 7 will explore possibilities for bringing together organizational analyses of the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. Concretely, I will consider the contributions made by labour process theory (economy), liberalist organization theory (state) and social movement theory (civil society). There are many differences in the way writers in these areas conceptualize the degree of strategic engagement possible today, and their political commitments do indeed vary considerably. Yet, what the authors in these three different fields share is a general suspicion of the relativistic nature of some depositioning discourses and a commitment to take seriously a politicization of organization theory. In this sense they can be regarded as being part of the wider realms of the repositioning project. However, my discussion will show that there are important limitations in each of these fields of study, and the main point I will argue is that a serious treatment of possibilities of repositioning is only possible if all three spheres – economy,

state and civil society – are brought together into a political and strategic framework of organizational analysis. Only if we begin to read between the lines of these three fields of organization it will be possible to conceptualize the hegemony of organization and contribute to a project of imagining possibilities of different organizational futures.

This imagining of different organizational futures is not simply a theoretical exercise. So, the title of this book, *Repositioning Organization Theory*, should not be misunderstood as a fetishization of theory at the expense of practice. On the contrary, as I have already mentioned and as I will argue throughout this book, at the heart of the concept of hegemonic impossibility is the notion of strategy. That is, thinking about and theorizing the hegemony of organization implies a commitment to a strategic practice of political and organizational change (see also Böhm, 2002a). The strategic practice this book aims to contribute to is the discussion of the impossibilities of what has been called the global justice or anti-capitalist movement, which has been protesting against the way today's global capitalism is organized. In Chapter 7 I will therefore engage with and analyze the history, politics and organization of this social movement and explore its strategic possibilities for repositioning social organization. This analysis will serve as an empirical exploration of the strategic possibilities of hegemonic, democratic politics and the implications for a project of repositioning organization. It is this analysis, I hope, which will contribute to a project of a radically politicized organization theory which is able to engage with the most urgent political and social questions of our times. It is precisely this project which describes the logic of the impossibility of organization. As Contu states: 'unless we start working towards this logic, working with(in) the (im)possibility of "the social," there is always someone else with more certainties and appealing promises that will be instituting the "social" for us all' (2002, p. 173).

Structure of the book

This book is divided into four main parts. After this introductory Part I, Part II lays out the philosophical cornerstones of my argument. As I see positioning to be related to questions of hegemonic impossibility and strategic politics, Part II discusses a range of philosophies that I see being important for a conceptualization of hegemony, impossibility and politics. There are three chapters in Part II: Chapter 2 is a note on dialectics, the main intellectual approach taken in this study. My concern will be to recover dialectics from its often simplistic understandings in organization theory and show its relevance for a radicalized and politicized organization theory. Chapters 3 and 4 closely engage with a range of different philosophies that aim to conceptualize the political event. I distinguish between a

German, largely pre-Second-World-War tradition, which is discussed in Chapter 3, and a French post-war tradition, explored in Chapter 4. As the title 'Philosophy' suggests, Part II considers a wide variety of philosophies that, in my view, can contribute significantly to our conceptualization of the impossibility of organization.

While Part II of the book is of philosophical nature, Part III is closely concerned with practice. To be precise, Part III takes an interest in the way organization theory has been practiced in recent times. This part again consists of three chapters, which will aim to make productive use of the philosophical concepts explored in Part II to critique the academic field of organization theory. Chapter 5 is a critique of the discourse of knowledge management. This critique is deployed as an example of a mainstream management and organization theory discourse, which, in my view, very much defines the hegemony of the field and therefore positions it in a particular way. Chapter 6 is a critique of the depositioning project within organization theory, which has attempted to resist the mainstream hegemony of organization theory. While clearly acknowledging the contribution of the depositioning discourse, my discussion aims, however, to expose the limitations and shortcomings of this project. Chapter 7, then, explores the possibilities of repositioning the hegemony of organization theory by discussing discourses concerned with the economy, state and civil society. This chapter also engages with the anti-capitalist and social forum movements to show how organization theory can productively contribute to the discussion of acute political and social questions of our times. The final Part IV, that is, Chapter 8, concludes the book.

Part II

Philosophy

2

Dialectics? A Note on the Politics of Thought

In the introductory Part I outlined the main argument of this book, which problematizes the question of positioning within organization theory. I argued that the question of positioning organization is related to the concept of hegemony, which describes the project of positioning as impossibility. A conception of the impossibility of organization, however, is not part of a so called postmodern project of political relativism. Instead, it opens up and even demands possibilities of radical social change that involve questions of political strategies of organization. In Part II of this book I will discuss a range of philosophies that will allow me to conceptualize the impossibility of organization. As will become apparent, impossibility has something to do with speculation, and all philosophies discussed in this part of the book are speculative in nature in the sense that they negate, or deposition, established positions and explore possibilities of affirmatively creating new positions. I will argue that it is this simultaneity of depositioning and repositioning that characterize the event of politics described by these philosophies.

Part of what I try to do in this book is to read between the lines of what are sometimes regarded as different philosophical traditions in order to make productive use of them. This 'making use' can be related to Benjamin's (1999f) conception of reading, which, in his view, should not be aimed at trying to reveal the origin or true intension of a work. Instead, reading is always a *translating* of text, which must be understood as an affirmative destruction of an author. The aim of Part II is not to present the wholeness of philosophical texts. Instead, I will see these texts as fragments that need to be translated. For Benjamin, this is the only way to do justice to a text: to destruct and translate it into a new text. The destruction of philosophical texts attempted here aims at exploring the philosophical understanding of the event of politics, which is of importance for conceptualizing the impossibility of organization and formulating a political project of repositioning organization theory.

One particular type of translation I will attempt in Part II of this book is between, what we could call, a German, largely pre-Second-World-War tradition, which is discussed in Chapter 3, and a French post-war tradition of theory, explored in Chapter 4. In organization theory and other fields of enquiry there are sometimes artificial demarcating barriers seen between these traditions, which have sometimes been referred to as critical theory and poststructuralism/postmodernism (see Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, p. 81–111). On one hand, critical theory is sometimes regarded as rationalistic, elitist and something that aims at grand emancipatory and political narratives – as can be seen in Alvesson and Deetz (2000). On the other hand, poststructuralism, or what is usually referred to as postmodernism, is sometimes seen as a celebration of fragmentation, textual plays, hyper-reality and loss of foundations (*ibid.*). Rather than relying on a binary understanding of critical theory and poststructuralism, I will, instead, show that there are many connecting lines between, what I refer to as, the philosophical traditions of destruction and deconstruction. In my view, what these traditions generally share is an understanding of speculative thought, which aims at negating, or deposing, established positions and exploring possibilities of affirming different positions. What I will be concerned with is to show that such a speculative movement between negativity and positivity never ends. But I will argue that this still makes possible, and even demands from us, a particular event of politics, in which new positions of social organization may be claimed. Before I engage in detail with some philosophies of destruction and deconstruction in Chapters 3 and 4, let me reflect on this book's general intellectual approach.

Dialectics in organization theory

As I outlined in the introductory chapter, this book puts forward a dialectical argument built around the triad of positioning, depositioning and repositioning. This is, perhaps, seen by some as an odd choice, as dialectics has not been very popular with organization theorists recently. In times of an emphasis of organization as process and movement and the popularity of French poststructural thought it seems that the philosophical tradition of dialectics has past its sell-by date. However, my choice of dialectics has been a deliberate one. Part of what I try to achieve here is to reclaim a space for dialectics, which does not imply, as I will argue, that we simply have to *go back* to say Hegel and uncritically apply his thought. On the contrary, the point of dialectics is not to see it as some sort of transcendental method that cannot be subjected to critique. Instead, to be a true dialectician, one has to dialectically engage with the dialectical approach itself.

Without having the necessary space to engage in detail with the discourses of dialectics in organization theory, the first thing to note is that dialectics is not a fixed category or universal method; instead, it is a

contested concept that has been used in many different ways – for a discussion of some useful dialectical approaches in organization theory, see, for example, Burrell and Morgan (1979), Carr (2000), Hancock and Tyler (2001a,b), Hellström (2004) and Willmott (1990). However, this contestation often leads organization theorists to use dialectics in a very loose way (Carr, 2000, p. 214). Argyris and Schön (1978), Ashcraft (2001), Calori (2002), de Rond and Bouchikhi (2004), Reed (1996) and Pina e Cunha (2004), for example, explicitly refer to dialectics but fail to conceptualize it properly. Often the dialectic is simply mentioned in passing, or it is used in a way that has almost no resemblance with the intellectual tradition of dialectical thought as it was developed and practiced by Kant, Hegel, Marx and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Part of my argument will be that such a ‘forgetting’ or ‘breaking’ with the dialectical tradition is neither desirable nor possible.

Carr (2000, p. 214ff) points out that there are four popular misconceptions about dialectics within the realms of organization theory. First, any framework presenting two sides of a problem is sometimes referred to as dialectical. While the positioning of two phenomena in relation to each other is clearly part of the dialectical approach, critical theory argues, as we will see throughout this book, that dialectical thought is about questioning the relationship between phenomena and antagonisms in society. Dialectics can thus be seen to have political and strategic qualities. Applied to the argument of this book, for example, it is important to note that the dialectical triad of positioning, depositioning and repositioning is not simply an arbitrary positioning of categories, but one that hopes to strategically intervene in a real socio-political situation facing organization theory. Not every juxtapositioning exercise is a dialectical move.

The second misconception about dialectics, according to Carr (2000), is that the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad is often reduced to a mechanism to produce compromise. That is, the synthesis is seen to be some sort of Third Way or middle ground that provides a way out of the impasse produced by the opposition of thesis and antithesis. Again, as we will see later on in this chapter, this is far from what dialectics is intended to be or do within the realms of critical theory. Third, Carr (2000, p. 215) points out that dialectics is sometimes rejected because of its apparent binary approach, which is seen to depend on modernist, dualist separations, for example, between mind and body, right and wrong, and so on. As response, one can point again to the strategic and political purpose of a dialectical approach. Reducing social reality to a dialectical juxtapositioning of two binary oppositions does not necessarily make a statement about these positions to exist *a priori*. That is, dialectics is not about essentialist categories. Fourth, Carr (2000, p. 216) argues that a popular misconception is that dialectics is only geared towards a negative discourse; that is, the critical theory dialectics produces is only able to negate, put into question and deposition, as it

were. One of the purposes of this book is to show that such a view of critical theory is unfounded.

In addition to Carr's list of popular misconceptions about dialectics, we can note two further approaches to the dialectic which are somewhat problematic. First, some attempts have been made to read dialectics in the light of the recently popular process philosophies. Similarly to what I will be arguing here, some authors – for example, Calori (2002) – see dialectics as a continuous movement that can never be finalized by the synthesis. In contrast to my argument, however, Calori's (2002) process understanding of dialectics fails to see the politico-strategic possibilities of the dialectical movement. That is, Calori and other process philosophers of organization rob the dialectic of its political and speculative form and content.

A final misconception of the dialectic is that it is seen to be committed to a fairly crude understanding of the notion of historical progress. Dialectics is often attributed to Hegel for whom, according to Burrell and Morgan, 'the dialectic stresses that there is a basic antagonism and conflict within both the natural and the social world which, when resolved, leads to a higher stage of development. This dialectical process is seen as a universal principle, which generates progress towards the state of "absolute knowledge"' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 280–1). Within such a view the dialectical process is seen as the bringing together of antagonistic categories, thesis and antithesis, in order to produce a new, progressive synthesis. This synthesis is thought to be a new unifying totality that signifies a higher state of development. As Carr writes, 'the familiar triadic structure of Hegelian thought...represents a process wherein the synthesis absorbs and completes the two prior terms, following which the entire triad is absorbed into the next higher process' (2000, p. 213). I will suggest in the following sections that, for Benjamin and Adorno, the dialectical process does not necessarily have to be linked to notions of historical progress. Instead, for them, the dialectical process – similarly, as I will show, to the philosophies of deconstruction and impossibility – is better understood as a kind of open-ended movement between negativity and positivity. The crucial point to argue, however, is that this movement incorporates strategic possibilities for radical political change, and it is the task of this book to unfold these possibilities theoretically and practically.

Dialectical image

For Benjamin, a dialectical process does not bring essential historical categories into opposition in order to bring about a higher stage of development. For example, he is very critical of some aspects of Marx's thought, which he sees to be indebted to a conception of history as progress (BGS I.3, p. 1232). Instead of seeing dialectics as a tool to bring about progress, Benjamin sees time coming to a standstill in the 'dialectical

image' (BGS V, p. 576–7). This 'dialectical image' does not narrate history but presents fragments of a historical experience. It is this anti-narrative showing of historical images of modernity which makes, for example, his *Arcades Project* – Benjamin's main, yet unfinished, work that critiques the spatial and ideological emplacement of Parisian modernity² – so unique. Benjamin thinks that this halting of the progressive continuity of history is needed to politically intervene in a specific situation.

What I suggest here is that the categories of positioning and depositioning are not essential historical categories that seek to be progressively superseded by a category of repositioning. Instead, what I aim to construct in this book is a 'dialectical image,' a constellation, which presents fragments of a historical experience. This experience is subjective in the sense that it is presented by an author. However, this should not be misunderstood as the resurrection of the agency of a fully intentional and voluntaristic subject who chooses to see organization through different images, like in Morgan (1986, 1997). Instead, this subjective experience has been produced within the objectivities of wider social relations of reality. So, the 'dialectical image' constructed here is both subjective and objective. For Benjamin, it is precisely this coming together of the subject and the object in a momentary constellation, an event, which opens up possibilities of political intervention.

Benjamin is quite clear about the political ends of such an event: it is aimed at the destruction (this concept will be discussed in Chapter 3) of the 'eternal image' of history, the destruction of the continuous history of those in ruling power (1999d, p. 254). Social constructionist approaches, such as Morgan's (1986, 1997) 'imagin-i-zation,' do not have such political ambitions. Social constructionism – without necessarily being apolitical, as we will see in Chapter 6 – is based on the claim that one can view and construct the world through different lenses. This is named by Burrell (1996, p. 652) as the supermarket shelf approach, as one can pick and choose an image of organization that seems to fit in a particular situation. The problem with Morgan's and other social constructionist approaches is that they do not seem to be able to question the image of the supermarket and its historical production itself, precisely because 'history' is interpreted as a local event that is seen in different ways depending on differing subjective viewpoints. In contrast, the point of Benjamin's 'dialectical image' is precisely to challenge those images and discourses of history which are taken for granted and which are continuously emplaced by dominant forces of positioning. However, Benjamin's destructive-dialectical constellation is not only negative. It aims to be affirmative by seeing those historical images that have been forgotten or marginalized (BGS I.3, p. 1236). This is to say, the political event of destruction seeks to halt the continuities of history in order to make visible marginalized images of history that could, possibly, enable political re-cognitions and new experiences of reality. It is

such an understanding that I have in mind when I talk about dialectical possibilities of repositioning.

In Benjamin's view, then, a project of repositioning should not be about progress; for him this would simply be a reproduction of established historical continuities. Instead, his dialectical approach speculates about a political event that would disrupt and discontinue 'eternal images' of history, which are always already reproduced by those in power. Such an understanding of the dialectical approach can largely be associated to the tradition of 'critical theory' the way it was practiced by Adorno and others at the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, commonly known as the Frankfurt School.³ Although Benjamin was not formally involved with the Institute, he shared a lot of its philosophical and political concerns, which are expressed, for example, in a lively exchange of letters between Adorno and Benjamin (Benjamin, 1994).⁴ Although I will engage with the philosophical thought of Benjamin and Adorno in detail in Chapter 3, we can note here that for both writers the purpose of research, of critical thought, is not to ask how a particular social phenomenon functions, but how it dialectically stands in relation to the antagonisms of society. The idea of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, for example, is not to simply describe the functionalities of the Parisian arcades' social space, but to analyze in detail the particular subjectivities, ideologies and architectural emplacements formed by the wider 'goings-on' of capitalist modernity. Benjamin and Adorno called such a dialectical analysis 'immanent critique'.⁵ Benjamin's 'immanent critique' of the arcades exposed the inherent antagonisms of Parisian modernity (1999a); it analyzed how 19th century capitalism produced specific subjectivities, for example, that of the *flâneur*⁶ who reproduces capital by consuming images of fashionable commodities on display. For Benjamin, the shiny, glitzy commodity world of the arcades produces, what he calls, a phantasmagoria which intoxicates the *flâneur* (for an extended discussion of this, see Chapter 5).

Now, the purpose of 'immanent critique' is to dialectically awaken the *flâneur* and the whole modern 'sleeping collectivity,' as Benjamin calls it (1999a, p. 388); it aims to destruct the phantasmagoric 'dream-world' of capitalism and heighten the reader's knowledge by exposing the antagonisms of social reality. In the 'dialectical image,' or constellation, of the *Arcades Project* this destructive exposure is achieved by way of bringing antagonistic textual images of reality in such a position to each other that a new knowledge of the object is made possible. However, this new knowledge does not become possible by way of merging the different fragments of reality into a coherent or even final synthesis that would give us the illusion of a harmonious, non-antagonistic reality; what emerges is not a unity or totality. Instead, Benjamin's *Arcades Project* consists of textual fragments – quotations and self-quotations – which are presented not as narrative but as a montage of antagonistic, non-integrated particulars which cannot be synthesized.⁷

In his essay 'On the Programme of the Coming Philosophy' Benjamin refers to the outcome of such a dialectical process as 'non-synthesis' (*BGS* II.1, p. 166). What this concept of 'non-synthesis' highlights is that, for Benjamin, the dialectical process does not lead to any progressive or higher state of knowledge. Part of what he tries to achieve with his *Arcades Project* is to halt the continuity of history. The montage of fragments of historical experiences presented in the *Arcades Project* is the attempt to freeze history into a 'dialectical image' and produce an event in which history could be seen differently. For Benjamin, this difference is a 'non-synthesis' because it is precisely that: difference; that is, it is not a united and harmonious experience but one that is ridden by antagonisms. Such an understanding of the dialectical process coincides with Adorno's notion of 'negative dialectics' (1973a), which, too, describes a dialectical movement that continuously fails to complete itself, that is, produce a unified and harmonious whole. For Adorno, the dialectical process is negative because it will always result in a failure, the failure to produce a final synthesis. Yet, for him, this failure does not amount to an idealist or nihilist conception of what critique and philosophy can do. Instead, it is a failure that bears a speculative affirmation in itself.

Breaking with Hegel?

Similarly to Benjamin's and Adorno's philosophies, Derrida's deconstructive approach can be seen as a speculation; it is an attempt to see the world and its history differently. For Derrida, speculative thought is of particular relevance; in fact, it has been argued that his work is not thinkable outside the tradition of speculation (Barnett, 1998, p. 35). In his essay, 'The Age of Hegel,' for example, Derrida acknowledges Hegel's importance as a philosopher of, what he calls, the 'already-not-yet' (1986, p. 3). For Derrida, this 'already-not-yet' is one way to express the dialectical, speculative structure of Hegel's work. In Derrida's view, Hegel's dialectic is not some sort of method, which one can reduce to a programmatic application of the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' triad to any problem. Instead, for Derrida, the dialectic is first and foremost a way of speculating, speculating about difference, the 'not yet' (*ibid.*). This speculation about the 'not yet' is not simply a projection into the future and a radical break with history, with the 'already.' Instead, Derrida's 'already-not-yet' could be seen as a questioning of history, as a rereading of past images in order to see their revolutionary opportunity, to speak with Benjamin. This, then, is a speculation about the 'not yet' in what is 'already' there.

Derrida illustrates Hegel's dialectical, speculative 'already-not-yet' by engaging with a letter Hegel sent to the Prussian Royal Ministry of Education. In what seems to be partly an implicit commentary on Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) distinction between minor and major literatures and

their frequent portrayal of Hegel as major or state philosopher (1987, p. 377, 385), Derrida sees Hegel's letter as a minor intervention by someone who, in his view, is both close and distant to the state. In Derrida's view, a minor literature is not separate from the discourse of the majority; he asks: 'Does not every subversive discourse always constitute itself through rhetorical effects that are necessarily identified as gaps in the prevailing discourse, with the inevitable phenomena of discursive degradation, mechanisms, mimetisms, etc.?' (1986, p. 25). For Derrida, Hegel's engagement and closeness to the state, although it needs to be problematized and questioned, is not a problem *per se* precisely because every minor discourse is close to the majority; that is, it is constituted by, and constitutive of, the majority. In Derrida's view, Hegel's dialectical speculation, as practiced with his letter to the Ministry, is to explore the subversive possibilities of this constitutive relationship between the minor and the major. This is to say, he hopes that his letter will intervene in the state's education policy and enable a school teaching that does not simply teach formulas and 'babble' but helps children to 'substantiate mind with content' and speculate about the 'already-not-yet' (Derrida, 1986, p. 25).

Derrida seems to suggest that there is a danger of simply opposing Hegel's discourse because it is seen to be too close to the majority or the state. In his view, speculative thought needs to be able to relate to and intervene in the discourse of the majority and not pretend that a minority can be constituted from the outside. It is, of course, Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, 1986, 1987) consistent argument that precisely this outside is not possible; that is, in their view, minority and majority always produce each other. This is also one of Hardt and Negri's main points in *Empire*, where they argue that an effective opposition to today's world-integrated capitalist system cannot be formed from an outside, precisely because that system constitutes life itself; they see Empire to be everywhere. Given their problematization of forming any kind of opposition from the outside, it is surprising that Hardt and Negri seem to think that it is necessary to work in *opposition* to the tradition of dialectical thought. In *Empire* and elsewhere (Negri in Negri and Zolo, 2003) they frequently suggest a need to *break* with dialectics and go beyond it. For them, even the best German thinkers of the first half of the twentieth century were not able to break with the dialectic; *only* those French philosophers who began to reread Nietzsche in the 1960s were able to do just that, as Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 378) claim. There are several points to be made in relation to such a reading of the dialectic and history in general.

Hardt (1993, p. 52) engages with this problem of being in opposition to something in his monograph on Deleuze. There he quotes Judith Butler whose response to the claimed possibility of a 'break with Hegel' is: 'References to a "break" with Hegel are almost always impossible, if only because Hegel has made the very notion of "breaking with" into the central tenet of the dialectic' (1987, p. 183–4). Hardt's response to Butler is two-

fold. Firstly, he maintains that there are different kinds of oppositions. On one hand, there is an opposition that becomes assimilated by the object it tries to oppose, as it lacks a crude, energetic force. On the other hand, however, and this, he says, is Deleuze's project in relation to Hegel's dialectic, one can develop a strategy of 'total opposition,' which seeks to totally disrupt and discontinue something. Secondly, Hardt points to a Deleuzian forgetting; that is, he maintains that Deleuze opposes Hegel by simply forgetting him (mainly in his later work): not mentioning or engaging with him. Whether Deleuze's strategy, and Hardt and Negri's for that matter, is one of 'total opposition' against Hegel or one of forgetting Hegel, both are somewhat problematic for several reasons. First, the notion of 'total opposition' seems to suggest the possibility of the formation of critique from an outside, which stands in contradiction to what Deleuze and Guattari's, as well as Hardt and Negri's, theoretical projects seem to be about. Second, to oppose Hegel and the dialectic assumes that there is a 'Hegel,' or a 'dialectic,' in the sense that these terms can be seen to signify a unified content. I would suggest that this also stands in contrast to Deleuze's consistent attempt to reread the 'old' philosophers, such as Leibniz, Bacon, Hume, Bergson and others, in order to explore new possibilities of their work. As I argued above, such a strategy of rereading could precisely be related to speculative-dialectical thought. Third, opposing or even forgetting Hegel seems to imply the possibility of an 'end of Hegel,' which, of course, points to nothing less than 'the end of history.' As I mentioned in Chapter 1 in relation to Fukuyama, the notion of ending something like history is based on an idealist understanding that society could indeed be made fully transparent; that is, one could get rid of all antagonisms, such as 'Hegel' for example. According to Derrida's (1986) argument in 'The Age of Hegel,' such a total discontinuity is impossible; what he seems to imply is that 'today we are all Hegelians in a way;' that is, it is impossible to totally oppose Hegel, or any other author, precisely because his work has always already shaped history – our age or epoch – in a particular way.

The point I am making here is that one cannot simply oppose or even forget Hegel or the dialectic precisely because one cannot 'end' history. One can also not assume that there is 'a' dialectic that can be applied like a unified method. Instead, what I see in dialectical thought is a general engagement with the problematic of the relationship between discontinuity and continuity, negativity and positivity. For me, the dialectical process is about the continuous translation of this problematic, which also includes the continuous translation of the problematic of dialectics. Following Derrida, one can perhaps say that the dialectic is impossible:

Guaranteed translatability, given homogeneity, systematic coherence in their *absolute forms*, this is surely (certainly, *a priori* and not probably) what renders the injunction, the inheritance, and the future – in a word

the other – *impossible*. *There must be* disjunction, interruption, the heterogeneous if at least *there must be, if there must be* a chance given to any ‘there must be’ whatsoever, be it beyond duty. Once again, here as elsewhere, wherever deconstruction is at stake, it would be a matter of linking an *affirmation* (in particular a political one), *if there is any*, to the experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the *perhaps*. (Derrida, 1994, p. 35, emphasis in original)

Perhaps one could suggest that the above passage is Derrida’s translation of the problematic of the dialectical process into a two-fold movement. First, Derrida talks about the impossibility of an ‘absolute form,’ a systemic coherence, homogeneity, precisely because there is disjuncture, interruption, that is, heterogeneity. So, for him history – including that of the dialectic, we might add – is not homogeneity (thesis) but heterogeneity (antithesis); this is the first movement. The second movement is an affirmation (synthesis), a speculative filling of the gap that is left behind by rendering the homogeneous continuity of history impossible. Dialectics can thus be characterized as a two-fold movement of impossibility. Let us now unpack this notion of dialectics being a movement of impossibility.

Dialectics as impossibility

According to Žižek (1989, p. 176), the common understanding of the dialectical process is that the synthesis is some kind of return to the thesis, or some sort of higher, progressive unity that can ‘heal the wounds’ produced by the antithesis. In Žižek’s view, the contrary is the case. For him, the synthesis does not heal anything, it does not return to a positive identity (*ibid.*). Instead, the synthesis is an affirmation as ‘negation of the negation;’ that is, the synthesis is not simply a full positivity or even totality, but an affirmation of the power of the ‘labour of the negative’ (Hegel, 1972, p. 10). Žižek maintains that with this ‘negation of the negation’ one comes to experience how the negative, disruptive power of the antithesis, which is menacing the unity of the given order, the thesis, ‘is simultaneously a positive condition of it’ (1989, p. 176). However, he makes clear that this positive, affirmative experience is an event which does not abolish any antagonisms – it does not unify reality in a new, higher identity. For him, the synthesis is as ridden by antagonisms and possibilities of discontinuity as the antithesis (*ibid.*). This is why, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the dialectical process is impossible; if it were simply possible, that is, if it could ever be finalized into a unified synthesis, there would be no space for dialectics or indeed society as such.

Hegel thus appears as located in a watershed between two epochs. In a first sense, he represents the highest point of rationalism: the moment when it attempts to embrace within the field of reason, without

dualisms, the totality of the universe of differences. History and society, therefore, have a rational and intelligible structure. But, in a second sense, this synthesis contains all the seeds of its dissolution, as the rationality of history can be affirmed only at the price of introducing contradiction in the field of reason. It would, therefore, be sufficient to show that this is an impossible operation requiring constant violation of the method that it itself postulates. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 95)

What Laclau and Mouffe thus describe here is the impossibility of dialectics which, for them, can never lead to a full identity that is closed in itself. That is, dialectics cannot lead to a totality, or the full continuity or positioning of history, because it continuously leaves open a gap for depositioning and discontinuity – a gap for an antithesis to negate the homogeneous unity of a given order. For Žižek, a dialectical synthesis can never give us a final answer. Instead, he maintains that the continuous failure of the synthesis to deliver a final answer becomes an affirmation in itself; in its very failure, the ‘negation of the negation’ ‘begins to function as its own answer’ (1989, p. 177); that is, in its failure the dialectic produces a hopeful content. One could say, then, although it cannot give us a final answer, the dialectical process might begin – and, according to Derrida (1986), the conceptualization of this beginning is one of Hegel’s main contributions – to give us some answers. At least it might be able to speculate about what type of questions should be asked.

As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), such dialectical questioning is possible because social organization itself is impossible; that is, society, organization and thus history can never be finished. In their view, this notion of impossibility points to the fact that hegemonic social relations can never be all-encompassing; hegemony can never be a totality that could provide us with a full picture of social organization and history. Disruptions, resistances, disorganizations or depositionings are therefore possible. As I argued in Chapter 1, the depositioning project in organization theory is characterized by a multiplicity of political resistances against the positioning project of organization. According to Laclau and Mouffe, these resistances are the ‘field of discursivity,’ which is a constitutive, yet subversive, part of every discursive formation (1985, p. 111). Within this view, one could say that the depositioning resistances in organization theory both constitute the positioning hegemony and subvert that very hegemony at the same time. The depositioning discourses thus describe the possibilities of a different reality; yet they are also embedded in and subsumed by the hegemony of positioning. The dialectical approach is thus something that can never lead to a full synthesis or totality. Instead, dialectics is an immanent event in a discursive field that can never be closed or fulfilled. Dialectics is possible because of the impossibility of organization, and dialectics is

itself an event that keeps organization impossible, which, as we will see in Chapter 4, does not mean that no decision about how to synthesize social organization can be taken.

Applying these insights to the problematic of this book, one could thus suggest that the depositioning discourses of organization theory do not stand in total opposition to the positioning project; instead, they are an immanent part of it. When, for example, some depositioning authors, as we will see in Chapter 6, celebrate the processual and plural character of organizing, one could claim that they describe the way capital works today. In the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), one could maintain that the depositioning discourses, or deterritorializations, are immediately reterritorialized by dominant forces of reality. For them, capital is a successful social machinery precisely because it makes possible a multiplicity of resistances and deterritorializations, which, however, are immediately subsumed, or reterritorialized, by dominant signification systems. Hardt and Negri (2000) use this insight to conceptualize, what they call, *Empire*, or today's globally integrated capitalism, as 'non-place,' a term partly borrowed from Augé (1995). For them, *Empire* does not exist in one place, that is, in one totality that can fully represent the social; instead, it is a dynamic system of 'radical contingency and precariousness' (2000, p. 60). *Empire*, then, is an open system that allows room for multiple identity politics and resistances. In Hardt and Negri's view, however, this openness is a particular one; that is, this openness works towards specific ends. They argue that this deterritorialized openness of *Empire* is always already reterritorialized along the lines of the stratifications of capital. In such a view, capital is a deterritorialization force that reterritorializes all deterritorialized fragments along the particular lines of its value system.

What Deleuze and Guattari as well as Hardt and Negri describe here is the impossibility of capitalist society, although they would not use such a term. And if we understand dialectics as impossibility, then capital itself can be seen as a regime that follows a dialectical approach. That is, the resistances of the depositioning project – or the antithesis – can be seen as being a constitutive part of the positioning project – the thesis – and any synthesis is not a progressive and absolute break with capital, but itself ridden by antagonisms. This becomes a problem if one is concerned with the way capital and the entire positioning project works today. That is, if resistance is always already a constitutive part of today's capitalist regime, how is it possible to imagine a different, repositioned regime of social organization?

In this book I will argue that a project of repositioning organization should indeed be understood as a dialectical impossibility. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, for Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of impossibility does not point to a nihilistic or relativistic understanding of social organization. Instead, they maintain that the impossibility of social organization opens up possibilities for reconstituting social reality. This is to say,

if it is impossible to fully constitute society – that is, if society as totality is impossible – it must be possible to organize a different hegemony of society. Now, such a project of reconstitution or repositioning is dialectically immanent in society. The difference to the depositioning discourses is, however, that the repositioning project is not only about resisting realities of social organization that are taken for granted; instead, it aims at exploring some new ‘principled positions’ (Squires, 1993) along which the social can be constituted. This political reconstitution is the possibility that emerges out of the dialectical impossibility of society. Here, dialectics enables a different social synthesis, which does not simply reproduce the taken-for-granted historical synthesis continuously reproduced by capital. We are thus dealing with competing possibilities, competing syntheses. The aim of this book is to show that different dialectical syntheses are possible, precisely because any established synthesis is nothing but an impossibility.

What I have problematized in this chapter, then, is dialectics as this book’s main intellectual approach. However, for me, dialectics is not a specific method but a general movement between negativity and positivity that is immanent to all aspects of social organizing. This movement will always fail to produce any final answers or final places in which dialectics can be located. In this sense dialectics is an event of impossibility, an event, which, as I showed in this chapter, can be traced in a range of different philosophical traditions. For me, this event is political because established positions and histories are rendered impossible, that is, they are deposed, and possibilities of new positions and experiences are explored. When I say political here, I do not only refer to specific places of politics, that is, places where politics are normally seen to be done, such as, for example, the Houses of Parliament. Instead, for me, the political is inherently connected to speculative, dialectical thought itself, because dialectics is about putting into question established positions of social organization and imagining different positions along which society could be organized. This dialectical action of speculation and imagination cannot be done from an artificial outside; it can only be done from within the immanent processes of social organization. In this sense, one is always confounded; I am (and this text) is always confounded: to repeat Derrida’s words, cited in Chapter 1: ‘every position is *of itself confounded*’ (Derrida, 1987, p. 96, emphasis in original).

As this chapter has gone over a great variety of philosophies far too quickly, I will now turn to a more detailed discussion of how different philosophical traditions have conceptualized the political event. The aim here is not to integrate the philosophies of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility discussed in the following two chapters. Instead, what I will try is to read productively between these philosophies in order to gain an understanding of how the political event could be conceptualized. As I argued above, such a conceptualization is of importance if one is concerned with exploring possibilities of repositioning organization.

3

The Political Event: Of Destruction

In the previous chapter I engaged with the tradition of dialectics by considering the speculative nature of a range of different philosophies. What I tried to show is that dialectics is not, as is sometimes claimed, a method aiming to produce a universal, even totalitarian, synthesis. Instead, dialectics is, for me, a movement between negativity and positivity that describes the impossibility of social organization. Hence, dialectics can be connected to the question of politics. That is, as dialectics cannot produce a final synthesis, the question of social organization remains open. It is precisely this openness that describes the political event. In the next two chapters I will problematize this insight by discussing a range of philosophies in much more detail. While this chapter, Chapter 3, will consider philosophies that can be associated with a German pre-Second-World-War tradition of thought, Chapter 4 will engage with some French post-war philosophies.

There is one concept that features in the writings of all three German writers that I am concerned with in this chapter, Benjamin, Adorno and Heidegger. All of them were interested in the concept of destruction, which is probably not a coincidence as all three had their main writing periods in a time of war and destruction in the first half of the 20th century. As hopefully becomes apparent, there are similarities, but also important differences, in the way these writers understand the movement between negativity and positivity that characterizes destruction. What I aim to show in this chapter is that for all three philosophers destruction is not simply a negativity that eradicates history and tradition; instead, it is a negative movement that seeks an affirmation – a new experience and a new life. As I will show, it is precisely this movement between negativity and positivity that describe the political event.

Adorno's response to Heidegger

For Adorno, philosophy⁸ should not simply be something positive and affirmative. For him, in order for philosophy to be philosophy, it has to

envisage its own liquidation, or destruction: 'each philosophy, which today is not concerned with securing the existing mental and social conditions but with truth, is faced with the problem of a liquidation of philosophy itself' (AGS 1, p. 331).⁹ What Adorno poses to us is the notion that philosophy can only exist by liquidating itself: the being of philosophy comes through its non-being. For Adorno, the positivity of philosophy describes itself in contemporary modes of disciplinary knowledge production, which have turned philosophy into an apparatus based on a logic of positioning thought within formal categories.

Let us think, for example, of analytical philosophy, which, according to Adorno, is 'learnable and reproducible by robots' (AGS 6, p. 40), and which, in his view, has attained a monopoly position in Anglo-American countries (AGS 10/2, p. 462). Such a philosophy assumes reality to be a historical order that can be positively measured and analyzed. In his view, positivism, as the name suggests, confirms the positive; it positions social relations and contemporary modes of being inside a grid of predefined knowledge, which itself is never questioned. According to Adorno, positivism's brother is pragmatism, which tries to eternalize the here and now by basing all its analytical power on existing relations to make them consumable and practicable. For Adorno, pragmatism, which aims at the production of a 'reasonable and responsible mankind, remains in the spell of the disaster without a theory being capable of thinking the whole in its untruth' (AGS 10/2, p. 470).

Adorno, then, is deeply troubled by the fact that contemporary philosophy seems merely another scientific discipline, whose knowledge production is institutionalized and made practicable for the mundane purposes of existing social reality. For Adorno, philosophy, as a formal logic of positioning, a philosophy that is only practiced to reproduce an institutional¹⁰ positivity, is bankrupt and corrupt, because it exists only for itself. If, in Adorno's view, philosophy wants to be relevant in relation to social reality, its task has to be one of a destruction of its own positivity; for him, philosophy needs to be understood and practiced as 'negative dialectics.' Philosophy as 'negative dialectics' would continuously negate or destruct itself in order to expose its own antagonisms. For him, only this movement of destructive discontinuity can prevent philosophy from celebrating the positive, continuous order of history.

At first sight Adorno's philosophy look similar to what Heidegger poses to us in *Being and Time*, which he describes as the destruction¹¹ of Western metaphysics.¹² Here, too, destruction must not be understood simply as the negativity of doing away with a philosophical tradition. 'On the contrary, it should stake out the positive possibilities of the tradition, and that always means to fix its *boundaries*.... The destructuring is not related negatively to the past: its criticism concerns "today" and the dominant way we treat the history of ontology.... However, the destructuring does not wish

to bury the past in nullity; it has a *positive* intent' (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 66–7, emphasis in original). Hence, this destructuring, or simply destruction, is not simply a getting rid of something, as is sometimes assumed; instead, it is affirmative: destruction is a movement of negativity that points to the positive possibilities that such a movement can produce.

From this point of view, Heidegger's destructive philosophy is similar to Adorno's call for the liquidation of philosophy and Benjamin's destructive presentation of Parisian modernity. For all three writers, philosophy implies not simply a positivity or even a scientific knowledge production machine, but a 'labour of the negative' (Hegel, 1972, p. 10), which aims at the destruction of merely positive conceptions of history and time. For them, only such a destructive movement can point to possibilities beyond the popularly consumed positivities of the *Zeitgeist*, the positive spirit of the here and now.

Although Adorno was clearly impressed by Heidegger's philosophy – he even shared some of its concerns – he also subjected it to some fierce criticism.¹³ What Heidegger attempts to show in *Being and Time* is that time shapes and produces being, being is temporal (1993b, p. 62). As I briefly discussed in Chapter 1, the radicality of this thought lies in the fact that Heidegger sees being, or the subject, not as a transcendental, eternal thing, but as something that is emplaced, or positioned, by the technics of history. Put differently, for him, modern being is a specific arrangement of, what I have labelled, the positioning project.

However, what Adorno laments about Heidegger's work is that it does not analyze in any detail these specific historical contingencies that position being. In other words, he does not concern himself with closely studying the specific production processes of being. Instead, Heidegger tries to develop an understanding of Being, which is a more general or basic conception of being.¹⁴ What this means is that, for him, being, which, at first sight, seems so obvious and simple to understand as 'all there is,' is in fact not what it *is*. Instead, being is that which has 'fallen' from Being. What Heidegger thus sets out to do in *Being and Time* is to question today's widely consumed notion of being and come to an understanding of Being itself, that which lies behind being. In other words, he is in search for Being as an original being, the 'pure I' (AGS 5, p. 191–2). For Adorno, the problem with Heidegger's Being is that, on one hand, it is immediate, primeval and thus meaningless, but, on the other, it acquires the meaning of an authentic essence (*ibid.*). Thus, Heidegger's depositioning of the subject, that is being, is at the same time the positioning of a transcendental subject-less Being (AGS 10/2, p. 466). According to Adorno, then, Heidegger depositions being and repositions it in the lofty heights of Being.

For Adorno, Heidegger's philosophy amounts to a 'jargon of authenticity' (AGS 5; 1973b) because it destructs being in order to get to some sort of authentic or original Being. One could also say that Heidegger's philosophy

is one that discontinues in order to reveal an original continuity of life. In Adorno's view, Heidegger's thinking is not speculative in nature (AGS 10/2, p. 463), but fixed in an absolute. This made him easily incorporable into Nazi ideology, which was equally based on a project of destruction in order to reveal an authentic Aryan Being.¹⁵ According to Adorno, the danger of non-speculative destruction – that is, a destruction that aims at revealing some underlying continuity – is that it can be incorporated into projects of 'absolute negativity,' which, undoubtedly, the Nazi state was. Put differently, the danger of Heidegger's complete depositioning of being is that it is repositioned as the positive emptiness of 'pure Being' and 'pure Time' (AGS 1, p. 330).

According to Adorno (AGS 6, p. 19–20), the philosophy of Heidegger amounts to idealism. The danger of Heidegger's idealism is that, although he aims at the depositioning of the continuity of history, his destruction of being results in the idealization of Being which seems to stand outside any concrete social relations. What Adorno has in mind when he calls for a liquidation of philosophy is not a destruction of being that is repositioned in the lofty realms of Being but a philosophy that would put into question the conditions of the production of this very being. This questioning cannot come through a positive reaffirmation of everything there is, but only through speculative, negative thinking that is relevant to today's actuality.

For Adorno, negative thinking involves a critique of social organization, which is affirmative in itself as it aims to present knowledge of the social. This affirmation, however, must not be mistaken for a positivity that only confirms, sanctions or reproduces existing social relations. Instead, it is a positivity that comes through the negativity of a destruction of popularly consumed images of history. Yet, destruction cannot simply work in opposition to history. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, a complete discontinuity is not possible as this would suggest 'the end of history.' One thus needs to emphasize again that, for Adorno, the dialectical process of destruction can never complete itself – there cannot be a final synthesis.

Although Adorno thinks that Heidegger's concept of Being attempts to work towards such a final synthesis, one could, perhaps, suggest an affirmative reading of Heidegger by saying that his Being is equally something that can never be fully attained. In this sense, Being is the ultimate horizon of being, which, however, is impossible to reach. In the language of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) one could, perhaps, suggest that the concept of Being describes the impossibility of social organization, that which can never be accomplished but, nevertheless, is always there. The concept of Being indicates that being is not the final word of history; there is always a beyond and difference. This is then, perhaps, something one can generally learn from Heidegger's philosophy: discontinuity and destruction can never be complete; there will always be an unreachable horizon which keeps the

question of history and being open. What I suggest now, by returning to some images of Benjamin's thought, is that, although destruction is impossible – because it cannot be complete – it is also possible and even necessary. It is this dialectic between the impossible and the possible that engenders, in my view, Benjamin's conception of the event.

Benjamin's event

Although Benjamin never used the concept of destruction extensively, it nevertheless can be seen to be central to his philosophy. This at least is the view of Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne who, in 1994, edited a collection of essays on Walter Benjamin's philosophy entitled *Destruction & Experience*. For them, the concept of destruction points to 'the destruction of some false or deceptive form of experience as the productive condition of the construction of a new relation to the object' (Benjamin and Osborne, 2000, p. xi). In this sense, destruction is not a getting rid of something – it does not necessarily imply that something is destroyed in the physical sense, although this *can* be involved too – but describes the condition for a radically new experience, a new knowledge of the object. In Benjamin's work destruction appears, for example, in his study of the emergence of the German mourning play, or Baroque tragic drama (1998), where allegory destructs Greek symbolism and thus enables a new way of seeing, a new figuration of language, a new meaning outside traditional symbolic relationships. In his 'Work of Art' essay (1999c) photography and film are seen to destruct the artwork's traditional aura, thus enabling new political possibilities for art. In Benjamin's view, technology does not destroy art; instead, it reconfigures it; technology opens new possibilities for a repositioning of art in relation to politics and society. Equally, in his essays on language and translation (1999f) he sees translation as an act that destructs language in order to reopen the question of language, to enable the emergence of a new language which is yet unknown and unnameable – in Benjamin's view, translation brings about the death of language in order to ensure its survival.

For Benjamin, destruction is an *Augenblick*, which can be translated literally as 'the blink of an eye.' The *Augenblick* is a special, short-lived, ephemeral moment; it is an event. Benjamin sees this event as a response to an understanding of history as *chronos*; as chronological, linear order that is constructed by those in power. For him, the figuration of the *Augenblick* is Kairos, who is the youngest son of Zeus in Greek mythology and seen as the embodiment of opportunity. Hence, *kairos*,¹⁶ as a concept, signifies a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action – it is a decisive event. However, Benjamin's interest in *kairos* should not be misunderstood; it does not come from a preoccupation with psychology (the individual subject) or mythology (the idealized and eternalized object). On the contrary, Benjamin's event is a space where the continuity of both subject and object is interrupted – the *Augenblick* is an

event that brings subject and object together in a politically intensive and sensitive 'now-time' (*Jetztzeit*) (BGS I.2, p. 701, 704; 1999d, p. 253, 255).

As a response to the official history, which is portrayed as *chronos*, Benjamin sees history as 'the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]' (BGS I.2, p. 704; 1999d, p. 255). Benjamin's 'now-time' is not concerned to see the present as either a moment in the unfolding of progress, like any other, or a part of a backward or forward succession of always already positioned facts, nor is it subsumed in some other way under a conception of history as a project that aims at the completion of a predefined totality. Instead, it is an event of the actuality of the past, which is contingent upon the action of the present and therefore contested.

The event of 'now-time' is thus characterized by two *simultaneous* movements: The first movement is that of the destruction or halting of time as a continuous historical succession of positioned facts by turning its endless *dynamis* into a momentary *stasis* – this is like a snapshot of a camera. Here *kairos* (which is etymologically related to the Greek *keirein*, to cut) cuts through the idealized, fetishized, notion of endless time and brings it to an abrupt halt: 'Marx says, that revolutions are the locomotives of world history. But perhaps it is completely different. Perhaps revolutions are when mankind, which is travelling in this train, reaches for the emergency brake' (BGS I.3, p. 1232, my translation). Hence, the world is brought to a standstill – the hustle of the 'normal goings-on' of modernity is stopped by way of a speculative thought-image: 'Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock' (BGS I.2, p. 700; 1999d, p. 254).

The second movement is that of remembering, which for Benjamin does not mean to recognize 'the way it really was.' Instead, it means to see images of the past as belonging to the present. Put differently, a 'historian...stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary' (BGS I.2, p. 704; 1999d, p. 255). Instead, for Benjamin, the historian sets up a constellation of different images of time that do not belong to the same sequence. He calls this constellation 'now-time' because it is an event that aims to see (from the position of the now) history differently. In this event the continuity of history as *chronos* is destructed and different continuities between disparate fragments of time are established.

For Benjamin, then, historical insight is when one puts the present into a constellation with the past. This forming of a constellation is the spatial aspect of Benjamin's event as *kairos*; it is a place in which past and present are read together:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In

other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. (BGS V, p. 576; 1999a, p. 462)

Benjamin's 'dialectical image' is the place where past, present and future come together; it is the specific place of 'now-time,' where 'each "now" is the now of a particular recognisability' (BGS V, p. 577; 1999a, p. 463). Thus, for Benjamin history needs to be recognized, it needs to be worked on, it needs to be read, as it were. For Benjamin, dialectics is when one puts fragments of historical experience and dominant contemporary images of time together in such a way that a powerful constellation is formed, from which a 'flash of knowledge' springs that is able to illuminate the here and now. This 'dialectical imaging' is not progressive *per se*. There is no guarantee that the 'flash of knowledge' produced by the event enables a 'higher state of development.' Instead, it is simply an opportunity to see history differently and a response to the danger that the past becomes a part of 'the homogeneous course of history' (BGS I.2, p. 703; 1999d, p. 254).

Benjamin's 'dialectical image' is not a subjective appearance, but an image of a real place, in the sense that real social antagonisms and struggles appear in this image. This 'dialectical image,' or constellation, aims to be an interruption of homogenous time, which would, at least this is the hope, reawaken the 'sleeping collectivity.' It is this awakening which renders Benjamin's event political:

The Copernican revolution in historical perception is as follows. Formerly it was thought that a fixed point had been found in 'what has been,' and one saw the present engaged in tentatively concentrating the forces of knowledge on this ground. Now this relation is to be overturned, and what has been is to become the dialectical reversal – the flash of awakened consciousness. *Politics attains primacy over history*. (BGS V, p. 490–1; 1999a, p. 388–9, emphasis added)

This, then, spells out Benjamin's conception of the event of politics. What Benjamin calls for in the above passage is an overturning of the established logic of positioning knowledge as a predefined category of historical thought. His 'Copernican revolution' is that the now has to be genuinely understood as a time of the present, as opposed to time as the 'eternal return' of a homogenous historicist organization of what has been. The 'dialectical image' attempts to rescue time from the winners of history, from the ones in power, and interrupt the 'dream-image' of that time. Yet, this political event is not only a destructive moment; instead, it is inherently constructive as it attempts to liberate a space of action and hope. As

Benjamin once made clear, “‘construction” presupposes “destruction”” (BGS V, p. 587; 1999a, p. 470). The ‘dialectical image,’ then, is an event of destruction which engenders the opportunity to construct something new.

One should note that, similarly to Adorno’s ‘negative dialectics,’ Benjamin’s destructive dialectics cannot be synthesized into a final frontier, as if history could ever end, as if the social could ever escape struggle. As for Adorno, Benjamin’s destruction does not lead to a final frontier of an endless, positive time; instead, it is a never-ending movement of ‘immanent critique,’ which is always looking for new opportunities, new journeys, new passages – it always demands from us ‘to read what was never written’ before (BGS I.3, p. 1238, my translation). However, what is important is not the endless negative movement of destruction, but the political positivity of a collection of forces to reposition reality, to construct a new actuality:

It is very easy to establish oppositions, according to determinate points of view, within the various ‘fields’ of any epoch, such that on one side lies the ‘productive,’ ‘forward-looking,’ ‘lively,’ ‘positive’ part of the epoch, and on the other side the abortive, retrograde, and obsolescent. The very contours of the positive element will appear distinctly only insofar as this element is set off against the negative. On the other hand, every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive. It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to this initially excluded, negative component so that, by a displacement of the angle of vision (but not of the criteria!), a positive element emerges anew in it too – something different from that previously signified. And so on, ad infinitum, until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical apocatastasis. (BGS V, p. 573; 1999a, p. 459)

The key term here is ‘apocatastasis,’ which is formed by assembling the following three Greek words: ‘apo’ (away from, detached), ‘cata’ (against, reversal), and ‘stasis’ (static). One could suggest that ‘apocatastasis’ implies an enlarging movement that goes against an established order or continuum of history. This movement is not simply destructive; instead, it is constructive as it sets something into place (*katastasis*, establishment, to set, to place). The kairotic opportunity of this movement, as it were, is that it blossoms into something bigger than itself. This is what ‘apo’ implies: the destructive movement detaches itself and grows into a different historical continuum, a new universality. At the same time, however, this affirmative ‘apocatastasis’ seems to be impossible because it can only be the product of an infinite movement of displacement, as Benjamin suggests in the above passage. This takes us back to his notion of ‘non-synthesis,’ which suggests that the dialectical process can never come to an end.

This bears the question of who brings about such an 'apocatastasis.' This is the question after the subject that is supposed to enact the dialectical movement of destruction. It is true that Benjamin's discourse sometimes gives the impression of relying on a conception of a voluntarist subject who simply decides to see the world differently. Phrases such as 'the flash of awakened consciousness' or 'politics attains primacy over history' fuel such an interpretation. While one could, perhaps, accuse Benjamin for not always being dialectical enough (Adorno did so privately in a letter sent to Benjamin on 18 March 1936; see Benjamin, 1994, and Adorno, 1995, p. 168), one should not underestimate his lifelong concern to conceptualize subjectivity as something that is produced by specific historical constellations of time and space.

The *Arcades Project* presents a whole plethora of subjects, such as the *flâneur* and the prostitute, whose bodies are shaped by the forces of early modernity and capitalism – these subjects are not free but alienated. His essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1999c), too, shows how technological forces change the subject's cognitive schema and perceptual apparatus. In both the *Arcades Project* and the 'Work of Art' essay Benjamin is careful not to simply call for a return to some sort of original human or a Being. His concern is to explore the political possibilities technological innovations, such as film montage, open up for the production of different subjectivities.

Benjamin was fascinated by the arcade because it presented him with the 'world in miniature,' a world that was characterized by the triumphal rise of the bourgeois class, technological industrialism and the commodity. For Benjamin, what emerges out of the Parisian arcade is the *flâneur*, the bourgeois man¹⁷ who strolls through the arcades to meet the mass of urban city folk and commodities through the 'tactility' of his eyes and kinaesthetic feelings and imaginations. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* is the modern Parisian subject *par excellence*, because his experience is characterized by the shocks of the modern city: commodities, advertising images, anonymous crowds. The *flâneur* has a deep empathy with these 'things' – his subjectivity is made up of these objects. Yet, for Benjamin an analysis of modernity has to go beyond seeing the subjective and objective as mutually exclusive categories and, instead, analyze their dialectical interrelationship and co-determinacy. This is to say that for Benjamin the arcade is such a fascinating technology not only because of its specific architectural features – the iron-glass construction – but also because this very construction, this object, must be seen in relation to the emergence and reproduction of the modern subject itself.

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* consists entirely of fragments of quotations and notes by the author. On one hand, this can obviously be explained by the fact that the work remained unfinished, because of Benjamin's suicide

in 1940 when he was fleeing the Nazis. On the other hand, however, Benjamin made clear in private letters as well as in the epistemological parts of the book that he intended to produce a book entirely consisting of quotations. He saw quoting as a way to deconstruct the narrative structure of text. Yet, the destruction performed by the *Arcades Project* should not be mistaken as a celebration of fragmentation – Benjamin does not simply want to destroy things in order to disperse reality endlessly. The quotations of the *Arcades Project* are not arbitrarily organized; instead, they are positioned in such a way that a strategic meaning springs out of them. As Benjamin writes: ‘Being a dialectician means having the wind of history in one’s sails. The sails are the concepts. It is not enough, however, to have sails at one’s disposal. What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them’ (1999a, p. 473). Hence, the positioning of the quotations is of strategic importance for Benjamin.

The aim of the *Arcades Project* is not to subjectively celebrate the fragmentation of reality, but to arrange the destructed fragments of texts in such a way that a passage becomes visible, a passage that points beyond fragmentation, a passage that anticipates the future. For Benjamin the concept of destruction has an affirmative character: “‘construction” presupposes “destruction”” (BGS V, p. 587; 1999a, p. 470). The point, then, is not to endlessly celebrate a movement of destruction but to find a passage through destruction that enables new, strategic possibilities of construction. To put it differently, Benjamin assembles a montage, a text full of ‘dead’ quotations (dead, because they are taken out of their original contexts), not in order to celebrate death, but to find new life between the lines of deadly material. For him, the guarantee of life can only come through death; journeys have to go through death if they are to continue.

This is to suggest that Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image,’ which constructs a constellation of historical images, is dialectical because it is not a voluntaristic illumination; instead, it is an image that is constructed before the subject, not by the subject. This is to say, the ‘dialectical image’ is an ‘immanent critique’ because it springs out of the antagonisms of history themselves. It is an immanent image that does not stand outside history; it is made possible by history precisely because history is not able to present itself as a full continuum. Benjamin’s political event engenders this dialectic between the possibility and impossibility of history; the ‘primacy of politics over history’ tries to open up a space for seeing strategic possibilities in what is the impossibility of history. For him, history clearly produces the subject as well as itself. His work seems to claim, however, that this includes possibilities of producing history and subjectivity differently, which is precisely the terrain of politics and the impossibility of social organization.

4

The Political Event: Of Deconstruction and Impossibility

The previous chapter engaged with the German philosophical tradition of destruction. The difficulty with writing about a philosophical concept such as destruction is that it cannot be easily defined; or, rather, it *cannot* be defined. One cannot simply say 'Destruction is X,' because such a statement can itself be subjected to destruction. The point of destruction is that one can put any statement into question – one can expose the deceptive totality of any knowledge by destructing it. Therefore, a concept like destruction resists definition. This is exactly the point Derrida makes in his 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' in which he tries to explain the impossibility of defining deconstruction:

To be very schematic I would say that the difficulty of defining and therefore also of translating the word 'deconstruction' stems from the fact that all the predicates, all the defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even the syntactic articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this definition or to that translation, are also deconstructed or deconstructible, directly or otherwise, etc....All sentences of the type 'deconstruction is X' or 'deconstruction is not X' *a priori* miss the point. (Derrida, 1991a, p. 274–5)

What destruction seems to share with deconstruction – and this is what I will explore in more detail in this chapter – is a certain movement, a movement between negativity and positivity. This is to say, both concepts cannot be defined precisely because they are not entities, programmes or methods – instead, they are *movements*.

The difference between method and movement is that a method can be represented in a single position – the whole point of a method is that it can be reproduced in a predictable manner by returning to the same. This makes a method subject to controllability and examination. A movement, on the other hand, cannot be controlled; a movement always already escapes definability, predictability and examination. One could say,

perhaps, that movement destroys methodological positions and turns their monuments into ruins. However, destruction and deconstruction are not simply negative movements – they are not simply eradicating or getting rid of something. Instead, they are affirmative. This becomes clear in Benjamin's short provocation 'The Destructive Character.' For him, the destructive character, who is the embodiment of the movement of destruction, reduces things 'to rubble, not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it' (1978c, p. 303). The point of destruction thus is not to reduce everything to rubble – this would be a programme of pure negativity – but to find a passage through it, to find a way through death to affirm life. As we will see in this chapter, such an understanding can be linked to the philosophical traditions of deconstruction and impossibility.

Derrida and deconstruction

One philosopher who has made productive use of the philosophical tradition of destruction is Derrida. The connection between his concept of deconstruction and destruction is made explicit when he says:

I wished to translate and adapt to my own ends the Heideggerian word *Destruktion* or *Abbau*. Each signified in this context an operation bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western metaphysics. But in French 'destruction' too obviously implied an annihilation or a negative reduction much closer perhaps to Nietzschean 'demolition' than to the Heideggerian interpretation or to the type of reading that I proposed. (Derrida, 1991a, p. 270–1)

Besides Heidegger's philosophy, Derrida is an interested reader of Benjamin. One could, for example, mention Derrida's work on justice and violence (1991b), which offers a reading of Benjamin's essay 'Critique of Violence' (1978d). Derrida (1985, 2001) has also drawn on Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' (1999f) in which, as I briefly mentioned above, he sees translation as the destruction of text, a destruction that does not get rid of text but offers ways of reading differently. It could be argued that what Derrida's deconstruction shares with Benjamin's destruction is the insistence on the need to not simply read text and history as they have always been read but to read them differently.

Now, there can be no question that Derrida's concept of deconstruction is definable in any strict sense. As I mentioned above, deconstruction, like destruction, is not a method; it is not something that can be easily positioned, reproduced and examined. Instead, it is a movement that always already escapes definition. This also forbids a simple comparison of deconstruction with the conceptualizations of destruction discussed above. What

I would, nevertheless, like to show is that deconstruction and destruction can both be seen as movements between negativity and positivity: movements that are not simply endless and arbitrary but affirmative in the sense that they aim to transform and politically reposition something. Although it cannot be the task of this book to fully engage with Derrida's philosophy and its possibilities for such a project of transformation – this has been done elsewhere¹⁸ – what I would like to move towards is a productive reading of Derrida that shows the close affinities between what is sometimes regarded as different philosophical traditions, namely those of German so called critical theory and French so called poststructuralism. Naturally, I am here particularly interested in exploring Derrida's conception of the political, or, rather, examining in which way deconstruction can be seen as an explicitly political practice of theory.

As a starting point, one could suggest that, for Derrida, deconstruction is a kind of spacing, which is interesting in connection to my discussion of positioning: 'Spacing designates *nothing*, nothing that is, no presence at a distance; it is the index of an irreducible exterior, and at the same time of a *movement*, a displacement that indicates an irreducible alterity' (Derrida, 1987, p. 81, emphasis in original). Hence, deconstruction can be seen as a movement of depositioning, a movement that displaces¹⁹ presence in order to show the difference and undecidability that is always already inherent to every emplacement. It is this undecidability that depositions every structure; deconstruction displaces seemingly fixed constructions – like Benjamin destroys the Parisian arcades – in order to expose their ephemerality and transience. Such an interpretation of deconstruction is well-known; one could say, perhaps, that this is how deconstruction is normally portrayed. It is seen as a movement that puts any truth into question by showing its limits as fixed position. Some commentators (Lehman, 1991; and Žižek in Butler *et al.*, 2000) have used such an interpretation to point to what they see as the tendency of deconstructionist thought to be somewhat relativistic and apolitical. However, Derrida is quite careful to position deconstruction as a movement that is not relativistic. For him,

[d]econstruction...is not neutral. It intervenes.... [T]here is no effective and efficient position, no veritable force of rupture, without a minute, rigorous, extended analysis, an analysis that is as differentiated and as scientific as possible. Analysis of the greatest number of possible givens, and of the most diverse givens (general economy)... It is necessary to uproot this notion of taking a position from every determination that...remains psychologistic, subjectivistic, moral and voluntaristic. (Derrida, 1987, p. 94)

Derrida insists that deconstruction is an intervention. As for Benjamin, this intervention, or interruption, of the normal 'goings-on' of reality, is not

voluntaristic; instead, it is made possible through the rigorous analysis of those positions that always already structure reality.

How, then, does deconstruction intervene if it always already aims at displacing positions, structures and truths? Derrida answers this question by showing how deconstruction is never just a negative organizational principle, in the sense that it only discontinues or dismembers. For him, deconstruction is both a dismembering *and* membering (Derrida, 1978, p. 234); that is, deconstruction not only disperses, displaces or depositions; it also re-members, re-replaces and re-positions. The negative of dismembering is thus always already complemented by an organized movement of membering – depositioning is accompanied by repositioning. Deconstruction is thus a double movement; Derrida speaks of a 'double gesture' and an act of 'double writing' (1987, p. 41). According to him, this 'double gesture' consists of two phases.

First, Derrida talks about the necessity for an overturning of established hierarchies:

To do justice to this necessity [of overturning] is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other..., or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. Therefore one might proceed too quickly to a *neutralization* that *in practice* would leave the previous field untouched, leaving one no hold on the previous opposition, thereby preventing any means of *intervening* in the field effectively. (1987, p. 41, emphases in original)

This phase of overturning is crucial for Derrida, as it puts existing violent hierarchies of opposition into question. It overturns taken-for-granted positions and therefore exposes the 'conflictual and subordinating structure of an opposition.' What is important to note here is that this overturning does not aim for the neutralization of a conflictual space. Derrida makes clear that a strategy of neutralization does not give us 'any means of intervening in a field effectively.' Thus, deconstruction does not neutralize or pacify existing relations. First of all, it aims to overturn existing oppositions.

This phase of overturning is, however, not enough. Instead, what is needed is, what Derrida calls, a 'bifurcated writing,' which '*simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, *and* releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field' (1987, p. 42, emphases in original). The second phase is thus

an 'invasion of the entire field,' which Derrida describes as the 'irruptive emergence of a new "concept," a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime' (*ibid.*). This 'invasion' of a field, and its colonization by new concepts, if you like, is the constructive aspect of deconstruction, and Derrida is quite clear that this construction can never be 'an operation signed by a single author'; instead, it can only be marked in, what he calls, a 'grouped textual field' (*ibid.*).

Derrida's deconstructive moment can thus be characterized as a 'bifurcated event' of writing that *simultaneously* overturns a given textual field, a reality, *and* rewrites it along new lines. In other words, Derrida's deconstructive event not only depositions or discontinues a given reality, as is sometimes assumed; it also attempts to reposition reality. As Derrida makes clear, these two phases of the 'bifurcated event' should not be understood as a chronological order, 'or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things' (1987, p. 41). On the contrary, for Derrida, deconstruction has structural implications, which cannot simply be carried out by a single author. Instead, it is an event that happens within, what he calls, a 'grouped textual field,' in the sense that a rewriting of history happens from within the textual field of history itself. For Derrida, deconstruction is clearly a social event, an event that necessitates 'an interminable analysis,' as 'the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself (Derrida, 1987, p. 42).

Derrida's deconstructive event of 'bifurcated writing' is political precisely because established orders, or 'violent hierarchies of opposition,' as he calls it, are overturned and rewritten along different lines. In this sense, deconstruction does not simply subsume every subject and object into a relativistic and nihilistic stream of nothingness, but directly addresses the violence of the established oppositions between subjects and objects. This is to say, for Derrida, deconstruction does not aim to neutralize a given field of subjects and objects. On the contrary, it aims to directly intervene in this field politically, that is, it recognizes and addresses the specific relations of subjectivity and objectivity at play. The political nature of deconstruction is made explicit by Derrida in the following passage:

[T]his is the moment of politics – to have rules, conventions and stabilizations of power. All that a deconstructive point of view tries to show, is that since convention, institutions and consensus are stabilizations (sometimes stabilizations of great duration, sometimes micro-stabilizations), this means that they are stabilizations of something essentially unstable and chaotic. Thus, it becomes necessary to stabilize precisely because stability is not natural; it is because there is instability that stabilization becomes necessary; it is because there is chaos that there is a need for stability. Now, this chaos and instability, which is fundamental, founding and irreducible, is at one naturally

the worst against which we struggle with laws, rules, conventions, politics and provisional hegemony, but at the same time it is a chance, a chance to change, to destabilize. If there were continual stability, there would be no need for politics, and it is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible. Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other. (Derrida, 1996, p. 83–4)

What Derrida describes here is, what he calls, the ‘moment of politics,’ or what I have referred to as the ‘event of politics.’ For him, politics is possible because there is no *a priori* continuum or stability; that is, organized society is fundamentally nonexistent as there is only chaos, which is impossible to eternally fix in one place. However, according to Derrida, it is precisely because of this essentially unstable and chaotic nothingness that makes it *necessary* to organize society, that is, to introduce rules, laws and, what he calls, ‘provisional hegemonies.’ This is essentially the political event: to make something possible within the open space of impossibility. For Derrida, this event is inherently undecidable because chaos cannot be fixed and organized only in one way. Yet, he is equally quite clear: the event of undecidability requires a decision; that is, the chaos of pure impossibility is not an option. Political decisions about how to organize society are needed. It is because there are different ways of making these decisions, or, rather, because there are different decisions one can take, there is a question of politics.

Yet, what we can also learn from Derrida is that the political cannot simply be a singularity, a place that describes a particular geography, a profession, a programme or a manifesto. Instead, the political is an undecidable space that requires social enacting. For Derrida, the political event is when a social decision emerges out of an undecidable situation: it is the event in which an affirmation is organized out of the undecidable fragments of a negative movement of displacing. But precisely because the political has to move through a movement of negativity it cannot be restricted to a singular place whose shape and form can be foreseen or pre-positioned, nor can it be reduced to an historical programme or a manifesto. This is to say, then, that, for Derrida, the political does not have an essence; it can come in all sorts of shapes and forms, which we might not even recognize as the political. However, as the movement of deconstruction, the political, too, does not simply go away. Instead, it is there for us to deal with, to give it a shape, a form, an organization.

Laclau and Mouffe’s political philosophy of hegemony

So far in Part II I have been concerned with the conceptualization of the political event, but it is, perhaps, not quite clear yet how this event relates

to the constitution of organization or, indeed, society. To make this link between the political event and social organization clearer I will now turn to the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe, who have made productive use of the philosophies discussed so far in Part II. In my view, it is their concern to show how the dialectical movement between possibility and impossibility is at the heart of the question of social organization. For Laclau and Mouffe, who explicitly claim to write in a deconstructionist tradition of thought (1985, p. 2–3), one of the important concepts to describe this movement between possibility and impossibility is hegemony, which I will introduce in this section and connect to the philosophies discussed above.

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985, see also Mouffe, 1993, and Laclau, 1990, 1996a,b), society is fundamentally impossible. That is, for them, the dialectical movement between possibility and impossibility can never be resolved because social organization itself is impossible or undecidable. This can be related to the notions of ‘negative dialectics’ and ‘non-synthesis’ which, as I discussed above, also point to the impossibility of ever finalizing the dialectical process. For Laclau and Mouffe, this impossibility or undecidability of society is structural (Laclau, 1995, p. 93), which means that the social will never be fully represented, it can never be finished.

This ‘structural undecidability’ of the social points to an understanding of structure as discourse, which, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 109–11), highlights that society can never be fixed in an all-encompassing, centralized place. Instead, society should be seen as a social interaction that occurs within a discursive context. Following Foucault, for them, this discourse can never be total; instead, it is characterized by resistance and difference. In their view, discourse can only be a partial fixation. This implies that it can only establish a precarious order of the social. If discourse is only partial, Laclau and Mouffe maintain, there will always be an excess of meaning, something which escapes the logic of discourse. They call this ‘the field of discursivity’ (1985, p. 111), which is not extra-discursive or non-discursive, but indeed produced by the very discourse of which it is a surplus. Because there will always be a certain excess of meaning, social organization can be seen as being ‘structurally undecidable.’

Yet, precisely because of this undecidability there is, for Laclau and Mouffe, the question of the decision. This is to say that the impossibility of social organization has to be represented (or misrepresented, this will always be an undecidable question) by one particular content – a political force, a class, a ‘grouped textual field.’ Following Derrida, Laclau calls this a real decision, because it is inherently undecidable how to represent society:

To deconstruct the structure is the same as to show its undecidability, the distance between the plurality of arrangements that are possible out

of it and the actual arrangement that has finally prevailed. This we can call a decision in so far as: (a) it is not predetermined by the 'original' terms of the structure; and (b) it requires its passage through the experience of undecidability. The moment of decision, the moment of madness, is this jump from the experience of undecidability to a creative act, a fiat which requires its passage through that experience. ...This act cannot be explained in terms of any rational underlying mediation. This moment of decision as something left to itself and unable to provide its grounds through any system of rules transcending itself, is the moment of the subject. (Laclau, 1996b, p. 54–5)

For Laclau, the event of decision is not a decision one takes *as* a subject. Instead, because there is a decision there is a subject. The moment of the decision, which emerges out of undecidability, is the moment of the subject. This is an important insight which can be connected to Benjamin's concept of 'dialectical image' discussed above. For him, this image is not a subjective illumination but one which springs out of history itself. Similarly, Laclau seems to locate the agency of the decision in the structures, or rather the gaps of the structure, of society rather than the individual subject. Laclau bases such an understanding on the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan. These I will now briefly summarize – and this will not be more than an introduction to Lacan – because his thought is of vital importance for understanding Laclau and Mouffe's conception of the politics of impossibility.

Lacan

For Lacan, 'the subject as such is uncertain' (1998, p. 188) – one could, perhaps, say undecidable or impossible. For him, the social is not *constructed* by the interplay of subjective experiences of others (with a small 'o') – in his view, people do not decide their future for themselves. Instead, the subject is produced by the symbolic order (words, meanings, narratives) that prepositions the social. Lacan calls this symbolic order the Other (with a capital 'O'), which is external to the subject, as it is a set of objective positions. This Lacanian Other forms the subject's identity: 'The Other is the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject – it is the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear' (1998, p. 203). For Lacan, 'the subject depends on the signifier,' which has to be located 'in the field of the Other' (*ibid.*, p. 205). The Lacanian subject, then, is not *a priori* 'full' – there is nothing to discover inside the subject, through self-knowledge or any other psychological strategy. Instead the subject is defined by an *a priori* lack, or gap. One could also say that subject is always already deposed. This lack is constantly filled and refilled by the symbolic regimes of the Other.

In this sense, the subject is a fold of the Other, to use a Deleuzian expression (Deleuze 1988, p. 94ff).

The implications of such a Lacanian theorization of the subject are immense. It moves us away from the humanist essentialism that seems to underlie many discourses. It links 'the *I* to socially elaborated situations' (Lacan, 1977, p. 5); that is, the '*I*' is not viewed as *the* grand constructor of sociality, as the decision-maker, but as a product of this very sociality. This implies that, for Lacan, the question of the subject is always already one of alienation (1998, p. 203ff). That is, because the subject is not free of any ties, because it is produced by the Other, it comes into existence by way of an invasion of the Other's symbolic meanings, the prepositioned regime of reality. However, this invasion can never be a 'full invasion,' an invasion that completely fills the subject's lack. Put differently, although the subject can only exist through the symbols of the Other, this symbolization can never capture the totality of the gap between the subject and the Other, or the Real. For Lacan the Real (with a capital 'R') is not simply reality. In fact, it is that which escapes the normal symbolization regime of reality. One could also say that the Real is the lack of the Other; it is the surplus of reality that cannot be symbolized. Thus, a full identity of the subject is impossible; there will always be a gap between the Other and the Real; the subject will always be deposed. Because of this lack, Lacan does not speak of the subject's identity but of identification (1977, p. 61ff). This means that the subject's attempt to construct a full identity will always fail – there will always be a lack in the subject's desire to fully present itself. What we are therefore dealing with is not identity but 'a series of identifications, failed identifications – or rather a play between identification and its failure' (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 29). The Lacanian subject is constituted by a certain failure, the failure to fully identify with the Other, the order of symbolic positions. One could also say that at the heart of the Lacanian subject is not harmony, the fully unified and biologically whole individual, but an antagonistic lack, which is traversed by a certain fantasy with which the individual identifies.

However, for Lacan, it is not only the subject that is characterized by an inherent lack. The Other, too, can never be a full, all-encompassing Other, which can provide a full identity to the subject. He writes:

Let me simply say that this is what leads me to object to any reference to totality in the individual, since it is the subject who introduces division into the individual, as well as into the collectivity that is his equivalent. Psychoanalysis is properly that which reveals both the one and the other to be no more than mirages. (1977, p. 80)

This is to say, precisely because the subject always lacks something, objective reality, or the Other, must also be defined by an *a priori* lack. But what

is this something that the subject and the Other lack? For Lacan, this something is *jouissance*, which could be translated as 'enjoyment,' but it is not simply pleasure. For Lacan, pleasure is produced by the symbolic order, the Other. *Jouissance* is beyond socially sanctioned pleasure (1998, p. 184); it is located in the Real, that which is not symbolizable. *Jouissance* is therefore never fully attainable, it can never be subsumed or incorporated into the Other. As the Real and its *jouissance* are impossible to symbolize, there will always be a gap in the Other. Put differently, because the Other can never quite manage to provide full enjoyment to the subject, and because the subject fails to fully identify with the Other, there is a gap in the symbolic regime or the Other. It is this gap, this failure, that is at the heart of both the subject and the Other, which describes the notion of impossibility.

Society as impossibility

We have obviously gone over Lacan's work far too quickly here.²⁰ Yet, the above summary can, perhaps, help us to understand the psychoanalytical background to the notion of the impossibility of social organization. For Laclau and Mouffe, the social is impossible precisely because there will always be a Lacanian lack in both the Other and the subject. That is, the social can never be represented as a full objectivity of reality; therefore, a subject can never fully identify with reality. As Laclau writes:

All subject positions are the effect of a structural determination...As a structure, however, constitutively undecidable, decisions are required that the structure does not predetermine – this is the moment of the emergence of the *subject* as different from subject *positions*. As the decision constituting the subject is one taken in conditions of insurmountable undecidability, it is one that does not express the *identity* of the subject (something that the subject *already* is) but requires acts of *identification*. These acts split the new identity of the subject: this identity is, on one hand, a particular content, on the other it embodies the absent fullness of the subject. (1996b, p. 57, emphases in original)

What Laclau calls here the 'absent fullness of the subject' points precisely to the notion that the social is inherently impossible. This is to say, a full representation of the social is never achievable, as both the Other and the subject are characterized by an inherent lack. For Laclau, this amounts to a 'structural undecidability' of society. One could also say that it is structurally impossible to ever close the question of the social. Yet, what Laclau seems to suggest in the above passage is that, precisely because of this undecidability, there is the question of the decision. Out of this decision, he maintains, the subject emerges as the act of identification with a particular content.

Because, for Laclau and Mouffe, the social is 'structurally undecidable,' different identifications are possible. This is to say, because the structure of the Other is a discourse that is characterized by a 'field of discursivity,' or a field of difference, different kind of subjects can be produced. This is why Laclau and Mouffe insist that social organization is not a totality but, instead, characterized by antagonisms.²¹ What these antagonisms point to is an inherent fragility of social organization; it can only be something partial and precarious (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 125). This is to say, because society is inherently characterized by antagonisms, it is impossible for the social to ever fully organize itself; there will always be something that subverts its full presence. This is why Laclau and Mouffe maintain: 'Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality' (1985, p. 127).

However, precisely because of this fragile nature of the social, Laclau and Mouffe insist that there is a need to organize society. This is the terrain of the political. This coincides with Derrida's view, which maintains that because of the fundamental chaos and undecidability of society there is a need for political decisions about laws and institutions. This decision can also be understood as a strategy of simplifying the space of social organization in such a way that it can be politically enacted. For Laclau and Mouffe, this political decision is engendered by a 'logic of equivalence' (1985, p. 130).²² Whereas the 'logic of antagonisms' points to the fundamental impossibility of social organization – to its openness and undecidability – the 'logic of equivalence' gives presence to some of these antagonisms in order to politically act upon them. This equivalence fills the inherent lack of the social and enables identification with a particular organization of reality.

This dialectic between antagonisms and equivalence, then, points again to the dialectic between the impossible and the possible, which is characterized by a double movement. The first movement is one that embraces difference; it shows the limits of any fixed reality and exposes the antagonisms of social organization. However, as Laclau notes, this first movement

cannot be the end of the matter. A discourse in which meaning cannot possibly be fixed is nothing else but the discourse of the psychotic. The second movement therefore consists in the attempt to effect this ultimately impossible fixation. The social is not only the infinite play of differences. It is also the attempt to limit that play, to domesticate infinitude, to embrace it within the finitude of an order. But this order – or structure – no longer takes the form of an underlying essence of the social; rather, it is an attempt – by definition unstable and precarious – to act over the 'social,' to *hegemonize* it. (Laclau, 1990, p. 90–1, emphasis in original)

What Laclau emphasizes here again is that there is a need to move from the level of undecidability to that of a decision, from impossibility to possibility. It is this move from the undecidable level of a limitlessly open society to a decidable level of social discourse which, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), is articulated by the concept of hegemony. We will now turn to a discussion of this concept.

Hegemony

In their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 7–91) genealogically trace the concept of hegemony to a set of radical political discourses. These range from Rosa Luxemburg to Kautsky, from Marx to Lenin, from Bernstein to Sorel, from Trotsky to Gramsci, as well as many other thinkers. There is no space here to engage with Laclau and Mouffe's detailed discussion of the historical emergence of the discourse of hegemony at any great length. Without wanting to simplify their discussion one could, perhaps, suggest that their main concern is to show that the concept of hegemony is a response to those essentialist discourses that see reality to be structured by underlying economic laws giving rise to specific economic classes. In their view, the concept of hegemony was introduced to suggest that the structuring of reality does not only depend on economic necessities but also on political and therefore strategic contingencies. This is to say, for example, 'if the working class, as a hegemonic agent, manages to articulate around itself a number of democratic demands and struggles, this is due not to any *a priori* structural privilege, but to a political initiative on the part of the class' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 65). In other words, the working class is not 'the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle' (*ibid.*).

For Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci (1971) was one of the most important 'anti-essentialist' thinkers who saw the historical, contingent character of the working class. For Gramsci, despite its specific economic necessities, the working class is required to articulate its demands within a plural field of democratic politics (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 70). Gramsci argued that, in order to understand social struggle, we have to go beyond the economism that privileges the political identity of the worker and the working class. In his view, political practices occur in many spheres of society. For example, many political identities, such as gender, race and religion, are not primarily embedded in the capitalist workplace or indeed the capitalist state, but in the practices of civil society. Hence, for Gramsci, social struggle is articulated in a variety of different fields, and there are a wide range of different possibilities for the formation of political alliances.

At the heart of a Gramscian understanding of social organization is thus a discourse of politics and strategy. That is, struggle is not primarily articulated

through essentialist categories such as the working class, but through the practical needs of a particular political situation that produces possibilities for forming coalitions, compromises and alliances. Such strategic alliances are established in an attempt to forge hegemonic links between different social actors in the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. Gramsci (1971, pp. 181–2) developed the concept of ‘historical bloc’ to show that a hegemonic class seeks not only leadership in the sphere of production, but also in the spheres of the state and civil society. Hegemony is thus a concept that aims to broaden the meaning of politics beyond the realms of economic production as well as the state to include the multiplicity of relations of civil society. Hegemony is that which organizes control within all three of these spheres.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) expand Gramsci’s work by conceptualizing hegemony as a discursive formation. Following Foucault, they argue that a hegemonic relation should be understood as a discursive formation that traverses many different spheres of social reality. That is, in their view, social struggles are rarely articulated within the confined boundaries of, for example, the workplace. Instead, the economic realm of the workplace is controlled by the state and legitimized as well as challenged through a variety of practices in civil society. Laclau and Mouffe’s argument was, of course, embedded in a specific historical juncture which, in the mid-1980s, was characterized by the crisis of the left (the crisis of social democracy and the communist project), the rise of neo-liberalism (Thatcher and Reagan) as well as the emergence of so called new social movements, such as feminist, gay, green, pacifist and Black civil rights movements, to name but a few (see Chapter 7). Laclau and Mouffe’s concern was to open up the questions of the political to these specific social developments that are characterized, not only by concerns of the working class or labour movements, but by a multiplicity of discursive struggles.

The concept of hegemony, then, points to the notion that struggle occurs in multiple discursive spaces that traverse the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. As I have already noted, for Laclau and Mouffe, ‘hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social’ (1985, p. 134). This is why Laclau refers to the ‘structural undecidability’ of society. In his view, society is structurally undecidable because it cannot be represented by a fixed signifier. This is to say that, for Laclau and Mouffe, social organization is contingent; it is characterized by a multiplicity of political struggles that occur in many different social places. However, this is only one aspect of hegemony. The other aspect is that precisely because of the ‘structural undecidability’ and multiplicity of society there is a need for a social decision about how to organize society. Following Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe assert that society is not simply an inter-play of multiple forces but, instead, described by a discursive unity (1985, p. 7). That is, there are concrete social formations that are characterized by the specific ordering and positioning of forces of power and know-

ledge. Linking back to my discussion of Heidegger in Chapter 1, we could say that hegemony points to the idea that social reality is positioned or emplaced within particular historical formations, which endure over time and space. This emplacing is not simply the placing of something, as Sam Weber notes (1996, p. 71). Instead, it is, what he calls, the 'staking out' of a place and the constant defence of that place. As I discussed in Chapter 1, this constant maintenance and defence of a social formation, an emplacement, is what Heidegger refers to as 'goings-on.'

The 'goings-on' of a hegemonic emplacement also produces specific subjectivities; the subject is 'staked out,' so to say, by concrete social formations. Now, as I argued above, any social emplacement, or hegemonic formation, must be seen as being contested. That is, social struggles are constitutive of any social formation. For Laclau and Mouffe, these struggles are an effect of the practice of articulation, which is the establishing of relations among actors in such a way that 'their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice' (1985, p. 105). For them, the concept of articulation points to the fact that social struggles do not merely express episodic rivalries or acts of dissent, which are constructed around temporary political demands. Instead, in their view, political struggles are articulated from within social antagonisms that are constructed by hegemonic discourses. This means that social conflicts are related to wider aspects of how subjectivities are produced by hegemonic discursive formations, or emplacements.

One example of such a hegemonic discourse is neo-liberalism, which, particularly over the course of the past twenty years, has articulated the worldwide politico-economic terrain by attacking bureaucratic and centralist forms of private and public organization and privileging market entrepreneurship and shareholder value (Torfing, 1999, p. 102; see also my discussion in Chapter 7). Applying Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemonic articulation, one could say that the neo-liberalist discourse is the hegemony of the general politico-economic terrain. Going back to Laclau's above point, this hegemony can be seen as a decision about how to fill the gap that is left open by the undecidability or impossibility of social organization. This is to say, neo-liberalism has become possible, because the wider politico-economic terrain is impossible. The hegemony of neo-liberalism is possible, precisely because it involves the construction, maintenance and defence of particular discursive formations that produce reality, including subjectivities, in concrete ways. Neo-liberalism, then, is a social discourse that has emplaced this world in a particular fashion. This hegemonic emplacement is, however, not a totality. It is hegemonic because it is characterized by constant contestations and embattlements. In the language of Foucault one could say that, because neo-liberalism is a regime of power and knowledge, resistance is always already a feature of that very regime. Laclau and Mouffe's point is that this resistance is shaped by the

way the hegemonic discourse is articulated. For example, the contemporary anti-capitalist movement, to be discussed in Chapter 7, has emerged precisely because of the way neo-liberalist discourses have been articulated.

Torfinn (1999, p. 118–22) critiques Laclau and Mouffe's conception of politics for not being able to account for the day-to-day politics, which are not always characterized by social antagonisms. For him, politics does not always have to involve hegemonic struggles, such as those that involve neo-liberalism and capitalism. Although Torfinn primarily seems to point to everyday political practices by governments and other political institutions, one could expand his critique and suggest that Laclau and Mouffe's conception of hegemonic politics does not, perhaps, leave enough room for those multiple micro-political practices, which do not necessarily involve struggles based on social antagonisms. However, in response Laclau and Mouffe would insist that they clearly emphasise the multiplicity of articulatory practices of resistance (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 131). Their point is that the articulation of political struggles is always connected to the production of identities, or rather identifications, which is based on the establishment of 'chains of equivalence.' That is, resistance is relational; in their view, 'chains of equivalences' establish a certain sameness among resisting actors who construct a political 'field of negativity,' which involves a discourse of social antagonism, or an 'us' against 'them' (Mouffe, 1993, p. 7). For Laclau and Mouffe, these 'chains of equivalence' of an articulatory practice institute themselves over the course of a historical period which partially fixes the social along specific lines of organization.

'Anti-capitalism,' for example, is made possible because of an articulatory practice of opposition against the particular ways neo-liberalist capitalism is currently organized. The anti-capitalist movement has established a 'field of negativity,' a field of 'us' against 'them,' precisely because it resists the particular 'goings-on' of capitalism. Going back to my discussion of Hardt and Negri's opposition against Hegel and dialectics in Chapter 2, one could, perhaps, say that their practice of opposition is a similar establishment of a 'field of negativity.' That is, Hardt and Negri oppose Hegel because they aim to resist the particular ways dialectical thinking has shaped philosophical thought. My above point was not, however, that opposition is not possible. I tried to highlight that a discourse of *total* opposition (or what Hardt refers to as 'forgetting') is impossible because the opposition against Hegel only becomes possible through the phenomenon we call 'Hegel.' Equally, 'anti-capitalism' is only made possible because there is 'capitalism.' This means that resistance against something can only be articulated from within the discursive formation of which it is a product. There is not strictly an 'outside' from which one can develop a position of critique. Resistance is always already produced and enabled by the discourse it aims to oppose, although resistance of course aims to seek an outside, a beyond, to oppressive discourses.

The point to make is that, although the hegemony of neo-liberalism and capitalism emplaces and organizes social reality in particular ways, it can never be a totality. As Derrida, says:

When one speaks of hegemony – that is, the relation of forces – the laws of structure are tendential; they are determined not (to not determine) in terms of *yes or no*, hence in terms of simple exclusion, but in those of differential forces, *more or less*. (Derrida, 1997, p. 293, emphasis in original)

Hegemony is thus a discursive structure that is inherently open and precarious. It enables resistances and oppositions. This, however, should not cloud the fact that a hegemonic structure is a particular emplacement of social reality; it involves a certain ideological closure. This closure can be seen as a social decision as to how to make society possible; it is a closing of the gap of society's 'structural undecidability' in order to produce social meaning and organization. This closure, or decision, can, however, never be final, precisely because hegemony points to the contingency and impossibility of social organization.

To conclude, in Part II I have discussed a range of different philosophies and the way they can be seen to conceptualize the political event. In my view, the philosophies of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility share an understanding of the political event as a dialectical movement between negativity and positivity. The dialectical movement of negativity is described by putting established historical orders into question. In Chapter 2 I discussed the philosophical and political reasoning behind such a dialectical movement. I argued that the dialectical act is a political questioning of the continuity of history, which is reproduced by hegemonic power. Dialectics is political because it questions, challenges and resists the 'principled positions' along which society is organized. What, however, I have been keen to show throughout Part II is that the political event, as conceptualized by the philosophies discussed here, is not only a movement of negativity, which simply leads to displacement and undecidability. I argued that the political event also seeks to put into place an affirmation. This putting into place is a social decision about how to fill the gap produced by undecidability. Put differently, it is an affirmation of depositioning by establishing new positions.

What my discussion of the philosophies of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility has also shown is that the political event does not simply produce new positivities, decisions or unities in the sense that these new continuities are thought to be totalities. Instead, these new continuities are themselves characterized by an undecidability, or impossibility. This is to say, continuity is always an imperfect synthesis of multiple forces. This is why Benjamin talks about 'non-synthesis' and

Adorno refers to the dialectical process as 'negative dialectics.' What this implies is that the dialectical movement between negativity and positivity can never produce final answers; it will always fail to put into place, what Benjamin calls, an 'apocatastasis,' a new total continuum.

However, what needs to be remembered is that it is because of this very failure that dialectics is enabled in the first place. This is to say, precisely because a continuum can never be perfect or all-encompassing there are possibilities of discontinuities. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), these discontinuities, or, what they call, deterritorializations, are inherent to the way capital works. That is, in their view capitalism is not simply a fully territorialized or totalitarian system. Instead, it is characterized by a plethora of deterritorialization forces that continuously leave the regime of capital open for intervention and change. Capital is clearly a very dynamic regime. Resistance to the 'normal goings-on' of capital are therefore enabled from within these very 'goings-on.' That is, discontinuities cannot be launched from an artificial outside, for example, a voluntaristic subject; instead, they are immanent to the continuities. Resistance, then, can only come from within regimes of power and knowledge that produce subjectivities. In this view, resistance is made possible because the regime of capital itself is impossible; that is, it is not fully constituted as continuity or universal position. This, I would suggest, is the dialectics of possibility and impossibility that describes the political event. As I have shown in Part II, speculative thought engenders this dialectical movement by searching for political possibilities within the realm of the impossibility of social organization.

Part III

Organization

5

Positioning Organization: The Hegemony of Management Knowledge

While Part II was mainly of philosophical nature – that is, I engaged with a range of different philosophies without connecting them to the field of organization theory – Part III of this book will be much more practical in nature. What will concern me in Part III is the practice of organization theory. As I will show, the philosophical arguments developed in Part II can be used productively to critique contemporary organization theory discourses. It is this critique which I hope will help us imagining different social and organizational futures and contribute to a project of repoliticizing and repositioning organization theory.

In Chapter 1 I followed Parker's claim that management can be seen as the 'hegemonic model of organization' (2002a, p. 184). That is, in his view, the theory and practice of organization is described by the hegemony of management discourses. I argued that the hegemony of management is part of a project that positions social organization in particular grids of rationality, representation and institutionality, which cannot be disconnected from the wider 'goings-on' of capitalism. In this chapter I will discuss the hegemony of this positioning project in relation to the field of organization theory. While it cannot be the task of this chapter to comprehensively outline, discuss and critique the hegemony of management discourses within contemporary organization theory, I will use a particular example to illustrate the 'goings-on' of the positioning project. The discourse which, in my view, illustrates the workings of the hegemony of management and the positioning project itself is knowledge management.

In this chapter, I will engage with the field of knowledge management, which can be seen to have become one of the most popular organization and management discourses over the past decade. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, Peter Drucker predicted the rise of a knowledge society as early as in 1969. Then, in 1992 he wrote:

In this society, knowledge is the primary resource for individuals and for the economy overall. Land, labour, and capital – the economist's

traditional factors of production – do not disappear, but they become secondary. (1992, p. 95)

In 1991 Ikujiro Nonaka, another management guru, wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*: ‘In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge’ (1991, p. 96). After these early guru rhetorics the knowledge discourse became increasingly popular in the course of the 1990s. Today, it seems that knowledge management has populated large areas of organization theory: information management, individual and organizational learning, innovation management, creativity management, strategic management, human resource management, culture management, capability management – all of these management theories and techniques can be related to the knowledge management rhetoric (for an overview see Prichard *et al.*, 2000).

In this chapter I will outline and discuss the discourse of knowledge management in order to critique its politics. After the first two sections generally introduce the field of knowledge management and its concerns, the main part of this chapter will be reserved for a Benjaminian critique of the ‘goings-on’ of knowledge management. This critique will be structured into three sections: first, I will argue that knowledge, the way it is conceptualized and practiced by knowledge management, can be seen as, what Benjamin calls, a paralyzing shock rather than an event which makes a new experience of reality possible; second, I will speculatively relate the knowledge manager to Benjamin’s ‘heroes’ of Parisian modernity, namely the *flâneur* and the prostitute, who are both seen to have a special empathy with the commodity; and, third, I will expose knowledge management to be inherently embedded in the ‘goings-on’ of commodity fetishism, which I will relate to the question of hegemony. What I try to achieve in this chapter is to engage with knowledge management to outline, discuss and critique its particular discourse.

Yet, this is only the first movement. The second movement is the speculative attempt to construct an image of the wider hegemonic ‘goings-on’ of the positioning project of organization. When Benjamin studied the Parisian arcades he was only partly interested in the particularities and peculiarities of that architectural phenomenon; what really made his *Arcades Project* an important contribution was his ability to relate the life of and around the arcades to the wider ‘goings-on’ of Parisian 19th century modernity itself. Taking the *Arcades Project* as inspiration, this engagement with the knowledge management discourse is an attempt to expose the ‘goings-on’ of today’s constellation of social organization.

Organization, management and the knowledge society

What is the *Zeitgeist* of organization? If one would go into a contemporary organization and ask the seemingly obvious question 'What is organization?,' one would probably be met by either ignorance or lack of understanding. It seems so obvious. What else do organizations do than to organize? – organize processes of production, organize human resources, organize marketing activities, organize accounting and finances, organize strategy, organize research, organize culture, organize change, organize time, organize space...everything in a modern organization needs to be organized. Yet, what seems so normal and natural to us today is, in fact, a very recent phenomenon. Although the concept of organization might have been around since ancient Greek times,²³ it is first and foremost linked to the emergence of capitalism and modern forms of divisions of labour, specialization and mass production in the 18th and 19th century, which gave rise to 'organization man' (Whyte, 1956). For Parker, the rise of modern organization is inherently linked to management, which, in his view, has become the 'hegemonic model of organization' (2002a, p. 184). For him (2002a, p. 6–9), the word 'management' has three interrelated meanings: first, it names a professional group of managers who can be found in most of today's organizations, whether in the public or private realm; second, management is a 'doing' that describes a process of 'sorting something out,' but also of controlling something; third, management is an academic discipline whose task it is to produce knowledge about management and business. For Parker, management is the *Zeitgeist* of organization. In his view, management is a specific form of organization that has claimed universality under the conditions of capitalist modernity.

The task of management is not simply to organize but to manage organizational operations more efficiently and effectively in the name of the owner or shareholder of a firm. As early as 1835 Ure describes management as the juggling of the mechanical, moral and commercial aspects of the capitalist firm. According to Starbuck, Ure

asserted that every factory incorporates 'three principles of action, or three organic systems': (a) a 'mechanical' system that integrates production processes, (b) a 'moral' system that motivates and satisfies the needs of workers, and (c) a 'commercial' system that seeks to sustain the firm through financial management and marketing. Harmonizing these three systems, said Ure, was the responsibility of managers. (2003, p. 150)

Management is about the efficient and effective organization of a range of systems that make up the corporate firm. The manager uses a range of rational tools and techniques for this job: planning, motivation,

accounting, forecasting, marketing, appraisals, time management, to name just a few basic ones. Going back to the theme of positioning, one could say that management is about the positioning of resources, that is, objects and subjects, within the wider organized realm of a firm in order to produce surplus value.

To stay with the example of time management, the task of the manager is to qualify and quantify time in such a way that the systems of organization can work efficiently and effectively hand in hand. In such a view, time is always already spatialized. That is, time is seen as a Newtonian objective, measurable, quantitative dimension of space; it characterizes the linear, chronological, evolutionary and progressive development of existing spatial relations. The management of time has a long tradition in work organizations. Marx (1976, p. 350), for example, analyzes in detail how time, besides labour power, is the most important commodity that characterizes the organization of the capitalist production process. The management of the time-commodity is of high importance because surplus value can be accrued by extracting more time from labourers than is required to reproduce their wages. The clock must therefore be seen as one of the most important managerial tools in the history of capitalist work organization. It was also one of the main ordering devices for Taylor's scientific management as well as Ford's assembly line, which today, although its death has often been announced (Piore and Sabel, 1984), can still be seen as one of the main principles of managerial organizing. Let us think, for example, of the way McDonald's and the whole fast-food industry makes its money (see Ritzer's *McDonaldization of Society*²⁴); one could also use the example of the just-in-time manufacturing system (see Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). An important aspect of management, then, is to manage the time aspects of work and production processes.²⁵

However, beyond the concrete processes of managing time in work organizations, management can also be seen to continuously position and emplace 'our' time, that is, the time of today's particular historical formation. Relating back to my discussion of Benjamin in Chapter 3, one could say that management is firmly embedded in an understanding of time as *chronos*. The task of management is to position time within a progressive line of historical order. For Benjamin, this history is always already the history of those in power, those who have a concrete interest in the 'eternal return' of the 'ever same.' Management, one could suggest, is about ensuring that this 'eternal return' is connected to an image of progress, that is, to higher and faster returns and more of the same. Management thus *positions* time within a particular historical order. What is crucial is the exact qualification of this positioning: management is always already *positively* positioned in relation to capital. That is, management serves capital, and it has worked over the past century to convince capital that it is absolutely necessary for this purpose (Shenhav, 2002). Management's task

is to produce and expand surplus value and ensure higher returns – although it is not necessarily always very good at it. Management is thus inherently political. Its politics is the continuous emplacement and reproduction of the hegemony of capital; its politics is the application and replication of capital's particular value system, a system which, according to Marx (1976), is geared towards the production of surplus value in the labour process.

The politics of management is particularly apparent when one considers the rhetoric of shareholder value. According to Willmott, this has only recently become an *explicit* objective for management. Before the stock market boom in the 1990s, he maintains, the purpose of management was more generally expressed in 'universalistic terminology, such as improving efficiency and effectiveness, seemingly as ends in themselves' (2000, p. 216). But, as he adds, because of the underlying agenda of profit generation shareholder value could be seen to have always been an important aspect of management. The notion of shareholder value points to the idea that the most important aspect of the management of a company is the production of higher returns, that is, higher profit levels – although there are, of course, differences in the way the capitalist system works around the world.²⁶ As Marx (1976) clearly points out, the whole idea of the capitalist production process is to produce ever higher economic returns for owners, that is, shareholders, which can only be achieved by managing the labour process more effectively and efficiently. In this regard Jackson and Carter write:

Management knowledge...constitutes a relatively homogeneous canon that claims to be able to improve organizational efficiency (and, thereby, profit, though the link is rarely demonstrable), in particular through the adoption of specific techniques for the use of labour. The general objective of these techniques is to enable units of labour to be more productive – that is, to work harder. (1998, p. 151)

For Jackson and Carter, management knowledge is thus 'an ideologically based canon, biased in favour of an essentially capitalist interest. It functions as part of the techno-mediatic hegemony that sustains this dominant discourse' (1998, p. 152). What Jackson and Carter name here, after Derrida (1994), 'techno-mediatic' relates to the Heideggerian understanding, discussed in Chapter 1, that technical regimes of society need to be continuously emplaced and defended. Heidegger refers to this process as the technical 'goings-on' of modernity. In Chapters 3 and 4 I highlighted the inherently political aspect of this continuous emplacement, by suggesting that society is made possible by forging social discourses into a hegemonic order. Management is at the heart of the hegemony of capital precisely because it continuously organizes its 'goings-on.' The political purpose of

management, then, is to continuously produce knowledge that enables the reproduction of capital. One could, perhaps, say that management has always been about the production of knowledge; that is, the management of knowledge has always been the very purpose of management. In this sense, managers have, perhaps, always been knowledge managers (Jacques, 1996). This seems to be an important point to make in relation to today's popular rhetoric of knowledge management, which sometimes sees knowledge as a phenomenon that has only emerged recently; perhaps over the past decade or two.

It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the rhetoric of knowledge management originates, in part, in the strategic management literature. I have already cited Drucker and Nonaka who started to talk up the importance of knowledge as a strategic resource in the *Harvard Business Review* in the early 1990s (albeit Drucker, as we have seen, predicted the rise of a knowledge society as early as the 1960s). Since then one has become accustomed to the talk of companies being 'knowledge-intensive' (Alvesson, 1995; Starbuck, 1992) or 'knowledge-based' (Grant, 1996). Special issues of organization and management journals dedicated to knowledge management (*Strategic Management Journal*, 1996; *Organization Science*, 2002), new journals (*Journal of Knowledge Management*) and a whole plethora of books on knowledge have appeared. One can claim that today knowledge management is an integrated part of mainstream academic work in the area of organization and management studies. This is not to say, however, that knowledge management has only been an academic discourse. On the contrary, management writers, who frequently praise themselves for being practice orientated, often claim that they are just describing what is already going on in organizations.

Consultancies are often used as example for the practice of knowledge management (Alvesson, 1995; Moore and Birkinshaw, 1998; Robertson and Swan, 1998; Weiss 1998; Starbuck, 1992): they are described as being at the forefront of organizational learning (Levitt and March, 1988; Huber, 1991), knowledge creation and innovation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and the management of 'knowledge workers',²⁷ to name just some aspects of knowledge management. The function of a management consultancy is fairly simple: it sells knowledge to managers. Its task is to advise management in how to organize resources and operations more efficiently and effectively; that is, to develop knowledge that management can use to increase levels of surplus value. Management consultants can be seen to inhabit a special boundary space between theory and practice, between academic and business knowledge. Of course, some management academics and consultants quite actively traverse these boundaries by serving both markets.

It is therefore of no surprise that management consultancies and management academics can be seen to be at the heart of the development and diffusion of what has been called the knowledge management fashion.²⁸

Knowledge is the object of interest for both consultants and academics; both professional groups make a living by creating and diffusing knowledge. Management consultants and management academics can thus be generally seen as service providers for management to help to create better knowledge to run businesses. However, it should be clear that not all management consultants and management academics are restricted in this sense. All the same, there is a clear economic relationship between these three groups (see also Shenhav, 2002, for an historical account of this relationship in an American context). Today's popular talk of the knowledge society or information society can therefore not be disconnected from the economics outlined above. One needs to bear in mind that when one talks of knowledge management one immediately talks of management knowledge and a privileged class of often white, middle-class knowledge workers from the First World whose main objective is to organize existing capitalist relations more effectively and efficiently.

Recently, however, some writers have suggested that the knowledge society/economy discourse should not be reduced to the 'goings-on' of the academic-consultant-manager triangle. Instead, something much larger and fundamental is at stake. Jacques (2000), for example, thinks that the knowledge discourse is a sign of the transformation of capitalism itself. He therefore maintains that Marx's labour process theory no longer provides an adequate understanding of the creation of capitalist value. In his view, it needs to be replaced with what he calls a 'knowledge theory of value.' The argument is that one should not reduce the site of value creation to what is happening in the capitalist workplace; for example, the Fordist car assembly line. Instead, capitalist accumulation goes on in a variety of different social spaces that are both material and immaterial.

It is this increasing immateriality of labour that is highlighted by Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) and others (see Virno, 2004, and the special issue of *ephemera* on the 'Theory of the Multitude'). These authors argue that learning and knowing are basic social processes that become increasingly controlled by capital. The argument is that the 'goings-on' of capital cannot be reduced to the workplace anymore; instead, capital has become, what Hardt and Negri call, an Empire that is not only geographically but also socially limitless. In other words, capital is everywhere and nowhere. This is based on Marx's understanding – developed particularly in the second volume of *Capital* (1992, p. 427ff) – which argues that capital's continuous processes of circulation aim to create, what Marx calls, total social capital. That is, capital seeks to be equivalent to social organization; capital aims to stand in for what is called society. As Negri writes, 'the socialization of capital is a process which determines, through circulation, an irresistible compulsion towards expansion, appropriation and homogenization – under the sign of a social totality... [C]apital constitutes society, capital is entirely social capital. Circulation produces the socialization of capital'

(1991, p. 113–114). In Negri's view, this necessarily means that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between labour and capital: 'capital is the totality of labor and life' (1991, p. 122). That is, as capital aims to be the social, the boundaries between labour/life and capital become increasingly blurred. Basic social processes, such as knowledge and learning, are therefore turned into capitalist reproduction processes used for the further accumulation and circulation of capital.

Although one cannot dismiss the new importance of knowledge for today's management of corporations and the economy at large, critics argue (see Fleming *et al.*, 2004, and Thompson, forthcoming) that the significance of immaterial forms of labour are sometimes overemphasized today – especially in the face of Third World sweatshops, immigrant labour in the First World, and masses of so called knowledge workers labouring in mass call centres, out-of-town supermarkets and on manufacturing shopfloors. Part of the critique put forward by Fleming *et al.* (2004), Thompson (forthcoming) and others is that, although there is no doubt that knowledge plays a bigger role in the accumulation of capital today, this does not mean that the Third World and its 19th century style labour relations have gone away. The Chinese peasant who moves to the big coastal cities in order to work 16 hour shifts, six to seven days a week, to produce toys, cheap electronic gadgets and other products for the West's supermarkets, knows what s/he is selling: his/her labour power. In this light, the rhetoric of the new importance of knowledge sometimes remains blind towards the continuous importance of traditional exploitative labour relations in the First World and especially in many parts of the Third World.

However, one needs to bear in mind that Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) and others would not necessarily disagree with this empirical critique of the knowledge society rhetoric. Their argument is not that *all* work relations are now suddenly based on knowledge and immaterial labour. Instead, immaterial labour has become the *hegemonic* form of work that increasingly shapes the way capitalist value is produced.²⁹ Rather than simply seeing it empirically, a hegemonic form should be understood in a strategic way: knowledge and immaterial labour can be described as hegemony because they are the strategic driver behind the contemporary transformation of global capital. The knowledge management discourse is one aspect of this transformation. This knowledge discourse should not be reduced to a question of epistemology. Instead, it has ontological qualities. Through the knowledge discourse, capital aims to extend into all spheres of life; even into our bodies, as we will discuss later. As Marx argued, capital seeks to be total social capital; and the knowledge management discourse can be seen as the strategic vehicle for capital to become such a totality. Capital seeks to position and emplace life in a particular way.

What I have argued in this section is that the theory and practice of knowledge management has to be seen in relation to the 'goings-on' of management knowledge and its positioning within the wider politico-economic relations of capitalism. When Parker describes management as 'hegemonic model of organization,' he implies that management knowledge is today's defining type of organizational knowledge. Today we not only manage business and global companies, but also nature, states, families, health, education; modern management principles are even applied to the organization of genocide (see Bauman, 1989). To Parker it therefore seems

that management...is almost everywhere nowadays. It has become one of the defining words of our time and both a cause and a symptom of our brave new world. It directly employs millions, and indirectly employs almost everyone else. It is altering the language we use in our conceptions of home, work and self, and both relies on and reinforces deeply held assumptions about the necessary relationship between control and progress. (2002a, p. 9)

For Parker, management is the 'hegemonic model of organization' because it alters our discourse; it organizes and emplaces social relations in a particular (managerial) way. The politics of this managerial project is that it is always already positively positioned in relation to capital. What I try to show in this chapter is that knowledge management is a part of the 'goings-on' of this positioning project. The specific modes of production, which knowledge management is embedded in, will now have to be analyzed in more detail.

'Techknowledge'

What I pointed to in the above section is that knowledge management can be seen as a particular technique or technology that is inherently connected to the wider technics of capital. What is interesting about the discourse of knowledge management is that it is quite explicit about the purpose of its technical apparatus in relation to creating economic value. In this section, then, let me outline some examples of the knowledge management discourse.

Although knowledge management consists of a number of different discursive domains, one commonality is striking: many seem to feature technology as the dominant theme. Swan *et al.* (1999) have found in a review of the knowledge management literature that in 1998 nearly 70 per cent of knowledge management related articles appeared in information systems and information technology literatures. In their international bestseller, *Working Knowledge*, Davenport and Prusak, who both have a track record of informa-

tion technology related research and management consultancy work, assert that 'knowledge management is much more than technology, but "tech-knowledgy" is clearly a part of knowledge management' (1998, p. 123). They go on to tell us just *how* important technology is:

Indeed, the availability of certain new technologies such as Lotus Notes and the World Wide Web has been instrumental in catalyzing the knowledge management movement. Since knowledge and the value of harnessing it have always been with us, it must be the availability of these new technologies that has stoked the knowledge fire. (1998, p. 123)

Technology is therefore seen as a determining force behind the knowledge management fashion. Davenport and Prusak even seem to suggest that technology made knowledge management possible; it has 'stoked the knowledge fire.' In their discourse knowledge and technology has become one thing; in their language it is called 'techknowledgy.' Some of their favourite 'techknowledgies,' which, they argue, help us to harness valuable knowledge from individuals and organizations, include: expert systems, artificial intelligence, desktop videoconferencing, hypertext systems such as intranets and knowledge maps. They are quite explicit about the purpose of this harnessing of knowledge: to turn knowledge into a valuable corporate asset, which will help to increase the competitive advantage of companies:

The mere existence of knowledge somewhere in the organization is of little benefit; it becomes a valuable corporate asset only if it is accessible, and its value increases with the level of accessibility. (1998, p. 18)

Hence, one can agree with Davenport and Prusak when they write that knowledge management 'is much more than technology:' it is much more in the sense that knowledge is not only technology but a vital commodity that needs to be exploited to continuously increase the value of companies' economic assets and profit levels.

In his book, *Knowledge Assets*, Boisot is also very explicit about the determining force of new technology:

[T]he microelectronics revolution promises to accelerate the rate of substitution of information for physical resources in human activity. It increases by several orders of magnitude humankind's capacity to capture, process, transmit, and store data. (1998, p. 210)

However, Boisot argues that technology does not only increase our 'capacity to capture, process, transmit, and store data;' it also has a soft side to it. Technology's information and knowledge sharing capabilities, Boisot asserts, also enable communities of practice to share uncoded and infor-

mal knowledge across boundaries of time and space more effectively. This threatens the functioning of traditional economic markets and organizational bureaucracies. Boisot warns that companies need to change their way of operating, if they do not want to be overrun by the microelectronic revolution, as he calls it. He maintains that information technology 'will, if anything, exacerbate the problem of intellectual property rights' (1998, p. 224), because knowledge will be increasingly tied to knowledge workers and shared within informal networks of clans. What Boisot alludes to here is the problem managers face with types of knowledge that cannot be pressed into established accounting and control systems.

Tacit knowledge is regarded as such a foggy type of knowledge³⁰ that cannot be easily captured. But what exactly is tacit knowledge? In knowledge management the term has been popularized by Nonaka (1991; 1994) who distinguishes between explicit and tacit knowledge, a classification that goes back to Polanyi's work (1966, 1975). Whereas explicit or encoded knowledge is seen as objective and abstract, tacit or embodied knowledge has been referred to as 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1966). Their variance has been further analyzed by their different degrees of transferability, that is, the transfer of knowledge across individuals, groups, space and time (Grant, 1996). Whereas explicit knowledge can be transferred through media, tacit knowledge is directly linked to individuals and can only be developed by practice and experience (Goldenson, 1984). It is argued that researchers have often concentrated on the explicit, visible part of knowledge, but overlooked the fundamental value of tacit knowledge in organizational life. For example, Leonard and Sensiper (1998) point us to the importance of tacit knowledge for innovating, a point similarly made by Senker (1995). Lam (1997) shows that cross-border collaborative work might be impeded by different degrees of tacitness of knowledge. The split between tacit and explicit has been criticized for a number of reasons. Firstly, it analyzes knowledge from a positivistic perspective, that is, we are able to access knowledge and measure it. Secondly, it assumes knowledge to be a specific entity that resides in people's cognizing minds (Blackler, 1995), that is, taking a somewhat cognitivist approach. Thirdly, it assumes that knowledge can be easily converted from something tacit to something explicit and vice versa. Therefore, some writers argue that it is not easy to separate the two, as 'tacit and explicit knowledge are mutually constituted' (Tsoukas, 1996, p. 14) and 'explicit knowledge is always grounded on a tacit component' (Polanyi, 1975, p. 41).

Regardless of such criticisms, what has been argued for is a new accounting system that would enable managers to capture knowledge, however tacit it might be, as intellectual capital:

The formation of the discourse on intellectual capital is predicated upon the assumption that the traditional double-entry bookkeeping system is

not able to reflect emerging realities. It is an inadequate tool for measuring the value of corporations whose value, it is claimed, lies mainly in their intangible components. (Yakhlef and Salzer-Mörling, 2000, p. 20)

Today, it is argued that company assets not only include material artefacts, properties and financial assets, but also employees' and organizational knowledges, which explicitly reside in people's heads and are tacitly embodied. Some knowledge management writers have therefore called for the development of new systems, that would enable a more adequate valuation of companies' assets, and provide tools for exploiting existing tacit and explicit knowledge bases more effectively (see Brooking, 1996; Edvinsson and Malone, 1998; Lynn, 1998; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Roos *et al.*, 1997; Stewart, 1998; Zeleny, 1989). Such discourses again establish the view that knowledge must be seen as economic asset that needs to be valued, mined and harvested. The term 'intellectual capital' cannot make the link of knowledge management to the specific interests of capital more explicit.

In their book, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Nonaka and Takeuchi are careful not to present knowledge management as something that should be dominated by technological systems. Instead, they assert that knowledge sharing within teams, vision and tacit knowledge are of key importance. However, their 'soft-speak' only tells half of the story:

[T]he *quintessential* knowledge-creation process takes place when tacit knowledge is converted into *explicit* knowledge. In other words, our hunches, perceptions, mental models, beliefs, and experiences are converted to something that can be communicated and transmitted in *formal* and *systematic* language. (1995, p. 230–1, italics added)

What Nonaka and Takeuchi spell out clearly here is that tacit knowledge is not as valuable as explicit knowledge. Thus, the urge is to make tacit knowledge explicit, that is, formalize the unknown into understandable language positions. In other words, according to Nonaka and Takeuchi, economic value can only be produced by codifying individuals' and organizations' tacit knowledge and transmitting it via technological networks of language. Especially in complex organizations, which are widely spread across time and space, technology, it is said, is imperative for both codifying and transmitting knowledge. This is illustrated by Nonaka and Takeuchi in one of their case studies:

[T]o assure 'free access to information,' computer systems have been introduced throughout the Kao organization, with all information being filed in a database. Through this system, anyone at Kao can tap into databases included in the sales system, the marketing information

system (MIS), the production information system, the distribution information system, and the total information network covering all of its offices in Japan. (1995, p. 172)

The process of knowledge-creation is even more explicitly shown in another case that has been studied by Nonaka and his colleagues:

National Bicycle has exploited the tacit knowledge of highly skilled craftsmen at the POS factory. The company has externalized their tacit knowledge into a computer language, which operates manufacturing robots and semi-automated equipment, by studying and observing their manufacturing skills. (Nonaka, Umemoto and Sasaki, 1998, p. 167)

These examples clearly show that the properties of the knowledge-creation process are remarkably similar to those of a computer system. This view is affirmed by Nonaka and Takeuchi when they explain the functioning of the 'hypertext organization,' their ideal structural scenario for enabling effective knowledge-creation:

To use... [a] computer metaphor, these companies [that adopt a hypertext structure] will be on the 'Windows' operating system, pulling multiple files onto the screen dynamically, while the rest [the 'old style' companies] will be operating like a static MS-DOS system. (1995, p. 234)

For Nonaka and Takeuchi, knowledge-creation is therefore not separable from technology; organizations become a computer; organization and technology become *one*; they both work together in a symbiosis to turn tacit knowledge into economically valuable explicit knowledge.

It is argued that, in order to build such a 'techknowledge' computer, a company needs a strategic knowledge manager. As Nonaka and Takeuchi make clear:

The essence of strategy lies in developing the organizational capability to acquire, create, accumulate, and exploit the knowledge domain...Someone at the top will have to be able to see the world from a knowledge perspective, mobilize the latent knowledge power held within the organization, and justify the knowledge created by the firm. (1995, p. 227–8)

One of Nonaka and Takeuchi's main arguments is that this 'latent knowledge power' is not always immediately visible; instead, it is hidden in tacit routines and employees' skills. According to them, one of the main tasks of knowledge managers is therefore to locate these hidden treasures and make them available for the whole organization. Equally, Baumard argues in his book, *Tacit Knowledge in Organizations*, that leaders need to

tap into the vast pool of tacit knowledge in order to make it economically available to the corporation. In other words, the codification of tacit knowledge, or the process of making tacit knowledge strategically useful within the organization, is one of the main tasks of strategic leaders. This is, however, not simply a making available of existing tacit knowledge. What Baumard also envisages is knowledge managers actively developing tacit knowledge bases according to the strategic goals of a company. He maintains, 'Th[e] new [strategic] architecture has to be able to privilege the formation of tacit knowledge, and its articulation as close as possible to the organization's strategic preoccupations' (1998, p. 223). With Baumard, then, knowledge management is extended right into the body of labour. This is what Marx's labour theory of value means; labour has to sell its whole body for capital to make use of. The task of management is not only to organize explicit knowledge that is ready to hand; the knowledge manager has to tap right into the sub-consciousness of labour in order to turn hidden tacit knowledge – the unnameable – into economic value.

What I have aimed at in this section is to outline the knowledge management discourse in its purest ideological form. Naturally, I have been very selective and left out a number of critical voices that have been raised against knowledge management (see the collection edited by Prichard *et al.*, 2000). However, what I am generally concerned with in this chapter is to specifically engage with the mainstream knowledge management literature, in order to analyze the hegemonic functioning of its political setup. As I argued in Chapter 4, a hegemony can never be all-encompassing, which means that there will always be holes and gaps in a hegemonic discourse, which are resistances against that very hegemony. I will discuss some of these resistances in the following sections and also in Chapter 6. The main purpose of *this* chapter, however, is to expose the 'goings-on' of knowledge management as one particular discourse within the wider hegemony of the positioning project. In the remainder of this chapter I will make connections to some of the themes of Benjamin's work, in order to critique the knowledge management discourse and its particular emplacement within the hegemonic project of capital.

Knowledge as shock and event

What the above populist images of knowledge management show is that they are fuelled by enthusiastic scenarios of technological progress. Technology is portrayed by knowledge management gurus as an inevitable force necessary for the growth of companies' wealth. The link between technology, knowledge and progress is, of course, not a new one. As I pointed out in the previous sections, technology has been essential for the development of scientific knowledge, modern forms of organization and management; let us just remember, for example, Taylor's scientific manage-

ment and Ford's assembly line. Knowledge management can be seen as another node in the long line of modern production systems. Leslie notes: 'Technology is viewed by...machine-obsessed modernists as a magical apparatus of social refurbishment whose scientific properties can remedy all predicaments through technical rationality' (2000, p. 39). The point that technology is seen as technics of social refurbishment is important here. It would be a mistake to simply say that Ford's assembly line was a manufacturing system; instead, it was a whole apparatus to produce not only cars but also subjects and social milieus. The assembly line, one could say, emplaced being in particular ways. In the same way knowledge management is not simply a tool for managers and consultants to increase companies' levels of surplus value. Instead, it is part of a managerial discourse, a technical apparatus, which positions and emplaces the social in relation to capital and its particular value system.

What 'techknowledgies' mean today, and Ford's car assembly line has meant since the 1920s, the train meant, perhaps, to Benjamin. For Benjamin, the train and railroads had particular significance as an image of the technical emplacement, so to say, of early modernity, the epoch of the mid-nineteenth century when the Parisian arcades emerged. For him, modern society is locked up in the rhetoric of a train that is running fast towards the light at the end of the tunnel. In his view, society seems to be in a dreamy state of promised progress; he calls this state the 'phantasmagoria of progress.' Railways and the train were signs of progress in the 19th century: one could suddenly move at high speed from one place to the other; a spatial movement that 'became so wedded to the concept of historical movement that these could no longer be distinguished' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 91). What the train was to the 19th and the car to the 20th century, information and communication technologies are, perhaps, to the 21st century. Today our movement seems to become more virtual: 'Now speed moves into a different register: from the movement of people and material objects in space to the movement of images and signals at absolute speed' (Lash, 1999, p. 289). Knowledge management technologies are at the very heart of what has been called the 'hyper-modern(organ)ization' of society (Armitage, 2001). Today it is not only the train, assembly line and car that 'keep the whole thing together,' to evoke Adorno and Horkheimer's words,³¹ but 'techknowledgies' such as (moving) images, news stories, information and knowledge. 'The noise is so great,' writes Karl Kraus (cited in Benjamin, 1978a, p. 243), the aphoristic anarchist who, in Benjamin's eyes, destructed the journalistic profession, by uncovering its opinionated commodity structure and its sheer lust for noise and catastrophes.

In old engravings there is a messenger who rushes toward us crying aloud, his hair on end, brandishing a sheet of paper in his hands, a sheet full of war and pestilence, of cries of murder and pain, of danger from

fire and flood, spreading everywhere the 'latest news'...Full of betrayal, earthquakes, poison, and fire from the *mundus intelligibilis*. (1978a, p. 239)

During Benjamin's lifetime it was mainly the newspaper that served as 'techknowledge' for the entertainment of mass society. Today the newspaper is accompanied by television, the Internet and other 'techknowledgies,' which deliver the latest news as a stream of information directly into people's homes.

In knowledge management, as well as in society in general, technology is thus often fetishized. That is, technology is seen to have magical, determining powers that one cannot escape. To speak with Benjamin, the subject is seen to sit on a train, a technology, which irresistibly leads into the future. Technology is thus portrayed to be external to human agency; it is situated outside society as transcendental power. What remains for the subject is to respond to the needs of the technology-fetish. In this view, the subject is subsumed by technology; the subject becomes a mere extension to the machine. The knowledge worker, as portrayed in knowledge management, can be seen as such a machinic subject that plugs into the system in order to mine and harness knowledge from it – knowledge management's subject is a Borg, to use Land and Corbett's (2001) metaphor. The subject is thus subject-less; it is a machinic thing that merely exists because it is held alive by technology.

Machinic subjects, enhanced with prosthetics, wired up and plugged into inflowmation (a version of Marinetti's futurist rhapsody for a postindustrial age). What happens in this cyber-conception of material is that the distinction between machine-technology-worker – a technician producing within technical relations of production – is collapsed into a single, mythic, postnatural subject. (Leslie, 2000, p. x)

As Leslie points out, the problem with such a conception of the subject is that the concrete technical relations of production between subjects and objects are all collapsed into an all-encompassing flow. Subjects and objects lose their distinctiveness and are now seen as part of a cybernetic knowledge system that is said to inevitably lead towards progress.

Within such a system knowing becomes a matter of information processing between computers – very much like the 'Human Information Processing' school of psychology proposes. Scholars in this school of thought refer to knowing as the process of mediation between input (stimulus) and output (response) within a system.³² In such a view, knowing is a mechanical process of controlling information inputs and outputs. It thus becomes clear why much of knowledge management rhetoric is centred on codifying knowledge: in order to be able to transfer

and therefore use knowledge as an economic asset, it has to be made explicit and measurable. As Kirkeby (2000, p. 107) points out, the perfect scenario for knowledge management is when all knowledge available in a company is transferable to a computer system, which can then be accessed and harnessed by knowledge workers. He argues that the ideal model for such a system is Turing's principle of the 'universal machine.' As I mentioned, companies, especially large management consultancies, have been keen to exploit knowledge management technologies, such as intranets and knowledge maps, to construct precisely such a universal knowledge machine.

What I would like to suggest is that knowledge management can be seen as a technology that is only the latest in a long line of, what Benjamin calls, modern reproduction technologies that have promised progress. For Benjamin, technical reproduction must be seen as one of the defining moments for the passage into modern mass-society, which he sees, on one hand, as an event of possibility – the possibility of constructing an entirely new knowledge and experience – but, on the other, as an event of 'tremendous shattering of tradition:'

The technique of reproduction, to formulate generally, detaches that which is reproduced from the realm of tradition. By multiplying the reproduction [of the work of art, the technique of reproduction] replaces its unique occurrence with one that is massive or mass-like [*massenweise*]. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in their particular situation, it actualises that which is reproduced. These two processes lead to the tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is film. (BGS I.2, p. 477–8; 1999c, p. 221, translation modified)

In Benjamin's words, technical reproduction is a process of detachment or displacement; in the case of art, for example, reproduction depositions art from its original, traditional context, or, what Benjamin calls, 'aura.' One could say, technical reproduction is an event of destruction: established positions of the technics of society are destructed and subjects are repositioned within the material and social world.

This takes us back to Heidegger's philosophy of positioning and emplacement, which I discussed in Chapter 1. In Heidegger's words³³ one could see Benjamin's event of modern technical reproduction as a new technical world-image of social organization. This world-image emplaces being in particular ways. In Chapter 4 I highlighted the inherently political nature of this emplacing. Like Heidegger's concept of emplacement, Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of the concept of hegemony points to the notion

that modern society can be seen as the forging of the social into a particular position, a position that needs to be continuously reproduced, maintained and defended. Modern technologies, such as knowledge management, are at the heart of this positioning of being into particular grids of knowledge that can be continuously reproduced. According to Cooper (1992), this is the economy of convenience which allows the world for the modern subject to be pliable, wieldable and amenable. In his view, remote control (the work not with the environment itself, but with its representations such as maps and models), displacement (the separation from that very environment) and abbreviation (the simplification of a complex world) are the mechanisms of this economy. In other words, the convenience of the modern world is organized through the gaze of remote control, 'which reduces what is distant and resistant to what is near, clear and controllable' (Cooper, 1992, p. 268). One could say that knowledge management is at the heart of today's economy of controllability.

For Benjamin, technical reproduction displaces traditional social relations. It destructs a historical experience of the world, or what he calls *Erfahrung*; instead, technical production produces shocks, or what he calls *Erlebnis*. For him, *Erfahrung* is a historical experience that is a product of a long movement (the German *fahren* is related to taking a journey, exploring the unknown); it is 'indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently not conscious data' (BGS I.2, p. 608; 1973, p. 110, translation modified). In contrast, shock is more immediate than experience. Shock is, for example, the telecommunicative trauma (Sloterdijk, 1988) continuously produced by today's 'techknowledgies:' advertisements, newspapers, TV, mobile phones, radio, email, the Internet. For Benjamin, modern subjectivity is characterized by the constant shock therapy of mass society:

The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience, the more they fulfil the concept of shock. (BGS I.2, p. 615; 1973, p. 117, translation modified)

Following Freud, Benjamin argues that shocks activate the subject's memory. Normally these shocks are absorbed and fused with experience and therefore turned into something narratable (Caygill, 1998). However, if shocks become too intense or constant, they have the potential to produce a trauma, a dream-like situation, in which the subject is not able to resist shocks meaningfully.

Now, for Benjamin modern experience is characterized by a constant exposure to shocks. This is why he describes Parisian 19th century life in

and around the arcades as 'dream-time' which produces the 'sleeping collectivity'³⁴ mentioned above. For him, modernity is the 'dream-time' of the carousel, the merry-go-round: one sits on a toy horse (exchanging views with fellow riders) that speeds around its own axis (Missac, 1995, p. 108), it 'eternally returns' to itself, it announces change with every second, but it just returns to us the ever-same. The carousel gives its passengers the impression of being on a speedy train of progress, a train that relentlessly searches for the new, but it just 'eternally returns' to the same station. The name of this station is 'commodity;' it is the 'obligatory passage point' for all passengers (Böhm, forthcoming). This can be connected to what in Chapter 1 I described as capital's powers of discontinuity or Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion that capital is a machine that continuously seeks to deterritorialize existing social relations. Similarly to Benjamin, they see capital as continuously being on a hunt for the new. However, this newness is always already reterritorialized within the specific value system of capital. Knowledge management is part of this hunt for the new that is supposed to deliver progress.

To grasp the significance of *nouveauté*, it is necessary to go back to novelty in everyday life. Why does everyone share the newest thing with someone else? Presumably, in order to triumph over the dead. This only where there is nothing really new. (BGS V.1, p. 169; 1999a, p. 112)

What Benjamin spells out here is the destructive programme of the commodity that is always already in search for the new. Yet, it is a search that is guided by the signifier 'capital.' So, for Benjamin, in the end 'there is nothing really new.' This relates to Benjamin's general critique of official history, or the history of those in power, which, in his view, always already promises to be progressive. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Benjamin sees this history as a chronological order or 'eternal image' that continuously promises the new but always delivers the 'ever-same.' The shocks produced by knowledge management and other reproduction 'techknowledgies' are at the heart of that historical continuum, which, in Benjamin's view, is always already maintained by those in power.

When Benjamin writes in the above passage that the search for the new can be seen as the 'triumph over the dead' he again points to the destruction of experience by shock; it is the triumph of knowledge as information over knowledge as experience:

Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. (BGS I.2, p. 444–55; 1978a, p. 89)

What does Benjamin mean by 'triumph over the dead'? In his essay 'The Storyteller' (1999e) Benjamin shows that stories come from a deep personal inner experience and are embedded in a unique tradition. Benjamin notes that the story's authority is largely connected to (the image of) death: a dying person communicates an experience, a tradition, to the younger generation. The storyteller, Benjamin argues, borrows this image of death in an attempt to connect this world to the Other, to bring the profane and the sacred together. Therefore, the story is embedded in a particular aura that connects to an inner sphere of unconscious, spiritual experience. For Benjamin, this religious side to experience is important, because he sees this experience as being able to transcend subject and object, profane and sacred, into a unity:

There is a unity of experience that can by no means be understood as a sum of experiences, to which the concept of knowledge as theory is immediately related in its continuous development. The object and the content of this theory, this concrete totality of experience, is religion. (BGS II.1, p. 165)

I would argue that Benjamin's religious experience is a historical experience that lies beyond official history. In Chapter 2 I discussed how Benjamin's 'dialectical image' tries to destruct the 'eternal image' of history in the attempt to see history differently. When Benjamin claims that shock seeks to 'triumph over the dead' he seems to point to the fact that official history always tries to forget certain images of the past that do not fit into the picture of a progressive continuum. Benjamin's 'dialectical image' tries to reconnect to the 'dead' images of the past that have been forgotten or rendered nameless.

Now, Benjamin's conception of historical experience can, of course, be interpreted as being hopelessly romantic. Although there is certainly an aspect of melancholia involved in Benjamin's work, it would be a mistake to therefore conclude that he argues for a return to an original state of being, or, what Heidegger's names, Being (see my discussion in Chapter 3), which would reconnect us to death and a unique inner or religious experience. In fact, Benjamin is very sceptical that this type of experience can be saved or regained in modernity. Nevertheless, some aspects of his work can be seen as a speculation about how historical experience can be reproduced under conditions of modernity. This is what earlier I referred to as the new possibilities Benjamin sees in modern reproduction technologies. On one hand, they destruct tradition and disconnect us from death; but, on the other, technologies, such as cinema, surrealist painting or hashish (besides Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay, see his 'Surrealism' essay), offer glimpses of a new type of religious or historical experience – Benjamin also calls these glimpses 'profane illuminations' (1978b). These illumina-

tions are sudden 'flashes of knowledge' that enable a crucial event, an event in which the world might turn, in which a new experience and a new type of knowledge might become possible.

However, according to Benjamin, this new knowledge is not simply continuing the line of the new that is always already the 'ever-same.' Instead, it is a novelty that has to go through death, the ruins of life, the destruction of the same. This new experience is an experience of death that enables a new cognition, a new experience of the object, because the object's unity is destroyed, made into a ruin. This is Benjamin's event of politics that I discussed in the previous chapter. In this event, the event of the 'dialectical image,' official history is destroyed in order to enable a connection to forgotten images of the past. This destruction also involves a shock; as Benjamin writes: 'where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock' (1999d, p. 254). This shock, however, is not part of the continuous stream of shocks produced by the homogenous course of history. Instead, it is a decisive intervention that aims to interrupt the continuum of that homogeneity. It is an event of destruction that enables a rereading of dead images of the past in order to produce a new historical experience.

Knowledge management does not engender such radical political possibilities. Instead of enabling a connection to death, that is, enabling a destruction of established knowledges of reality, knowledge management technologies are always already plugged into the specific reproduction machinery of capital and the homogenous course of history. As I have argued in this section, modernity can be generally seen as the denial of death and destruction – the denial of the negative. Instead, what is celebrated by modern reproduction technologies are positive notions of progress and newness that produce shocks that make the subject docile. As Sievers (1993) notes, management itself is an activity that can be seen as the glorification of positivity, as management's predominant intent is to facilitate a company's survival and immortality. Management, as today's hegemonic form of organization, always already serves capital and the continuum of history, which urges to reproduce itself along established lines of domination and control. To be sure, management is a destructive activity; it axes jobs, destroys the environment and often simply mismanages. Yet, this destruction is one that is structurally inherent to the 'goings-on' of capital, which searches for the new in order to reproduce the same. Knowledge management technologies can be seen as an inherent part of such a destruction; it is one that displaces, disorganizes and produces shocks of information in order to reproduce capital. Just like Drucker's *Age of Discontinuity*, which I referred to in Chapter 1, knowledge management discontinues, or deterritorializes, to use Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) expression, in order to reproduce dominant discourses of history. What this does not engender is the possibility of a real event, a real event of

destruction, which can politically intervene in a specific situation and read history differently in order to enable a new knowledge of reality.

Knowledge manager, *flâneur* and prostitute

I have argued in the section above that the process of managing knowledge, as theorized and practiced by mainstream knowledge management, can be seen as a denial of the experience of death and a privileging of information – what Benjamin calls shock. What I would like to explore in more detail in this section is how the shocks of the commodity produce modern subjectivity. I will show that one could speculatively relate today's knowledge manager to Benjamin's heroes of the Parisian arcades of the 19th century – namely the *flâneur* and the prostitute who, for him, are both modern subjects *par excellence* (see 1973, 1999a). This section argues that knowledge management is not simply a technology or a managerial tool used in companies or organizations. As I have already mentioned above, knowledge management must be seen to be part of a wider project that positions and emplaces society. This positioning project 'stakes out' the place for the subject; it 'corners' the subject, as Sam Weber (1996) puts it. The hegemony of this project, then, is described by the fact that it produces concrete subjectivities. It does not simply produce the subject in one place; instead, its discursive regime produces the place of the subject itself.

The Parisian *flâneur* is an upper middle class, bourgeois man³⁵ who walks in places where there are big crowds and things to see – for example, in shopping arcades, which began to appear in Paris at around 1850. Benjamin sees the *flâneur* as a subject whose experience is characterized by the shocks of the modern city: commodities, advertising images, anonymous crowds. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* has a deep empathy with these objects, these things: 'The *flâneur* is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity' (BGS I.2, p. 558; 1973, p. 55). As if the commodity had a soul, it tries to nestle in the body-house of the *flâneur*: 'Like a roving soul in search for a body' the commodity 'enters another person' whenever it wishes (*ibid.*). Benjamin writes that this luring sensuousness of the commodity intoxicates the *flâneur*; the narcotic commodity lures him into a 'dream world,' in which the most mundane things on sale can be enjoyed.

In Benjamin's eyes, the commodity produces a spectacle that changes the experiential apparatus of the subject. The commodity, writes Marx, 'appears, at first sight, to be a trivial and easily understood thing. Our analysis shows that, in reality, it is a vexed and complicated thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (cited in BGS V, p. 245; 1999a, p. 181). One usually takes the commodity for granted; it appears to be an objective fact, a thing. Yet, at closer inspection – an inspection that was Marx's tremendous life project – the apparent objectiv-

ity and normality of the commodity turns out to be a monstrous spectrality (Derrida, 1994), which consists

in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. (Marx, 1976, p. 164–5)

The *flâneur* is in the midst of these things, these commodities. The *flâneur* translates the commodity into allegorical³⁶ material which provides him with a profane enjoyment. This translation 'is not a question of work or active transformation. It is passive.... The *flâneur* has a satanic *Einfühlung*, an empathy with commodities.... He is not the hero, but, instead, performs the hero; not through action, but satanically through *Haltung* (bearing, posture, style). The *flâneur* allegorizes commodities through transforming them into a drunken stream or rush' (Lash, 1999, p. 329–30).

The image of the *flâneur* is originally tied to a specific time/space juncture: 19th century Paris, the capital of modernity, the place where early bourgeois capitalism moved into 'modern high capitalism' (Tester, 1994). However, in the process of the destruction of the Parisian arcades the *flâneur*, too, is destroyed and transformed into other modern heroes, such as Benjamin's sandwich-man.³⁷ In other words, the *flâneur*-subject is not a stable entity; instead, it can be seen as an empty space that is – to express this in Lacanian terminology discussed in the previous chapter – filled by the Other, by modernity's symbolic order: the commodity, the market, modern urbanization. With the accelerated commodification of life in the 20th century the *flâneur*'s subjectivity is transformed; his idleness is challenged by the continuous speeding up and marketization of Parisian urban life. The result is the transformation of the strolling *flâneur* into the entrepreneurial sandwich-man. Without discussing this transformation in all its detail, what this generally points to is the Lacanian notion that the subject is not a stable, unified, even full entity. Instead, it is historically contingent; it is always already somewhere else; it is divided. Hence, Lacan speaks of the 'barred subject,' or \$, a subject that does not seem to be constructed but destroyed (1977, p. 292ff). The barred or destroyed subject is not full of human life but, instead, an empty space, perhaps a 'non-place,' which is filled by the Other, particularly the commodity (perhaps it is not a coincidence that '\$' signifies Lacan's theory of the subject). It is the commodity-Other which turns the subject into a lively thing, it theatrically animates it and organizes its pleasures and enjoyments. In this sense, the subject is not essentially individual but always already an Other.

The purpose of this discussion of the *flâneur* is that, in my view, one might want to speculate about a reincarnation of the *flâneur* as today's

knowledge manager. As I have discussed so far, both of these modern subjects have a special relationship with the commodity. While the *flâneur* is intoxicated by the shocks of commodities on display in 19th century Parisian arcades, the knowledge manager trades with knowledge-commodities using a range of 'techknowledgies.' The knowledge manager is thus more entrepreneurial than the *flâneur*, which continues the line of development Benjamin suggested when he saw the sandwich-man as a *flâneur* put into work. What these modern subject types have in common is a certain embodiment of the commodity – for these subjects the commodity is not only an object that exists 'out there' but one that characterizes the very makeup of their bodies, subjectivities and experiential apparatuses. In the case of the knowledge manager it thus becomes clear that knowledge management technologies are not only geared towards the production, circulation and consumption of knowledge commodities but, in fact, are 'technologies of the self' in the sense that they produce particular knowing subjectivities.

This embodiment of the commodity finds its culmination in the prostitute, the commodity that is literally alive. Whereas for Benjamin the *flâneur* is the modern hero *par excellence* to develop a close empathy with the commodity, to be exhilarated by the commodity, the prostitute³⁸ is literally the personification of the commodity itself. The prostitute 'is the becoming-human of allegory... In [the]...soulless, but still lust-offering body, allegory and commodity are married' (BGS I.3, p. 1151, my translation). One might speculatively suggest that the prostitute serves, even more so than the *flâneur*, as role model for knowledge management. As I have argued above, the aim for knowledge management is not only to manage explicit knowledge but also to tap right into the tacit, subconscious areas of subjectivity in order to commodify the whole body and make it available for the production of surplus value. The prostitute is such a subject whose body has been turned into a commodity. One could therefore suggest that the prostitute is the ideal body for knowledge management. As the prostitute, the knowledge worker needs to sell his or her body for the purpose of surplus value production. As Marx suggests, 'prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer' (cited in Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 184, n147). The knowledge worker has to offer his or her knowledge, whether explicit or tacit, to clients; he or she has to sell the body as commodity. This is what Marx's labour theory of value suggests: labour needs to sell its body and knowledge, as commodity, so that capital can reproduce itself.

This also implies that the theory of knowledge management – here I am referring back to my above discussion of the close (economic) interaction between academics, consultants and managers – cannot be seen as an independent realm that is hidden in business school departments only producing knowledge for academics. Instead, precisely because of the economics

involved, knowledge management theory can be seen as a practice that is fully embedded in the wider social relations of capitalist production. What is done in the business school can thus be seen as theoretical practice that is directly linked to the production of subjects and their knowledge apparatuses. The business school and knowledge management theory are concrete 'techknowledgies' for the production of social relations under capital; that is, the knowledge produced on university compounds cannot stand outside the technics of the dominant social relations of production. This, then, is not only specific to the field of knowledge management. The university itself is positioned within the realm of modernity and hegemonic discourses.

Given the dominance of management discourses at large, the university may be seen, according to Fuller, as a corporate-sponsored training centre where the cutting edge is increasingly defined not by theory-driven academic qualifications but by 'those who possess non-academic, specifically entrepreneurial, forms of knowledge' (2000, p. 84). Although this might be overstating the situation, it seems to me that the hero for many of today's students is no longer the philosopher, but the highly successful business consultant or entrepreneur, like, for example, Richard Branson, the hero of English entrepreneurialism. It is also Branson who shows the way in terms of the 'new production of knowledge:' recently his business empire Virgin entered the academic market with a series of books³⁹ aimed at small and medium-sized companies, co-produced and co-branded by Warwick Business School. It is said, that this is a 'win-win-situation' for the two brands of Virgin and Warwick. Such marketing ventures confirm the fear that the university seems to become increasingly embedded in the hegemonic discourse of managerial neo-liberalism which calls for all knowledge production to be geared towards entrepreneurship in private and public sectors (see also du Gay, 2000a, and Waters, 2004).

It is the recently successful private/public partnership that Gibbons *et al.* seem to have in mind when they, in their internationally celebrated research manifesto, *The New Production of Knowledge* (1994), argue that, as traditional disciplinary university knowledge ('mode 1') is not able to reflect the complexities of the new world anymore, knowledge should be increasingly produced by tearing down boundaries between disciplines as well as between theory and practice: 'Mode 2 knowledge production is characterized by closer interaction between scientific, technological and industrial modes of knowledge production...The spread of Mode 2 knowledge production...and of market differentiation...is being driven by the intensification of international competition' (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994, p. 68). The authors are quite explicit in whose name this apparently holistic approach, this trans-disciplinarity, should be exercised: 'Another important precondition is to have access to such knowledge and expertise, being able to reconfigure it in novel ways and offer it for sale' (*ibid.*, p. 111). For Gibbons *et al.*, 'mode 2'

knowledge should be produced for a *specific* purpose: for sale. Theoretical knowledge is here always already a pragmatic 'techknowledge,' a knowledge that is embedded in particular socio-technical relations of capital and geared towards the production of surplus value. Thus, for Gibbons *et al.*, the value of transdisciplinary academic knowledge is its potential economic opportunity, its surplus value, which should be realized by making it available to practice.

The agenda of the theoretical practice of knowledge management is thus always already dominated by the restricted concerns of the commodity. What I have argued in this section is that this restricted economy produces specific subjectivities, such as those of the knowledge manager, *flâneur* and prostitute who are intoxicated by the shocks produced by the commodity. The significance of this is that the way knowledge is produced today cannot simply be seen as something that is going on in academic departments but as something that has direct effects on the way social organization is emplaced and technically reproduced. In this sense, knowledge management is not simply an epistemological tool, as is sometimes thought (von Krogh and Roos, 1995), but indeed an ontological practice that has significance for subjectivity and life as such. It is this ontological significance which describes the hegemony of management. Management is not only something which is taught in business schools, nor is it only something managers do in private or public organizations. Instead, it involves the production of subjectivities and therefore life itself. In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, one could say that knowledge management is part of a wider managerial discourse that has set up an enormous 'chain of equivalence' among social and also material actors in order to produce a hegemonic reality. It is this hegemonic discourse that fills the gap of symbolic reality, the Lacanian Other, and thus acts as an object of identification for subjects like the knowledge manager, *flâneur* or prostitute.

Hegemony and the fetish knowledge commodity

What I have suggested so far in this chapter is that knowledge management is always already positively positioned in relation to capital and management: knowledge is seen as a commodity that is used to generate surplus value. In the previous section I argued that such a positioning of knowledge produces specific subjectivities that are made up by the 'goings-on' of the commodity. What needs to be explored in more detail now is exactly how knowledge management, as well as management and capital in general, can be seen as *hegemonic* practices. In this section I suggest that an important aspect of the way this hegemony is produced and maintained is commodity fetishism.

According to Marx, in a world where social relations have become thing-like, things have to look beautiful. As I argued above, Benjamin's heroes of

modernity can be seen as thing-like commodities. The *flâneur*, for example, dresses up in a bourgeois wardrobe in order to be seen by the crowd and the commodity on display in the Parisian arcades. Equally, the prostitute has to look beautiful to attract the sexual attention of a client. The consultant, too, one could argue, puts on expensive business suits to sell knowledge to company managers. The commodity has to look beautiful, animated and divine in order to find a buyer on the market. This brings to mind the image of the dancing table which Marx uses in the introductory paragraph of his discussion of commodity fetishism. At first sight, he writes, a normal wooden table is

an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will. (1976, p. 163)

The point of Marx's dancing table is to show how an ordinary thing, the table, acquires an extra-sensuousness once it has been turned into a commodity. Marx's aesthetics of the commodity, however, is not something that is up to the subject, consumer or audience to interpret; the commodity's beauty is an objectivity that is grounded in the very way the symbolic order is shaped in capital's modernity. In other words, under capitalism the commodity-table is *a priori* aestheticized. As the commodity conceals social relations of production to make them appear as relations between things, the commodity is aestheticized, it acquires a sublime aura of objectivity. The table does all sorts of wild dances not because someone subjectively imagines such a 'grotesque idea.' Instead, such grotesqueness, one could argue, is structurally embedded in the way social reality works itself.

Marx uses the concept of fetishism to show how the objective grotesqueness of the table, that is, the systematic (mis)perception of relations between subjects (people, labour) as relations between objects (things, resources), works. It is worth quoting the passage, in which he introduces the concept, at length:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same

time supra-sensible or social. In the same way, the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of that nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye. In the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx, 1976, p. 165)

For Marx, commodity fetishism is the systematic substitution of relations between subjects by relations between objects. In everyday life one forgets that money, for example, is the product of complex social relations. Instead, one treats money as if its monetary value is a direct substitute for social value. We systematically fetishize money, which is an ordinary thing made out of paper or copper, as we (mis)perceive social relations as thing-like economic relations. Money thus becomes beautiful, a magical object, a fetish. The commodity, although clearly a dead and empty thing, becomes alive; it makes all sorts of wild dances and is worshipped and treated as a natural Other.

Why, then, does Marx 'take flight into the misty realm of religion,' why does he use the term fetishism to describe the 'goings-on' of the commodity? One can clearly sense a certain polemic and satirical intention in Marx's writing on capitalist fetishism, which has been detected by a host of writers (Mitchell, 1986; Pietz, 1993; and Žižek, 1989, 1997a). Marx seems to like the idea of ridiculing the bourgeoisie and its vulgar economists who believe, just like 'primitive' African people, in magical objects, that is, the divine naturalness of the commodity. The term fetishism was first used in an anthropological context to describe the 'strange' behaviour of African people who would worship certain magical objects.⁴⁰ By comparing capital to 'backward' cultures Marx thus seems to use the term to show the primitivism of capital, to show its irrationality perhaps. One could say that this is the negative interpretation of Marx's usage of fetishism, an interpretation that portrays Marx as someone who would ridicule cultural differences and

otherness. In contrast, an affirmative interpretation would see Marx's usage of the term fetishism in relation to his *serious* life-long interest in an analysis of the relationship between religion and economics. According to Pietz (1993), Marx clearly chose fetishism with care, as the term alludes to the juncture between individual sensuous desire and historically specific social divisions of labour. In other words, 'like fetishist cultures, civil society achieved its unity not by finding a principle of universality but endlessly weaving itself into a "system of needs" – a libidinal economy' (1993, p. 140–1). Capital's specific libidinal economy finds its expression in the general form of the commodity. Marx argues that the formation of the commodity fetish takes place with the general form becoming a *universal* form, that is, the social, libidinal practice becomes generally accepted custom or law – one could say that it becomes part of the symbolic order, the Lacanian Other.

What might be worthwhile in this regard is to extend the Marxian politico-economic analysis of commodity fetishism by discussing some psychoanalytic themes of sexual fetishism. Sexual fetishism is, according to Freud, psychologically triggered by a trauma, the trauma that the female lacks a penis. This lack, according to Freud, is compensated by some other object, a symbolic substitute for the penis, an object that is invested with excessive energies. Thus, in the mind of the fetishist

the woman has a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor. But this interest suffers an extraordinary increase as well, because the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute... We can now see what the fetish achieves and what it is that maintains it. It remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it. (Freud, 2000, p. 385; 1977, p. 353)

In other words, fetishism is triggered by a horror (castration) that leads to the substitution of a sexual object with an Other. This substitution occurs because the Other is lacking something (a sexual object, the penis). Therefore, the subject's attempt to accomplish a full identity by identifying with a supposedly full Other is failing. Fantasy tries to fill this lack of the Other; it tries to provide a solution for the uncertainty that is produced by the gap between the subject's need for identity and the failing of the Other to provide this full identity. Fantasy thus reduces anxiety and creates something like a harmonious picture which enables the subject to live without fear; it helps to obfuscate the true horror of reality (for example, castration).

Commodity fetishism could be seen as precisely such a fantasy. The commodity is the object which the subject adopts as something that provides

security, warmth and company. As I discussed in the previous chapter, for Lacan the Other, the symbolic regime of reality, is always characterized by a lack. This is to say that social reality can never be fully organized. In capitalism it is the commodity that fills the Other's lack. As the commodity fills the gap that is left behind by a failing Other, it enables the subject to identify again with the Other; the commodity substitutes the Other to become the Other. This is the basic process of capitalism's ideological structuring of reality. Benjamin calls this 'phantasmagoria' – a world that is projected like a movie on a screen.

The property appertaining to the commodity as fetish character attaches as well to the commodity-producing society – not as it is in itself, to be sure, but more as it represents itself and thinks to understand itself whenever it abstracts from the fact that it produces precisely commodities. The image that it produces of itself in this way, and that it customarily labels as its culture, corresponds to the concept of phantasmagoria...The latter is defined by Wiesengrund [Adorno] 'as a consumer item in which there is no longer anything that is supposed to remind us how it came into being. It becomes a magical object, insofar as the labor stored up in it comes to seem supernatural and sacred at the very moment when it can no longer be recognized as labor.' (BGS V, p. 822–3; 1999a, p. 669)

The commodity fetish is thus a fantastic illusion, a phantasmagoria, which serves the subject as a tool to imagine a harmonious structuring of objective reality. However, this is not a subjective illusion – it does not only work on the level of the imaginary. According to Marx, commodity fetishism must be seen as a systematic misrecognition; that is, commodity fetishism shapes the symbolic order, the Other itself. Therefore, for Marx this misrecognition is not a false knowledge; there is no gap between the subject and the object here. The point is that commodity fetishism works as a power/knowledge regime that produces everything that one might regard as knowledge. The commodity fetish that has filled the gap of the lacking Other shapes the subject and its imaginary-perceptual apparatus.

We need to remind ourselves of the Lacanian conception of the subject, discussed in Chapter 4, which is not a conscious, active human being. Instead, the Lacanian subject is – like the *flâneur*, the prostitute, the knowledge worker, and Marx's table – a thing that is animated by the Other. This thing traverses the boundary between subjective and objective, human and non-human, active and passive, alive and dead. Thus, to come back to Marx's table and its 'grotesque ideas,' one could say:

For this table, no less than the ego, is dependent on the signifier, namely on the word, which, bearing its function to the general, to the lectern of

quarrelsome memory and to the Tronchin piece of noble pedigree, is responsible for the fact that it is not merely a piece of wood, worked in turn by the woodcutter, the joiner and the cabinet-maker, for reasons of commerce, combined with fashion, itself productive of needs that sustain its exchange value, providing it is not led too quickly to satisfy the least superfluous of those needs by the last use to which it will eventually be pure, namely, as firewood....Furthermore, the significations to which the table refers are in no way less dignified than those of the ego, and the proof is that on occasion they envelop the ego itself. (Lacan, 1977, p. 132, translation modified)⁴¹

What Lacan does in the above passage is to portray the subject as a thing; he links the subject, the ego, to a wooden thing, perhaps Marx's table, which is shaped and worked on by the Other. In the same way one could say that today's knowledge worker is formed by the knowledge management discourse that is, as we have seen, always already geared towards commodity production. Marx's table, which, at first sight, seems to be an ordinary sensuous thing, acquires, once it has been turned into a commodity, a sublime extra-sensuousness, because it now serves as a magical object within a broader system of libidinal needs. Equally, the knowledge worker is turned into a knowledge commodity which acquires extra-sensuousness in today's knowledge society. As I discussed earlier, for knowledge management the ideal scenario seems to be when the knowledge worker's whole body, including his or her tacit and subconscious knowledge, is made explicit, transferable onto a computer system and made productive as a commodity.

For Žižek (1989, 1997a), a keen reader of both Marx and Lacan, commodity fetishism is an ideological fantasy. This fantasy is not a subjective misrecognition but indeed points to Benjamin's 'sleeping collectivity' mentioned above. That is, for Žižek, commodity fetishism is a structural fantasy that produces the subject as such; it enables an identification with what is an otherwise failing Other. For Žižek (1989, p. 31), the collectivity is asleep because it does not realize that the Other is failing. This is to say that social organization itself is impossible and undecidable and the commodity is only one particular content, which has decided to fill the lack of the Other. Žižek therefore insists that commodity fetishism works on the level of the universal and that the ideological fantasy of the commodity is structural. For Žižek, then, the commodity is a kind of universal machine that organizes social reality by way of a structural fantasy, that of commodity fetishism.

Now, I would suggest that Žižek's notion of universality works along similar lines as Laclau and Mouffe's concept of hegemony. Following Hegel, Žižek claims to work with a 'properly dialectical notion of the Universal.' In his view, the universal is not a totality but something that

can be found in the exception (2001b, p. 27). For Žižek, this exception is structurally necessary. This can be seen along the lines of Laclau and Mouffe's claim, which I discussed in Chapter 4, that social organization is structurally undecidable or impossible. What this structural necessity of the exception points to is that the rules of reality will always be characterized by exceptions. Social organization will never be full and all-encompassing and there will always be minorities, so to say. For Žižek, 'the basic rule of dialectics is thus: whenever we are offered a simple enumeration of sub-species of a universal species, we should always look for the exception to the series' (*ibid.*). This is because the exception is the symptom 'which disturbs the surface of the false appearance' – it disturbs the apparent unity of reality. In contrast to the fetish, which 'is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth' (Žižek, 2001a, p. 13), the symptom aims to destruct the normal 'goings-on' of the fetish by exposing a particular exception *as* universality. Or, in Benjaminian terms and applied to this chapter's topic, we could say that knowledge management, as shock, works as a fetish commodity because it enables us to be part of the 'sleeping community;' the Lie, as Žižek calls it. On the other hand, if taken seriously, knowledge could be an event, an exception, a 'flash of knowledge,' that would expose the universality of commodity fetishism.

What we have here is a politics of the particular that speculatively aims at the disruption of the universal and its fetish appearance. For Žižek, the task of the dialectical process is to expose universality as particularity. In Laclau's words, it is the task to show that 'the universal...does not have a concrete content on its own' (1996a, p. 34–5), but only one that is provided by a particularity. This, then, points to the notion that social organization, as universality, is impossible. As I discussed in Chapter 4, for Laclau and Mouffe, social organization is impossible precisely because hegemony can never be all-encompassing. One could say, it is impossible for the universal to only have one totalizing content. What is possible, however, is that social organization can be filled by a particular hegemonic content. For Žižek, the commodity is such a hegemonic content that has filled the universal Other of social reality. One could thus argue that capital's hegemony is produced and reproduced by way of an illusion, a fantasy, which systematically tells us that social relations can be universally expressed as a commodity relation. This illusion is, however, not a false knowledge. It is a knowledge that identifies with capital and accepts it as hegemonic social reality, as Other. Nevertheless, it is an illusion, precisely because it is only *one* particular content that has filled the gap of what is fundamentally a social organization that can never be fully represented.

This filling of the impossible gap of social organization is inherently political. It is political because it can be seen as a social decision about how to position and organize society. One could say, capital and the commodity are political machines that emplace the social into particular

formations, which need to be continuously reproduced and defended. Capital reproduces its hegemony; that is, it continuously renews its power as an object of identification. It does this by way of maintaining a complex libidinal economy of subjectivities, such as the *flâneur*, the prostitute or the knowledge manager, which are always already positively positioned in relation to capital. In this chapter I have discussed knowledge management as a particular technology that helps capital to position being in relation to capital and the commodity. This particular positioning of being can be described as knowledge management's hegemonic politics. In the previous chapter I discussed the concept of hegemony as a discourse that fills the lack of the Other; it is a discourse which decidedly fills, what Laclau calls, the 'structural undecidability of society.' In this chapter I have tried to show that it is precisely the commodity which is the hegemonic content aiming to be the universal representation of the Other. The knowledge management discourse is inherently part of this particular project of hegemony, which must not only be seen to shape the wider framework of social organization, but also the apparatus that shapes subjectivity and the ontological as such. Hegemony means that social reality, life itself, is shaped by a particular discursive regime of power and knowledge. In this sense, knowledge management is inherently political, as the political is the event in which a particular content aims to be the hegemonic universality.

As I pointed out in Chapter 4, however, a hegemony cannot be seen to have any centre or be final in any way. This is to say, as much as capital can be seen as a synthesis that has politically positioned and emplaced social organization, this emplacement can never be final; it is an emplacement that is continuously embattled and contested. This connects, then, to Benjamin's notion of 'non-synthesis,' as discussed in Chapter 3. This concept implies that a synthesis can never be fully accomplished; a synthesis is continuously subverted and challenged by discourses of resistance. The social can thus never be fully positioned and represented; there will always be depositioning forces. It is this notion of depositioning and the possibility of resistance that I will explore in more detail in the following chapter.

6

Depositioning Organization: The Politics of Resistance

In the previous chapter I outlined, discussed and critiqued the particularities of the knowledge management discourse in organization theory. I argued that knowledge management is positively positioned in relation to the restricted concerns of management and therefore deeply embedded in today's hegemonic relations of capital. Although the previous chapter engaged with the particularities of the knowledge management discourse, the aim was to paint a wider picture of the positioning project and explore the 'goings-on' of the hegemony of capital. As I discussed, this hegemony produces specific subjectivities, for example those of the knowledge manager, the prostitute and the *flâneur*. These subjectivities are products of the hegemonic relations of capital; they are actors that continuously reproduce this hegemony within the libidinal economy of commodity fetishism. In general, what the previous chapter tried to show is how knowledge management defines the hegemonic boundaries of possibility within the impossibility of social organization.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, however, a hegemony can never be all-encompassing; there will always be gaps in what sometimes seems to be a totalitarian dominance of management. This is to say that there is a multiplicity of resistances – perhaps one can call them minorities – that have been articulated against the hegemony of the positioning project within the realms of organization theory. In this chapter I will discuss some of these discourses of resistance that have been articulated against the positioning project of organization. However, what could be called the depositioning project in organization theory is not an essential category that is described by a unified discourse. Instead, the depositioning project is a multiplicity. I will therefore not attempt to fully represent the depositioning project in this chapter. All the same, I will argue that there is a certain tendency in organization theory to regard social reality as something that is fluid, plural, transparent and locally constructed. While such a depositioning and resisting of established images of organization has been a politically important project, which shows the precarious and undecidable nature of organizing,

this chapter aims to expose some of the limits of this project. Based on the philosophical conceptions developed in Part II, I will argue that the depositioning discourses of resistance discussed in this chapter can be seen to have certain depoliticizing effects, precisely because the political event is not seen as something that is related to wider questions of the hegemonic structuring and organizing of society.

Organization as multiple process

As a response or resistance to the restricted notions of organization discussed in the previous chapter, authors have increasingly called for a more processual understanding of organization: 'We need to see organization as a process,' Cooper and Burrell, for example, proclaim (1988, p. 106). For Chia, a processual understanding of organization

privileges an ontology of movement, emergence and becoming in which the transient and ephemeral nature of what is 'real' is accentuated. What is real for postmodern thinkers are not so much social states, or entities, but emergent relational interactions and patternings that are recursively intimated in the fluxing and transforming of our life-worlds. (1995, p. 581)

The 'process-view' aims to go beyond an understanding of organization as entity or unity and, instead, emphasize that every reality is produced within a complex web of multiple relations. Cooper and Burrell (1988, p. 106) refer to this as the 'production of organization.' That is, for them organization is not something that simply exists – it is not a noun – but, instead, an ongoing process of production 'that occurs within the wider "body" of society' (*ibid.*). Within such a view, organization is a verb, a continuous process of becoming, which has been described as the Deleuzoguattarian algorithm of 'and...and...and' (Styhre, 2002, p. 464). This expresses the view that organization is not seen as being real, or, what Chia calls, 'being-realism' (1996, p. 33) but, instead, as a 'becoming-realism' (*ibid.*) which always connects and transforms. The process-view of organization thus contrasts the continuity of *stasis* with the continuity of *dynamis*. It replaces the continuity of organization as a stable entity with the notion of a 'continuous production of multiplicities and assemblages' (Styhre, 2002, p. 465), or, as Kavanagh and Araujo put it, a 'multiplicity...constructed in a loose, dynamic network of tangles, mangles, ensembles and assemblages' (1995, p. 110).

This processual understanding of the concept of organization is seen by Chia as a resistance to modern technologies of organization and representation: 'Representation, through fixing and placing of fluid, amorphous, social phenomena in space-time, is an organizational process which

works to centre, unify and render discrete what would otherwise be an indistinguishable mass of vague interactions and experiences' (1998, p. 4). Rather than being restricted to the management of modern forms of positioning and organizing, organization theorists adopting a so called 'process perspective' (Thanem, 2001) have thus attempted to develop, what Chia calls, a 'social theory of organization' which does not neglect 'the wider questions of the organizational character of modern social life' (1998b, p. 6). To see organization as a process, then, is a realization that organized reality is produced within complex webs of social relations. That is, organization is not simply a positioned unity – for example, a hierarchy, discipline, taxonomy or institution – but indeed something that is continuously subject to multiple forces of depositioning and 'microscopic change' (Chia, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; see also Tsoukas, 2003).

One of the most celebrated 'process philosophers' of organization is Robert Cooper. In a recent journal interview Cooper (2001a) produces a rhizomatic text whose only space is that of the medium, the 'in-between,' which is a 'continuous *movement between* locations and has no location itself' (2001b, p. 193, emphasis in original). In this text concepts appear, reappear and transform, they continuously connect to a plethora of his other writings. This text can be seen as an image of the whole of Coopers' work, which has been concerned with the displacement and explosion of representation (1992), the movement of 'information' (Cooper in Chia and Kallinikos, 1998), the collection and dispersion of parts (Cooper, 2001c), and the re-production of mass (*ibid.*). For Cooper, 'there are no unities, only dispersions of terms' (1998, p. 119); that is, for him wholes, unities and organizations are only ephemeral collections that disperse again into holes, parts and disorganizations. In his view, 'things come together and then fall apart,...relations are ephemeral, even ghost-like,...possibilities rather than actualities constitute the fabric of our world' (2001c, p. 24). One could say that Cooper is the thinker of depositioning *par excellence* because he was one of the first within the realms of organization theory to engage with poststructural philosophies and critique established conceptions of organization as formal entities and positive unities. For him, traditional conceptions of organization seem to be 'unable to recognize the obvious point that every positive – that is, *positioned* – object or event depends for its existence on a negative background that cannot be made obvious' (Cooper, 2001a, p. 336, emphasis in original). His quintessential point is that the seemingly positive form of organization depends on a negative supplement, that of disorganization (Cooper, 1990).

The importance of his contribution lies in the fact that, for him, the concept of organization is not restricted to a specific form or economic entity but, instead, assumes to be a general social process that is comprised

of a heterogeneity of social and material actors. Cooper's attack on the specificity of organization is well developed in his work. In his view, over the past decades 'the concept of organization has lost its more general meaning of social organization and has been increasingly narrowed down to the specific, instrumental meaning of an industrial or administrative work system' (2001a, p. 326). He goes on to say that

the idea of a specific organization or institution is no more than a *positioning strategy* that we use to locate the slippery contents of our conceptual mindscapes. Seen against the complex, mobile mix of social reality, the image of a specific organization or even a human individual is no more than a provisional placement or transient impression. (2001a, p. 327, emphasis added)

What he describes here is a view of the positioning project of organization as the attempt to place social reality, which is fundamentally complex, mobile and transient, into a provisional order. For him, organization is a temporary node in what is otherwise a disorganized mass of reality; organization is the specific or particular expression of a general, more dynamic, matter (2001b). His depositioning strategy is thus not primarily one that critiques or resists particular specificities. In my view, Cooper's main contribution lies in the generalization of the concept of organization. He resists the hegemonic understanding of organization, which in the previous chapter I exposed as that of management (although Cooper does not talk about management), by depositioning social reality itself and showing that organization is a multiplicity, something that cannot simply be positioned in one place or expressed by one discourse, for example that of management. Cooper's work shows that any emplacement, position or organization is precarious and thus dependent on a negative movement of depositioning and disorganization. We could say, perhaps, that Cooper points to the impossibility of fixing organization in a permanent place.

Other process philosophers in organization theory, too, see organization as a temporary fixity in what is otherwise an essential flux of reality. As Linstead, for example, maintains, 'attempts to organize in terms of stopping the flow of process are deathly – they kill off that which is vital and urgent in process in order to stabilize it temporarily and create, as a false problem, a situation where movement has to be reinscribed or reinserted into the system' (2002, p. 105). Linstead calls organization a false problem, because it artificially stops the movement of reality. His concern is therefore, so it seems, to prevent stops, breaks and *stasis* in order to ensure the continuity of flows, movements and *dynamis*. However, it would be a caricature of the work of process philosophers to claim that they are only concerned with the continuity of change and *dynamis*. As

Linstead highlights, 'change must always to some degree be organized to be thinkable' (2002, p. 105). He goes on to say that

we need to bear in mind that organizations as social constructions still need some organizing if we are to sustain our social world in a recognizable form. The process, then..., might be seen as one of shifting tensions and relaxations, expansions and contractions, with organizing not as the opposite pole of the dualism to change, as its absolute other, but as a shifting qualitative relation between order and change. (Linstead, 2002, p. 106)

What Linstead describes here is a certain dialectic between order and change. Organization is seen as a necessary stop to the continuous flow of reality.

In Chia's words this stop is a decision that 'acts to reduce equivocality and to punctuate our field of experience thereby helping to configure a version of reality' (1994, p. 803). For him, this decision is not so much about choosing a reality; instead, this very decision is undecidable as it 'embodies and exemplifies the ongoing contestation between order and disorder, routine familiarity and breakdown, organization and disorganization, chaos and cosmos' (*ibid.*). For Chia, these decisions point to necessary breaks in the *dynamis* of reality: 'the process of organizing social worlds comprises a complex and dynamic web of...arresting, punctuating, isolating and classifying of the essentially undivided flow of human experiences for the purpose of rendering more controllable and manipulable such phenomenal experiences of the world' (1998a, p. 366). What seems to be the essential point of the deposing strategy of process philosophers, however, is that this arresting, stopping and deciding is only seen as a temporary, even local, intervention in what is otherwise an uncontrollable, disorganized flux of change:

Whilst the breaking up of change into static states enables us to act upon them and whilst it is practically useful to focus on the end-states rather than on change itself, we deliberately create insoluble problems by failing to recognize the true changeable nature of reality. It is a mistake to construe reality as a sea of stability with scattered islands of change. Instead, the opposite is true. *Stability is the exception*, not the rule, especially in lived reality. (Chia, 1998a, p. 355, emphasis added)

For Chia, reality is not a stability, or a structure, but, instead, a continuous process of flux and transformation out of which organized stabilities emerge as an exception rather than the rule. These temporary organized stabilities are local and particular rather than universal. As Tsoukas and Chia maintain, 'organizational phenomena are not treated as entities, as

accomplished events, but as enactments – unfolding processes involving actors making choices interactively, in inescapably *local* conditions, by drawing on broader rules and resources’ (2002, p. 577, emphasis added).

This, then, is an ontology that sees organized reality not as a universal ‘being-realism’ but as a locally enacted ‘becoming-realism’ (Chia, 1996, p. 33), implying that reality is something which is continuously changing rather than being fixed. One could also say that for process philosophers of organization ‘there is no society as such’ (Styhre, 2002, p. 470). At first sight this comes close to Laclau and Mouffe’s characterization of social organization as impossibility, discussed in Chapter 4. Laclau and Mouffe, too, see social organization as something which ultimately is impossible to fix. Applied to the problematic explored in the previous chapter, one could say, for example, that management can never be a full representative of what is a multiplicity of alternative organizational regimes. In this sense, management is only a temporary, perhaps local, fixation of wider, more basic organizational forces that are continuously changing. Such a view opens up tremendous possibilities for seeing alternative organizational futures; it is an inherently positive way of engaging with the world. In relation to Benjamin’s philosophy discussed in Chapter 3, one could say that process philosophers aim to deposition dominant histories and show that history can be something else than it currently is; process philosophy is about a movement from being to becoming. Law and Benschop call this ‘ontological politics’: ‘It is a form of politics that works in the play between different places, seeking to slip between different worlds. It is a form of politics that imagines that there always is such play’ (1997, p. 175). This, then, could be a productive reading of the politics of the process-view, which continuously seeks to explore possibilities of new, local forms of life and different ways of reading history; it aims to show the possibility of multiple realities and histories.

While this exploration of difference and multiplicity must be regarded as an important political project, this book is based on the understanding that social reality is not only constructed on a local basis and organizations are not only temporary phenomena. As I explored in detail in the previous chapter when I engaged with the knowledge management discourse, management could be seen as an organizational regime that has become the hegemony of social reality. This means that managerial principles do not only work on a local basis but indeed have acquired a certain universality. Management has emplaced reality in particular ways, an emplacement which is not a temporary form but something which endures over time and space. This does not suggest that management is all there is – otherwise there would be no depositioning project – but, nevertheless, it means that there is a tendency for management to structure, shape and govern social organization discourses. As a number of organization theorists have pointed out recently (Parker, 1995; Reed, 1997; Willmott, 1998; Hancock

and Tyler, 2001a), process philosophies of organization seem ill-equipped to analyze those structural forces that form social reality on a universal level.

Reed, for example, maintains that the world of process philosophers of organization

seems to consist almost totally of verbs and hardly any nouns; there is only process, and structure is regarded as its passing effect. Structure is denied any kind of ontological status or explanatory power as a relatively enduring entity that takes on stable institutional and organizational forms generating scarce resources that actors, both individual and collective, have to draw on in a selective and constraint manner before they can 'move on' and 'make a difference.' We are left with an entirely process-driven conception of organization in which any, even residual, sense of social structure...dissolve[...] away in the analytical fascination with the local, contingent and indeterminate. (1997, p. 26)

Reed's concern is that a process-view of organization denies us the ability to analyze and critique those concrete structures, 'such as capitalist corporations and bureaucratic control regimes' (1997, p. 35), which, in his view, shape social reality. He fears that because process philosophers fail to look beyond the local and contingent to see how organizational forms and discourses endure over time and space, 'others,' such as 'the party,' 'the market,' or 'the nation,' will always shape life according to their restricted political ends (1997, p. 29). In his view, process philosophers of organization see no need

to look beyond these micro-level processes and practices because, as far as their advocates are concerned, there is nothing, ontologically or analytically, 'there;' flat ontologies and miniaturized local orderings construct a seductive vision of the social world in which everything and everybody is constantly in a 'state of becoming' and never in a 'condition of being.' This socio-organizational world is disassembled into some of its elemental constituents, but these are never re-assembled with a view to gaining a broader understanding of and explanatory purchase on the structural mechanisms through which they were originally generated and are subsequently elaborated. (Reed, 1997, p. 29)

Although Reed's critique is generally well targeted, one could accuse him of somewhat caricaturing the process-view of organization. As I showed in my above discussion, process philosophers do indeed privilege becoming over being, change over structure, but their position is not as naïve as Reed wants it to be. What Reed does not seem to fully acknowledge is that a large aspect of the process-view of organization is a general resis-

tance against those modern structures – such as institutionalism and rationalism – that always already determine today's reality. In contrast to Reed's claim, cited above, that there is 'literally nothing there' (that is, there is no ontology) which process philosophers can engage with, one needs to see the political importance of their general critique of restricted economies of organizing. While he rightly critiques process philosophers for not analyzing and critiquing concrete social structures in any great detail, Reed does not seem to appreciate enough the imaginative and creative potential of process philosophies to see completely different life forms, different social organization, organizations that are not yet nameable within the existing structures of consciousness. In my view, the main contribution of process philosophers of organization is their attempt to imagine difference, multiplicity and change on a general level. Read affirmatively, one could say that they do not engage with concrete social structures because their main concern is to show how these structures are always already contingent and changeable.

Having said this, I feel broadly sympathetic towards Reed's attack on the process-view of organization precisely because his critique importantly points to some of its limitations and restrictions. In my view, the generalizations of the concept of organization that have been suggested by process philosophers have become too restricted for four reasons: first, although the main contribution of the process-view is to show the general fluidity of social structures, process philosophers are ill-equipped to understand the specific forces of restriction that prevent concrete changes and transformations of social reality; second, the lack of an analysis of hegemonic forces of domination lead to an idealized notion of social reality, which is portrayed as continuous, transparent and somewhat harmonious; third, because emphasis is overwhelmingly put on movement, multiplicity and becoming, speculative thought is not being used for the creation of specific events and unities that can potentially enact specific situations of change and transformation; and, fourth, the celebrations of ephemeral and local ontologies are in constant danger of being subsumed by those structural forces that always already seem to shape modern life, for example, capital or the state.

To further qualify these restrictions of the process-view of organization, one could note, for example, that capital, as a force that structures contemporary reality, does not seem to exist in the language of many process philosophers. Indeed one could claim that capital, although very real in its structuring effects, assumes the role of the Lacanian Real, which I discussed in Chapter 4 as that which cannot be made explicit, represented or symbolized (Žižek, 1997a, p. 93–5). This is to say, with process philosophers of organization we are often in the odd position that, while they are keen to speculate about the organizational Real (that which is currently not part of normal organizational reality), very real organizational forces of contemporary reality, such as capital, seem to be relegated

to the Real and hence rendered unnameable. If one wants to be affirmative about such a movement between the real and the Real, one could say that this is indeed part of any speculation. That is, the speculative power of the process-view of organization lies precisely in its ability to move forces of the real to the Real and vice versa. However, there are questions of effectiveness and strategy that need to be asked about such a movement, which I already touched upon in Chapter 3 when I discussed Adorno's critique of Heidegger. For Adorno, Heidegger's philosophy, although impressive, amounts to a 'jargon of authenticity,' or indeed to idealism, precisely because the *jouissance* of the Real, or Heidegger's Being, is not connected to the real, or any concrete modes of being that can be intervened and transformed. For Adorno, Heidegger's philosophy has very little transformational or affirmative potential because it cannot name the objects and subjects that are supposed to be affirmed. Equally, one could say that the process philosophies, discussed above, although generally affirmative in nature, lack concrete transformational powers as they are not able to name and specify the modes and forms of organization to be transformed. As the specific 'goings-on' of capital are rendered unnameable by the process-view, it lacks the language to transform those concrete social relations that, as we have seen in Chapter 5, describe the hegemony of organization as management.

One could thus say that, today, most process philosophies of organization are very effective in describing the movement from the real to the Real; this movement is one of questioning unified positions of organized reality showing that these are dependent on a multiplicity of forces of the Real, which are not currently symbolized by the reality of organization theory. This can be described as Derrida's 'first phase' of the deconstructive process, the phase of overturning established relations. That is, what seems to be very well argued in organization theory is that organization, as a general concept of social organizing, is not only an entity, a noun, but indeed a process of differentiation, a process of disorganization, which cannot be fixed or symbolized in a single place. As Cooper (1990) argues, organization is always dependent on a negative movement of disorganization; perhaps one could say, the real of organization is always complemented by a Real, that which is not or cannot be named or made visible. To show generally that organization is dependent on forces of disorganization has been, in my view, an important project of resistance against those modern forces of organization, which always already position reality in specific ways. However, one of Reed's critiques of the process-view, which I cited above, was that although process philosophers seem to be very effective in disassembling, disorganizing and depositioning, very little has been done to reassemble the remaining fragments in order to gain 'a broader understanding of...the structural mechanisms' of organized reality (Reed, 1997, p. 29).

This coincides with Hardt (1993, p. 45) who maintains that it is not enough to conceptualize the production of difference in a generalized manner. One should also see how these potential processes intersect again and form a passage that is a new critical actuality. In my view, what would be necessary is not only the creation of multiplicities, differentiations and disorganizations, but also a movement oriented towards the production of new unities and organizations. Put differently, our task is not only to expose the impossibility of organization but also to explore the possibilities of making a decision about how the social can be organized in different ways. In Part II I discussed a range of philosophies which see politics as something that not only disorganizes established realities but is indeed able to collect forces in such a way that a new organizational actuality is made possible. For me, the dialectical process is not only about depositioning established truths but working towards the construction of a new synthesis of forces. As Benjamin writes: 'Being a dialectician means having the wind of history in one's sails. The sails are the concepts. It is not enough, however, to have sails at one's disposal. What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them' (1999a, p. 473). In my view, the process-view has been essential in exposing the undecidable nature of reality and showing that any synthesis will always be incomplete, a 'non-synthesis,' so to say. What I highlighted in Part II, however, is that despite the impossibility of a synthesis, and the impossibility of social organization, there is still a need for a political decision about how to organize the social. This aspect seems to be largely missing in the depositioning discourses in organization theory.

The psychologism of social constructionism

As discussed in the previous section, one of the main contributions of the process-view of organization has been to show that organizations are only temporary nodes in what is otherwise a disorganized matter of becoming. This implies that organization must always be thought in relation to change. Within the conceptual framework of process philosophers change is not in the first instance a systemic event – it is not a rupture, a fundamental discontinuity or break of reality – but, instead, something that is ongoing at a local level. As I discussed in Chapter 3, for Benjamin, a rereading and change of history has to involve a destructive movement of stopping the flow of official histories. His 'dialectical image' is not merely one which enables us to see the continuous flow of multiplicities of history. Instead, it seeks to discontinue the history of those in power by way of a decisive shock, in order to read those minor histories that are always already forgotten by dominant discourses. In contrast, process philosophers highlight the continuity and locality of change. Tsoukas and Chia, for example, speak of 'microscopic change' (2002, p. 580). While

microscopic change is seen to be continuous, social reality can, in a way, never be determined itself.

In this section I would like to suggest that such an emphasis on the local can be connected to some social constructionist discourses, which have been of particular popularity in organization theory. To be clear, social constructionism is not a unified discourse that one can clearly define, pigeonhole or locate in any fixed explanatory category. Instead, it is a discourse that is characterized by a multiplicity of disciplinary languages as well as epistemological, ontological and political positions (see the book collections by I. Parker, 1998, and Velody and Williams, 1998). One could say that social constructionism is ridden with antagonisms, which, to be sure, are not strictly internal to it, but are clearly connected to wider antagonistic debates in society. Yet, what I would like to suggest in this section is that, despite these antagonisms, there is a tendency for some social constructionist discourses in organization theory to rely on psychological conceptions of reality construction.

Regardless of the multiplicity of views held by social constructionists one could, perhaps, give a general approximation of their position and say that they are deeply suspicious of realist ontologies and positivist epistemologies. In their view, reality does not pre-exist the human being; it is not something given by nature; instead, reality is constructed socially. This implies that the subject – whether individual, group, community or society – is not seen to be pre-given or derived from the nature of the world (Gergen, 1995a). This translates into, what one could generally call, an anti-positivist epistemology which maintains that social constructionists do not seek to understand the natural pre-given foundations and essences of the world but, instead, try to understand the contested dynamics of the way knowledge of the world is socially constructed. In Gergen's view, social constructionism can be defined as follows:

Drawing importantly from emerging developments most prominently in the history of science, the sociology of knowledge, ethnomethodology, rhetorical studies of science, symbolic anthropology, feminist theory and post-structuralist literary theory, social constructionism is not so much a foundational theory of knowledge as an anti-foundational dialogue. Primary emphases of this dialogue are based on: the social-discursive matrix from which knowledge claims emerge and from which their justification is derived; the values/ideology implicit within knowledge posits; the modes of informal and institutional life sustained and replenished by ontological and epistemological commitments; and the distribution of power and privilege favoured by disciplinary beliefs. Much attention is also given to the creation and transformation of cultural constructions: the adjustment of competing belief/value systems: and

the generation of new modes of pedagogy, scholarly expression and disciplinary relations. (1995b, p. 20)

Precisely because social constructionism is characterized by a multiplicity of views, Gergen's definition has been contested on a number of fronts. It is not the task of this section to evaluate and compare all of these contestations in detail. Instead, the starting point of my discussion is Gergen's claim that 'social constructionism is not so much a foundational theory of knowledge as an anti-foundational dialogue.'

By emphasizing dialogue Gergen highlights that, in his view, reality is always embedded in conversations and social interactions within communities rather than a pre-existing entity. Such a view has been particularly popular with those knowledge management scholars who have sought to look for alternatives to the technology oriented, or 'techknowledgey,' discourse that I discussed and critiqued in the previous chapter. What has been increasingly emphasized are 'people-centred' knowledge management approaches, that is, approaches that understand knowledge as something situational, local and socially distributed. Instead of knowledge as 'techknowledgey,' authors argue that knowledge must be conceptualized as an activity-oriented (Engeström, 1989; Blackler, 1995), situational and practice-oriented process (Scribner, 1986; Suchman, 1987; Lave and Wenger, 1991), which is embedded in communities of knowing (Boland and Tenkasi, 1995) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown and Duguid, 1991).

Such views of knowledge correspond to the critiques that have been put forward against cognitivism or what in the previous chapter I have referred to as the Human Information Processing school. Varela, for example, points out that 'cognition consists not of representations but of embodied action. Correlatively, the world we know is not pre-given; it is, rather, enacted through our history of structural coupling' (1992, p. 336). He therefore sees knowledge having a distributed and appropriated character as it is constantly worked on and transformed within changing social contexts. Hence, some social constructionists do not necessarily speak of knowledge but of *knowing*; that is, knowledge is not seen as a thing but as a process. The role of language must be emphasized in this context. Cognitivism, the information processing mode of cognition (Boland and Tenkasi, 1995), portrays communication as a message-sending and message-receiving process that uses language as its transmitter of reality. Many social constructionists reject the view that sees language as a chronological process of stimulus, information processing and response. As an alternative to such a formalist understanding of language one often relies on Wittgenstein's (1978) 'language game' metaphor which is explained by Boland and Tenkasi: 'Through action within communities of knowing we make and remake both our language and our knowledge.... In a language game there is no fixed set of messages

or meanings from which to choose in communicating' (1995, p. 353). Many social constructionist discourses thus see language not as a transmitter of predefined and prepositioned meanings but as a constantly evolving process; hence, Maturana (1978) prefers to use the term 'linguaging' (the process of creating language) as opposed to 'language' (a pre-existing symbolic schema).

For these social constructionists, then, language does not reflect reality; instead, it constitutes it. That is, reality is constructed (inter-)subjectively through the communal construction of language, or 'linguaging' (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Gergen, 1992; Kvale, 1992; Hosking *et al.*, 1995). As Boland and Tenkasi point out, 'words gain sense only through actual use in a community, meanings are symbolic and inherently ambiguous, and the power of social processes, storytelling and conversation is emphasized' (1995, p. 353). Thus, 'language is essentially a consensual domain of agreement' (Mingers, 1995, p. 110). Lave and Wenger argue that knowledge construction 'crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the "culture of practice"' (1991, p. 95). This implies 'participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities' (1991, p. 98). As another example one could mention the 'community networking model' by Swan *et al.*, which

highlights the importance of relationships, shared understandings and attitudes to knowledge formation and sharing...It is precisely the sharing of knowledge across functional or organizational boundaries, through using cross-functional...inter-disciplinary and inter-organizational teams, that is seen as the key to the effective use of knowledge. (1999, p. 273)

For the social constructionists discussed here, knowledge is constructed within organizational communities. It is said that this construction process is based on dialogue, consensus, shared understandings and a culture of practice. What is thus strongly emphasized are *local* knowledges that are said to be embedded in communities of practice. This emphasis on the local is seen as a reaction against and critique of positivist claims that knowledge is an objective and transcendental truth and that reality is a pre-given object (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997).

In the wider realms of organization theory Karl Weick has been one of the most prominent proponents of social constructionist approaches that emphasize local, community-based knowledge construction processes. More than twenty years ago, he already called for people to stamp out nouns, as he calls it (1979, p. 44). In a passage, which reminds us of the process-view of organization, Weick writes:

Nouns such as environment and organization conceal the fact that organizing is about flows, change, and processes... Fixed entities are things that people fix, and once fixed, they are supposed to stay fixed. That is the world of nouns. It is a perfectly consistent world of structures. The trouble is, there is not much in organizations that corresponds to it.... Verbs keep things moving and that includes the structures involved in sensemaking and the shifting demands to which those structures are trying to accommodate. Verbs remind people that they confront the activity of the environment rather than resistance.... People who think with verbs are more likely to accept life as ongoing events into which they are thrown, and less likely to think of it as turf to be defended, levels of hierarchy to be ascended, or structures to be upended. (1995, p. 187–8)

For Weick, organization is not a structure in any sense. Instead, organization is a sensemaking process that is 'grounded in both individual and social activity' (Weick, 1995, p. 6). In his view, 'the organization makes sense, literally and figuratively, at the bottom' (1995, p. 117). He thus strongly emphasizes the notion of the ground at which reality is constructed decentrally by social actors, as opposed to organizational reality being pre-given or imposed by a central place, for example, a top-management team (*ibid.*). In his view, organizations might be rational, hierarchical and structural on the surface, but deep down on the ground things are loosely coupled, even messy (Weick, 1995, p. 134). Weick's ground, then, is not a concrete foundation but, perhaps, a 'swamp'; it is a place where individuals and communities 'muddle through,' where organization is loosely coupled, where people have to make sense of and renegotiate and recreate their realities in every second. However, in Weick's world of social psychological sensemaking not everything is in process all the time. In a chapter called 'The Substance of Sensemaking' (1995, p. 106–32) he discusses 'substances' or 'content resources' such as ideologies, decision premises and paradigms which, for him, are vocabularies that simplify realities and influence sensemaking behaviours. Yet, in his view, 'there is no such thing as a fixed meaning for the content resources of sensemaking' (1995, p. 132) and, ultimately, it is up to the individual or group to choose which substances it wants to consider for the process of sensemaking.

Let me turn to a critique⁴² of such social constructionist discourses. In his essay, 'The Sociology of Knowledge and its Consciousness,' Adorno (1967) attacks the work of Mannheim (1951) who was one of the prime figures of the German 'sociology of knowledge' field. Mannheim's writing played an important role in German social science during the 1920s and 1930s and subsequently had also a defining impact on the writings of Berger and Luckmann (1966) whose book, *The Social Construction of Reality*,

is often referred to by social constructionists in organization theory. Adorno detects a clear psychologism in Mannheim's writing; that is, for him, Mannheim concentrates his analysis on the individualistic façade of society, where individuals are characterized as agents that construct and reconstruct reality on a local basis. This, Adorno claims, 'is based on the somewhat transcendental presupposition of a *harmony* between society and the individual' (1967, p. 41, emphasis added). For him, it is this idealism of a harmony between underlying societal power relations and the actuality of their subjective experience that describes the agenda of the German sociology of knowledge field championed by Mannheim.

Such a levelling off of social struggles into modes of behaviour which can be defined formally and which are made abstract in advance allows uplifting proclamations concerning the future: 'Yet another way remains open – it is that unified planning will come about through understanding, agreement, and compromise.' (Adorno, 1967, p. 42)

Understanding, agreement, compromise, dialogue – as I have shown, these are often the terms used in social constructionist discourses. Reality is seen as a subjective or inter-subjective phenomenon which is enacted by individual and communal techniques of knowledge construction.

For Weick, for example, a trained psychologist, everything seems to come down to psychological processes. Although there are some substances in his view of reality, he portrays them to be merely content resources for the psychological processes of reality construction. For him, there are no social structures, such as ideologies, which endure over time and space and produce subjectivities in specific ways. Weick's language recalls the psychologism Adorno speaks of; the psychologism that assumes a non-antagonistic and harmonic relationship between individual sense-making processes and wider societal forces of reality construction. It seems odd, for example, that when Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) study the work of flight operators aboard an US navy aircraft carrier they pay no attention to the wider socio-political context of that particular workplace. The aircraft carrier is seen as just another workplace that, like, for example, the fire fighter station, nuclear power station and hospital, operates in a high-risk environment. Their study is concerned to see how people make sense of potentially dangerous workplace situations and generally operate in a place that is ridden with tensions between routine operations and potential disaster. While Weick and Sutcliffe have a great deal to say about the psychological and social processes of sensemaking within the local community of flightdeck operators, their analysis does not attempt to connect local psychologies to wider social structures that produce the specific workplace called 'aircraft carrier' in the first place. According to Adorno,

such a psychologism 'remains in the spell of the disaster without a theory being capable of thinking the whole in its untruth' (AGS 10/2, p. 470). That is, while Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) are concerned to study how workplace disasters can be prevented, they have no grasp of the disaster of the military-industrial complex itself; they have no political way of seeing the wider social structures their flightdeck operators are embedded in.

Weick's particular social constructionism is by no means the only example of psychologism that can be observed in some areas of organization theory; let us briefly consider another one. The cover of the 1999 edition of Lave and Wenger's bestseller *Situated Learning* shows a picture by Bent Karl Jakobsen featuring a stylist scene of jazz musicians. One could claim that jazz and social constructionism have formed a 'successful' symbiosis in recent years. Evidence for this are a dedicated special issue of *Organization Science* (1998), named 'Jazz improvisation and organizing,' as well as the writing of Mary Jo Hatch (1997, 1999) who has been attempting to 'Jazz[...] up the theory of organizational improvisation' (1997). Hatch argues that 'jazz musicians do not accept their structures as given' (1999, p. 83). Instead, they improvise and create 'empty spaces' for imagination, innovation and change, which they fill with 'amazingly' creative, largely uncoordinated, inspirational jazz. She translates her jazz metaphor into a 'jazz-based view' in organization theory, in which she advocates the notion of the 'ambiguity of structure;' that is, structure is not supposed to be seen as given but as something that is resisted by individuals who, according to Hatch, collaborate together in teams, engage in processes of sensemaking, improvise and create 'empty spaces' that are filled by new inspirations. With her jazz metaphor she therefore seems to continue the psychologism detected in the social constructionist discourses discussed above: supposedly free subjects can construct their own worlds by making sense of social structures and being creative.

In his essay, 'About Jazz' (AGS 17, p. 74; see also 1967), Adorno attempts to decode the ideological significance of jazz as art form by analyzing both its inner structure and the manner of its popular reception in society. For Adorno, jazz is foremost a mass-produced and mass-consumed commodity:⁴³ 'Jazz is a commodity in a strict sense' (AGS 17, p. 77). Improvisation and interruption of the structural logic of jazz, Adorno argues, are masks that conceal the demand-oriented commodification of music and therefore the structural imperative of the capitalist music market. He calls it 'pseudodemocratic' as it is clearly part of the commercial propaganda machine of the market.

The improvisational immediacy, which makes half of its success, is clearly part of such attempts to break out of the fetishistic commodity world that try to get away from it without changing it, and therefore will be sucked into its entanglement even deeper...With Jazz an unconscious

subjectivity falls out of the commodity world into the commodity world; the system does not allow a way out. (AGS 17, p. 83, my translation)

He therefore questions the naturalness and creative potential of jazz as forms of resistance against dominant structures, as Hatch would have it. What, in fact, is natural about jazz, he argues, is its commercial logic. According to Adorno, the freedom from structures and the dynamism, flexibility and flux of jazz are illusions. Instead, jazz is rooted in a rigid and timeless immobility and the repetitive sameness of the exchangeable commodity (Lunn, 1982). For Adorno, therefore, jazz is deeply rooted in the technics of capital: by trying to escape the ideology of commodity fetishism the jazz-subject only ends up being entangled in the commodity world even more.

In Adorno's view, jazz is embedded in the 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism. Although it gives us the impression of producing ever new styles and themes, there remains an objective commodity relation. Just like knowledge management, Jazz's purpose as commodity is to sell newness. Adorno's point is that this repeated newness is, in fact, the 'eternal return' of the 'ever-same,' the commodity. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Benjamin sees the very purpose of the commodity to 'announce change with every second.' Like the merry-go-round, however, it always already returns us to the same point of departure. And, just like the 'techknowledgey'-oriented knowledge managers discussed above, Hatch and her colleagues are quite explicit about the qualification of this point of departure which one always returns to. In Lewin's (1998) account, for example, the jazz-based view should improve the flexibility of human capital. The jazz metaphor is therefore not value free; instead, it is aimed at making organizational members more creative and flexible for capital's production process. While Adorno is often criticized for his elitist prejudices against jazz – and while such a critique might, at times, even hit its target – it should be clear that his critique is especially insightful in times when notions like community, creativity, social construction, innovation and so on are on top of the agenda for many organization and management scholars (see also Jones and Böhm, 2003). Adorno's critique points us to the idea that, although reality is seen to be invented by jazz musicians and other creative people, there are some social structures which shape the way reality is constructed. As I argued in the previous chapter, one of these dominant social structures is capital.

What I have argued in this section, then, is that social constructionists have resisted the positioning discourses discussed in the previous chapter by emphasizing 'people-centred' techniques of reality construction. Rather than being produced by objective relations, subjects are seen to construct their own realities by engaging with each other socially within local communities of practice. What these social constructionist dis-

courses share with the process-view is that reality is seen as a contingent, precarious and local process. While process philosophers do not necessarily see the individual as the prime enactor of these processes – note, for example, Cooper's decentred and material conception of subjectivity (1999, 2001a) – the social constructionist views discussed here emphasize the social nature of reality construction. Reality is seen as something that is produced by individuals reaching consensus and shared understanding through dialogue. In this section I argued that such views are based on a certain psychologism, which remains blind towards those social structures that endure over time and space and traverse local communities. One of these social structures is, for example, capital that always already shapes reality in specific ways and produces subjectivities along specific lines. The so called jazz-based view shows that social constructionist discourses do not exist in a value-free environment in which reality is only constructed on local levels. What Hatch and other protagonists of organizational jazz make clear is that the creative potentials of improvisation and ambiguity are geared towards the interests of companies and capital. The jazz-based view is articulated as a theory of the firm, which aims to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. It is clear that this takes us back into the restricted realms of the hegemony of capital and management, discussed in Chapter 5.

Within the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) one could say that the social constructionist discourses discussed here, which aim to deposition centralized, bureaucratic and rational understandings of reality construction, are always already reterritorialized on the level of capital. This is to say, as social constructionists confine their agenda to local, community-based understandings of reality, they seem particularly ill-equipped to discuss, critique and resist those social structures which shape social reality on a universal level. Therefore, social constructionism, the way it is often articulated within the realms of organization theory, seems to be a depositioning discourse that is easily incorporated into the restricted agendas of the positioning discourse, which in the previous chapter I discussed as the hegemony of capital and management. The people-centred knowledge management discourses, Weick's sensemaking language and the jazz-based view do not challenge or even discuss this hegemony precisely because within their conceptual framework social reality is produced on the ground or the local level. These discourses thus fail to problematize the impossibilities of social organization.

The pluralistic politics of social constructionism

While the discourses discussed above seem to see reality as something that is mainly consensus-oriented and non-conflictual, one should not assume that social constructionism is *per se* apolitical. On the contrary,

many social constructionists see local reality and identity constructions as a vital broadening of the realm of politics. Gergen, for example, writes:

Most acutely needed are innovative forms of political action. In my view, one of the most significant innovations derived from the identity politics movement was to broaden extensively the arena of the political. In particular, political practice ceased to be reserved for the arena of politics formally considered – campaigning, voting, office holding – and it ceased to be centrist – that is moving from the top down. Rather, politics moved into the arena of the local and the immediate – into the streets, the classrooms, business, and so on. Further, as we have slowly learned – particularly from feminist activists – there is no arena of daily life that is not political in implication – from the cartoons our children watch to our purchase of shampoo and shirts. In this sense, political action does not require either aggressive action or broad visibility to be effective. It seems to me that the future of relational politics might promisingly be shaped by conjoining these realizations. Most particularly, we may see relational politics as diffused (in terms of its expansion into all corners of society) and defused (in terms of reducing its aggressive or alienating posture). Politics in the relational mode should be both subtle and unceasing – not the work of specific groups on specific sites identified as ‘political,’ but the work of us all, on all fronts. (1995a)

For Gergen, then, local processes of reality, or what he calls identity constructions, are always already political because they involve the construction of different life forms. For him, ‘constructionism is deeply pluralistic. There are no foundational grounds for discrediting any form of discourse, and because discursive practices are embedded within forms of life, to obliterate a language would be to threaten a form of humanity’ (1998, p. 45). Thus, in Gergen’s view, social constructionism is indebted to a pluralism of different life forms and ‘the co-habitation of a multiplicity of disparate voices’ (1998, p. 46). What he calls ‘relational politics’ is a politics which aims to maintain this multiplicity of voices by encouraging dialogue and collaboration between groups, thus overcoming, what he calls, a ‘contentious politics,’ which separates communities and artificially establishes barriers of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ (Gergen, 1995a).

Gergen’s political scenario is thus one that imagines the friendly co-existence of different communities, which is established by developing a shared language that does not alienate, antagonize or escalate. Instead of fuelling antagonistic languages, his ‘relational politics’ calls for the creation of ‘a new range of poetics’ (Gergen, 1995a), that can work across different discursive fields and establish understanding between conflictual parties. He names four examples of this ‘relational politics’: collaborative education, family therapy, community focused institutes and appreciative

inquiry. The latter is a distinct management technique to solve conflicts in organizations:

When organizations confront conflict – between management and workers, men and women, blacks and whites and so on – appreciative inquiry shifts the focus from who is right and wrong, fostering tolerance, or developing rules of proper conduct, to modes of collaborative action. More specifically the attempt is to work with the organization to locate instances of desirable or ideal relations – cases in which groups work well and effectively with each other. Further, as these appreciated instances are brought into public consciousness, the organization is brought into discussion of the kind of future they might build around such cases. In the very process of instancing the positive, and forging an image of a desirable future, the divisive constructions lose their suasive capacity. (Gergen, 1995a)

Gergen's 'relational politics' thus attempts to overcome organizational conflicts by mediating and establishing dialogue between opposed parties. This is based on an understanding that the organization is fundamentally an open and somewhat transparent terrain that can be managed using a set of management principles, such as 'appreciative inquiry' mentioned above. Gergen's 'relational politics' is about making organizational relations transparent, by establishing shared understandings, and enabling the acceptance and respect of difference. 'Relational politics,' then, is indebted to a pluralistic understanding of organization, which maintains that conflicts can be overcome by way of an open and transparent dialogue between oppositional parties.⁴⁴

Such pluralism can also be observed in other organization theory discourses (see also Böhm and De Cock, under review). For example, let us briefly look at the paradigm debate, which has been staged for more than two decades now, and which originally erupted in response to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) book *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. Burrell and Morgan contend that organizational analysts are embedded within the realms of four sociological paradigms: functionalism, interpretativism, radical structuralism and radical humanism. These paradigms come into existence, they argue, because of two fundamental splits: first, the split between subjectivist and objectivist ways to view the world, which is marked by different philosophical assumptions about ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology; and second, the split between regulation and radical change. Now, according to Burrell and Morgan, these four paradigms are not intended to represent images that can be chosen by individuals. Instead, they are described as being incommensurable; that is, there cannot be any dialogue or compromise between these four paradigms. In other words, because of fundamental philosophical differences,

sociological and organizational research is, according to Burrell and Morgan's argument, divided into four incommensurable communities that all view the world differently. The notion of incommensurability is thus one that emphasizes antagonistic differences between world-views that cannot be bridged. Although it is not my task here to fully engage with Burrell and Morgan's argument, it is noteworthy that for Burrell 'the belief in incommensurability...has its origins in politics' (1996, p. 650). For him, incommensurability is strategic in nature and can be seen as a response to a particular situation in the 1970s when functionalist orthodoxies of organization threatened to overtake the social sciences. Hence, one could say that Burrell and Morgan's notion of paradigm incommensurability attempted to 'open the field' (Cooper, 1976) and establish antagonistic camps of radical thought, camps that would be heavily guarded against functionalist agendas. This opening, however, is not a celebration of openness itself. Instead, it could be argued that incommensurability attempts to open up possibilities for antagonistic struggles by establishing a logic of 'us' against 'them.'

While the paradigm grid is often used to pigeonhole organizational theories according to their philosophical assumptions, the original political significance, which lies in the resistance against established functionalist theories of organization theory, is sometimes not seen or acknowledged. In opposition to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) notion of an incommensurability between paradigms of organizational analysis, writers have increasingly argued for paradigm commensurability; that is, what has been emphasized is that multiple paradigms can co-exist alongside rather than in opposition to each other. Hassard (1991), for example, puts forward a multi-paradigm view that aims to go beyond binary oppositions of modernist social science agendas. He advocates a postmodernist view of organizational analysis, which, being allegedly based on Derrida's notions of undecidability and *différance*, would not be oppositional in nature but 'developing the middle ground.' In his eyes, this would be somewhat 'more closely attuned to the spirit of the times' (1991, p. 19). And it certainly is, given the recent 'success' of political discourses of 'The Third Way' (Giddens, 1998). A similar view is put forward by Aldrich who argues for a communication model when he says: 'we should be pleased that people in different cultures...[find] a common ground around which to organize their discourse' (1992, p. 38). For Aldrich, then, incommensurability needs to be overcome because today's multicultural world requires strategies of mediation, dialogic communication and consensus building. In organization theory such a call for diversity and pluralism has been a popular response to the notion of incommensurability; see McKinley and Mone (1998), Kaghan and Phillips (1998) and Weaver and Gioia (1994) and Knudsen (2003). What seems to be at the heart of the call for pluralistic dialogue is the idea that it would be possible for all cultures (and para-

digms) to, on one hand, maintain their individual differences, and, on the other, develop a common language which would help to reconcile all existing antagonistic differences.

Such a pluralistic approach to understanding organization can be related to Morgan's metaphoric view developed in his bestseller *Images of Organization*. In there he describes his particular way of seeing organizational reality as follows:

When we look at our world with our two eyes we get a different view from that gained by using each eye independently. Each eye sees the same reality in a different way, and when working together, the two combine to produce yet another way. Try it and see...The way of seeing itself transforms our understanding of the nature of the phenomenon. (Morgan, 1986, p. 340)

This means that, for Morgan, reality can be looked at through different eyes. For him, there is not one reality but many; reality can be constructed by looking at it differently. The ambition of *Images of Organization* is to support this type of multiple seeing by offering a set of 'vision tools' in the form of metaphoric images of organization. These images are not fixed or incommensurable like the paradigms from 1979 supposed to be; instead, they are continuously constructed and reconstructed to serve pluralistic aims: 'There can be no single theory or metaphor that gives an all-purpose point of view, and there can be no simple "correct theory" for structuring everything we do' (1997, p. xxi). Thus, as Morgan claims, images are relativistic tools (1986, p. 283). This implies that, in his view, everybody has the potential to transform his or her being and the world through individual and collective constructions of new images and worldviews. One question thus seems to be crucial to answer for social constructionists like Morgan: who or what selects the images that construct our world? For Morgan, the answer to this question seems to be: 'If one really wants to understand one's environment, one must begin by understanding oneself, for one's understanding of the environment is always a projection of oneself' (1997, p. 243). In other words, in Morgan's view, the self-reflecting individual constructs his or her own image of the world, which he describes as a strategy of 'personal empowerment' that enables the self to deal with the complexities of the contemporary world. Morgan defends his somewhat self-centred approach by expressing his vision to develop a theory that 'encourages people to see and grasp the liberating potentials of new individual and collective enactments' (1997, p. 274), while, for example, Foucauldian analytical frameworks of seeing the 'deep' structure of power relations would, according to Morgan, lead to a world with a 'resilient logic of its own' (*ibid.*). It is this fear of totalitarianism which makes him explicitly choose not to engage in an act of seeing underlying

power relations (1997, p. 275) and, instead, emphasize the practical realm of organizational creativity and '*imagin-i-zation*.'

The relativistic velocity of Morgan's metaphoric images is even increased by Alvesson (1993) who introduces the concept of 'metaphors of metaphors.' He argues that our usage of metaphors is usually informed by second-level metaphors that guide the way we see metaphors. He writes:

By drawing attention to second-level and possibly *other* levels of metaphors, we challenge the simplified assumption that the images of the research object which guide research are clear, distinct and well structured, and that the researcher completely masters his or her project through conscious choices of 'seeing as'...Ideas and frameworks are much more complex, ambiguous and inconsistent. (1993, p. 130)

Although Alvesson's intervention rightly suggests that one cannot simply consciously and rationally choose a worldview and reality, his main point seems to be that 'reality is complex, ambiguous and inconsistent' and thus inherently unknowable – there is always another metaphor behind our back. This seems to be another celebration of undecidability, which prevents us from making any decisions in relation to the pressing issues of contemporary social reality. One could, perhaps, speculatively suggest that it is this undecidability that lets Hugh Willmott 'hesitate and reflect a little before we do things' (in Boje *et al.*, 2001, p. 307), Mike Reed to be careful to not 'rush to judge' (*ibid.*, p. 310), and David Knights to not wanting to have 'too great of an ambition' (*ibid.*, p. 309). In a way this carefulness and undecidability is, of course, part of any critical inquiry into a phenomenon. As I argued in Chapter 4, this undecidability can even be seen to be structural on a societal level. However, while Morgan's and Alvesson's metaphoric approach seems to suggest that a decision about which image should represent reality can never be made because there is an inherent plurality and multiplicity of images available, my discussion in Chapter 4 clearly suggested that politics is about making a decision about how to fill the gap of undecidability. This is to say, rather than celebrating the pluralism and undecidability of reality, the philosophies discussed in Part II all suggest, in one way or another, that a decision, or what I also referred to as synthesis, is possible and even necessary. The necessity is derived from the fact that without such a decision, there would be no society or organization and thus no question of politics.

There have been a number of authors who have questioned the alleged plurality of the type of pluralism celebrated by the social constructionist discourses discussed above. For example, in response to the call for a dialogic commensurability between paradigms, Jackson and Carter (1991, 1993) have been arguing for paradigm incommensurability, because, in their view, it 'serves to protect actual plurality' (1991, p. 110). They main-

tain that the dialogic pluralism of social constructionists actually serves the purposes of orthodox functionalist approaches; that is, in their view, dialogic pluralism cannot traverse existing power relations and establish a fully transparent society. As Burrell says, 'dialogue is a weapon of the powerful' (1996, p. 650). What Jackson and Carter spell out is that dialogic pluralism seems to have become a tool for the powerful who are not interested in real plurality but the maintenance of existing power relations. In contrast to the proponents of a dialogic commensurability between paradigms, Jackson and Carter see paradigm incommensurability as a concept that renders the possibilities to protect actual plurality. It

allows the potential of divergent opinions to develop without them being automatically proscribed by the orthodoxy, and that the denial of incommensurability denies this plurality, thereby leaving the way open for such subordination. (1993, p. 721)

They go on to suggest that 'each paradigm can be seen as representing an ideology' (*ibid.*). For Jackson and Carter, reality is fundamentally characterized by competing, antagonistic ideologies that cannot be simply traversed by establishing dialogue. In their view, dialogue between these ideologies is not possible precisely because they are ideologies that form specific paradigmatic identities. This seems to fit well with Laclau and Mouffe's political theory discussed above, which maintains that the articulation of difference, for example a paradigmatic worldview, is always connected to wider processes of identity construction which renders these differences socially antagonistic. This is to say, paradigms are incommensurable because they are not simply different images that can be chosen by individuals to view the world, as Morgan (1986) would have it. Instead, they are ideological in nature and thus emplacements that cannot be easily traversed, for example by dialogue.

Social constructionist celebrations of pluralistic dialogue rely on a certain belief in what can be called a 'happy family' status of the world (Gabriel, 1999). That is, what seems to be at the heart of the call for dialogue and pluralism is the idea that it would be possible for all cultures (and paradigms) to develop a common and transparent language which would help to reconcile all existing differences. Yet, as Jackson and Carter and others have suggested, this pluralism is often one that serves specific interests of those in power. This is indirectly confirmed by Scherer when he says:

A pluralism of perspectives is not in itself problematic, either for researchers or for managers, as long as there is a comparison standard or procedure available to reasonably decide which perspective is preferable. But pluralism does present a problem when it ends in a situation of incommensurability. (1998, p. 151)

For Scherer, it seems, pluralism needs to be managed; one needs a procedure to reasonably decide which pluralistic image of reality is to be preferred. In this view, pluralism can never be an absolute plurality, which involves the existence of incommensurable worldviews; instead, it is always confined to an established space of management or rational decision making. Such pluralism is described by Žižek (1998) as ‘para-politics,’ which, for him, is a politics that works along the logic of the police. What this means is that, although the existence of political conflict might be acknowledged, even accepted, it is often reformulated as a competition among respected parties. This competition is within a clearly defined representative space, which is monitored by specific rules. This clearly resembles, for example, Hassard’s logic of multi-paradigms or Gergen’s relational politics. Both seem to accept conflict between images of reality, a conflict which can, however, be traversed by establishing dialogue between the oppositional parties. What never seems to be questioned by such a dialogic approach are the relations of power and knowledge that produce the logic of dialogue in the first place. As we have seen, dialogue is often controlled by specific standards and procedures; that is, the police are always already present: they set the rules of engagement; they make sure that certain principles are not jeopardized and fundamental values not questioned.

This is partly what Banerjee and Linstead (2001) point to in their critique of today’s globalization discourses, which, besides strong economic rhetoric, often contain aspects of multiculturalism, pluralism and diversity. They argue that contemporary global capitalism works partly on the register of diversity without fundamentally challenging the status quo of capital and the way society works today; they write:

In a global economy, diversity in terms of race, ethnicities and nationalities has to be ‘managed’ for the market economy to function smoothly. This reductionist view of diversity is the basis of the multiculturalist doctrine, corporate, state-sponsored or otherwise. Multiculturalism aims at preserving different cultures without interfering with the ‘smooth functioning of society.’ (2001, p. 702)

What Banerjee and Linstead highlight here is that diversity and pluralism have become normal management techniques that, on one hand, accept difference, but, on the other, never seem to question the fundamental functioning of society. Hardt and Negri, too, argue that Empire is dependent on the proper management of diversity (2000, p. 152). They show that Empire is a hegemonic force precisely because it is able to include diverse forms of gender, race and culture. However, as I argued in Chapter 4 and 5, this diversity – this assemblage of diverse forces of deterritorialization – is always already reterritorialized to serve particular hegemonic aims of global, managerial organization. Multiculturalism, or

pluralism, thus becomes yet another management technique to further the reach of capital into the very heart of the ontological production of societies and cultures (see also Hoobler, 2005). Yet, just like the process philosophers discussed above, social constructionists rarely mention capital and other structural forces of society precisely because, in their view, reality is constructed through pluralistic dialogue within local communities.

Discourse and the possibility of post-dualistic transparency

What I suggested in the last section is that social constructionists often emphasize the pluralistic nature of reality. Pluralism maintains that reality is not constructed in one, centred position but in a multiplicity of local places, enacted by a diversity of individuals, groups, communities and organizations. Within such a view, politics is the attempt to reconcile possible differences and conflicts between communities. It is important to realize that, for the social constructionists discussed above, politics is always happening at the local level. That is, if there is conflict occurring between communities of practice, it is a conflict which can be resolved by dialogue, 'linguaging' and conflict management techniques. What should have become clear in Chapter 4, as well as in my discussion above, is that such a belief in a certain transparent harmony of society is illusory. As I have argued, conflict is always connected to wider social and historical identity constructions, which traverse local boundaries of time and space. In this sense, it cannot simply be solved by establishing dialogue between oppositional parties. Resolving social conflict, that is, bringing about a final synthesis, is impossible. As I suggested in Chapters 3 and 4, Benjamin's concept of 'non-synthesis' and Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of the concept of impossibility highlight the fact that social organization can never be forged into a final place; there will always be a certain gap and openness. This does not imply, however, that social organization is not possible. What the philosophies explored in Part II seem to suggest is that the political event points to a certain synthesis which is made possible, a synthesis which politically emplaces the social itself and thus transgresses the level of the local. Yet, as I suggested in the previous sections, many social constructionists and process philosophers are ill-equipped to connect politics to the wider spheres of social organization.

The missing link to the societal level, which can be noted in many social constructionist approaches to understanding reality, has been pointed out by a number of scholars. Hardy and Phillips, for example, have argued in their study of the Canadian refugee system that refugees are not 'produced solely by the discourse that takes place within the refugee system; they are also produced by much broader discourses that occur at a societal level, and that act as a resource and a constraint for actors within the field' (1999,

p. 2). Their point is that identities and realities are not only constructed within local communities of practice, such as refugee systems, but within wider discursive formations of society. For Hardy and Phillips, subjects do not construct their own world by way of 'linguaging,' dialogue and consensus-building, as many social constructionists discussed above would have it; instead, through a series of societal discourses the world ontologically produces different subject positions (see also Hardy *et al.*, 2000). The difference between 'linguaging,' which is often emphasized by social constructionists, and discourse is important here. While 'linguaging' points to the construction of reality through dialogue and consensus-building in local communities, discourse highlights the point that the language which is deployed by individuals and groups is itself a product of historical discursive formations.

As I mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 4, this understanding of discourse is largely based on Foucault's work, which has had a great influence on many organization theorists in the past two decades (Burrell, 1988; Knights, 2003; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Kondo, 1990; O'Doherty and Willmott, 2001; Townley, 1994). Foucault's social constructionism is guided by the notion that reality and thus any truth claims are historically produced. This historical production brings about discursive formations, or apparatuses, that organize relations of power and knowledge in such a way that they operate both at the subjective and objective level of reality. This is to say, on one hand, an apparatus is historically produced by inter-subjective relations, but on the other, as much as it is a product of social relations it also reproduces them as an objective force. This goes beyond the social constructionist view that mainly seems to see reality as something that is constructed by active, conscious and intentional subjects who engage with each other through dialogue. In contrast, Foucault's (1970, 1991) subject is produced by discursive regimes which are emplaced in and enacted by modern institutions such as prisons, hospitals and refugee asylums. That is, in Foucault's view, the subject is a product of an apparatus; it is folded out of the regime of relations of power and knowledge, as Deleuze would have it in his book *Foucault* (1988). As I discussed in the previous chapters, this coincides with Benjamin's conception of the subject; for him, the *flâneur* and the prostitute, for example, are subjects that emerge out of the particular apparatus of 19th century Paris.

Within the realms of organization theory Foucault's work has been read in many different, often competing, ways. While there is not enough space here to engage in detail with these competing readings of Foucault – for a close analysis one can consult, for example, Jones (2003b) – it has been noted that the concept of discourse is often not connected to wider societal relations of power and knowledge. This is to say that, despite Foucault's

insistence on discourse being a social formation, which transgresses the objective and subjective, it sometimes is seen to be merely the same as the abovementioned notion of 'linguaging,' which suggests that reality is constructed within local communities of practice. Reed, for example, maintains that Foucauldians often 'retreat into a form of micro-contextual reductionism in which institutional power and control are always derived from below, rather than from the social structural mechanisms and locations that generate such practices and through which such structures are elaborated and/or transformed' (1997, p. 28). Similarly, Thompson and Smith (2001; see also Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) suggest that Foucauldians tend to overemphasize the ongoing subjective processes of local identity constructions rather than seeing social categories that objectively produce subjects as labour and employees. They particularly refer to Knights and Willmott (1989, see also Knights, 1992, 2001) who have put forward the notion of identity work, highlighting the multiple, micro-political processes of identity construction (see also my discussion in Chapter 7). On one hand, such critiques of Foucauldians seem somewhat over-generalized, especially if one considers that some Foucauldian organization theorists have specifically tried to show how dominant capitalist discursive regimes produce management techniques (Townley's, 1994, study of Human Resource Management), other critiques seriously try to use Foucault's work to extend, for example, Marxist theories of work and subjectivity (Willmott, 1990, 1994, 1997; Marsden, 1993), and further critiques highlight that 'we need to relate our microstudies to the big picture, to take on board social and political issues' (Hardy, 2002, p. 17). This is to say, not all Foucauldians merely fetishize the local, as some critics would have it. On the other hand, however, the critiques produced by Reed, labour process theorists and others are useful, because they point to a certain tendency of some Foucauldians to reproduce the restrictions of the process-view and social constructionists, that were discussed above. Let me explain this by briefly looking at an example.

David Knights (1992, 1997, 2001) has consistently argued for a permanent deconstruction of, what he calls, dualistic relationships. For him (1992, p. 520), deconstruction is about the permanent questioning of reality and subverting the institutional apparatuses that govern modern lives. In his view, the main contribution of Foucault's and Derrida's philosophies has been to show that identities and truth claims are always fallible, contingent and thus local (1997, p. 2). According to Knights, dualisms, such as individual/society, female/male, micro/macro, mind/body and subjective/objective, need to be deconstructed because they are almost always maintained by desires for secure identities and orderly structures (*ibid.*). To call these identities and structures into question and render them fragmentary, provisional and uncertain (1997, p. 12) is, in his view, the task of, what he and others call, a postmodern organization theory.

This reminds us of the process-view of organization whose main contribution is to show that organized reality is always already a contingent process.

While I have already stressed the political and philosophical importance of such a resistance against established positions, or dualisms, I am concerned that such a depositioning only describes one aspect of the deconstructive movement. As I discussed in Chapter 4, deconstruction can be seen as a dialectical, bifurcated movement between the possible and the impossible. The first movement shows the limits of any fixed reality and exposes the relations of power and knowledge that produce and maintain any organized positions – such as the dualisms Knights is concerned about. One could say that this is what Knights' work has done very effectively; his deconstructive approach seeks to permanently unsettle established dualisms, render any structures contingent and show how truths, such as identities, are locally produced (1997, p. 7). However, according to my discussion of the deconstructionist philosophies of Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe, this cannot be the end of the matter. While deconstruction renders reality impossible or undecidable, it also shows how a decision is possible and necessary in order to structure and organize society. Equally, for Benjamin as well as Adorno, the movement of destruction is not only negative; its aim is also to construct new places. This is the political event that I attempted to conceptualize in Part II. It is guided by the realization that social organization is not simply the permanent play of local differences, but the political ordering and emplacing of these differences. The concept of hegemony points to the idea that social organization, while fundamentally impossible and undecidable, is historically structured through particular discursive formations that endure over time and space; social organization is thus possible.

Knights' position seems to be that he wants to continuously deconstruct structures and identities in order to expose their precariousness. That is, as the process philosophers discussed above, Knights seems to be mainly concerned with showing the contingency and process character of any structures. His 'post-dualistic' approach, as Parker (1999, p. 34) calls it, aims to be more reflexive about the way truths and identities are constructed. This post-dualistic reflexivity claims to take into account local concerns and save these localities from the imposition of external discourses; as Knights writes:

It may well be impossible to reconcile conflicting interpretations that localized situations throw up by methods entirely internal to those narratives, but it should not entail *imposing* an external discourse on those narratives. By definition, discourse is a matter of debate and dialogue not imposition. (1997, p. 6, emphasis in original)

With Knights, then, discourse assumes the character of something that can be chosen; it can be imposed or translated into something meaningful for local situations by way of debate and dialogue. Here we seem to be in the realm of 'linguaging' again. Knights' post-dualistic politics assumes that dualistic structures can be resolved at the local level by being dialogic, reflexive and deconstructive. Following Parker (1999, p. 37ff), one could respond to Knights by asking: What is the ground of this dialogue and reflexivity? Is this ground not always dependent on certain political positions, and is not the question of politics precisely one about the disagreement with certain (dualistic) positions and structures rather than their post-dualistic reconciliation? Knights' post-dualism seems to put forward a politics that is mainly oriented towards continuously depositioning established positions. As I argued above, when I critiqued the process-view of organization, one needs to acknowledge that such a view is politically important as it renders social reality impossible; that is, it shows that the current 'goings-on' of social organization are not eternal and ultimate. However, the concern is that such a view loses sight of the fact that social organization only becomes possible by way of politically ordering and structuring reality, which ultimately also involves certain dualisms and antagonisms. It seems to me that Knights' deconstructive movements are ill-equipped to think the political event as something that makes such social structures and struggles possible.

To evoke Žižek's (1997b, 1998) terminology, one could, perhaps, refer to Knights' post-dualism as 'post-politics.' For Žižek, 'post-politics' is the politics which aims to reconcile the differences between established ideological positions, such as those between left and right. For example, he names New Labour's 'Third Way,' which, in his view, attempts to go beyond established political dualisms and, instead, face social problems practically. This pragmatism is supposed to develop the middle ground and have an impact on people's actual lives. For Žižek, the belief in the 'post-political' middle ground has depoliticizing effects because it is based on the idea that ideological differences and conflicts can be resolved by way of pragmatic actions, such as establishing dialogue between conflicting parties. This reminds us of Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis, briefly discussed in Chapter 1, which states that since the fall of the communist project the world is no longer held hostage by competing ideologies but, instead, is characterized by the worldwide success of liberal-democratic politics and capitalism. For Žižek (1997a, 1998), this belief in the possibility of a post-ideological, liberal society is itself an ideology that is based on the assumption that social relations can be made transparent, that is, social organization can be fully represented and thus finalized. I am not suggesting here that Knights' post-dualism is as naïve as suggesting that social organization and history can be finalized by integrating all dualisms into a coherent whole. However, there is a tendency in Knights' work to believe

in the possibility that a certain transparency of social relations can be achieved, as he hopes, by continuously deconstructing dualisms and dialogically and practically translating reality onto local grounds.

In Žižek's view (1997a, p. 101ff), such a belief in the possibility of a transparency of social relations is a significant feature of today's 'post-ideological-end-of-history' discourse. In my view, however, this belief in transparency is not an invention of our so called postmodern world, as Žižek seems to suggest. As I mentioned in the Preface, Benjamin's Parisian phantasmagoria, the arcade, the world of the strolling *flâneur*, was made out of glass; for Benjamin, the arcade is a world of transparency (1999a, p. 546). As Missac (1995) suggests, the arcade can be seen as the predecessor of the atrium which features in many company headquarters and hotels today. As today's glass architecture, the glass roof of the arcade enlightens dark interiors in order to transgress the boundary or dualism between inside and outside, house and street. In Benjamin's view, this transparency of the arcade is an essential feature of the way the commodity world is able to intoxicate the *flâneur* and give the phantasmagoric illusion of being the world. The glass architecture of the arcade opened up the dark houses of traditional Paris; traditional architecture was deterritorialized in order to make room for the commodity rush and strolling *flâneurs*, the subjects of early modernity. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest, capital is a machine that continuously deterritorializes. Part of what I have attempted to suggest in this chapter is that today's depositing project of organization, which is characterized by post-dualism, processualism and pluralism, can be seen, in a way, as the continuation of this deterritorialization process, a process from which the 'goings-on' of capital cannot be disconnected. Depositioning can be seen as the call for transparency. As Benjamin showed in the *Arcades Project*, this transparency can be seen at the heart of the 'goings-on' of capital, which always already reterritorializes this transparency for the purposes of commodity production.

Impossibilities of depositioning: The event of resistance

In this chapter I have discussed a range of depositioning discourses within the realms of organization theory. Generally one could suggest that what these discourses have in common is a suspicion of positions *per se*; that is, their main contribution is to put established positions of truth into question and to show that all positions are contingent arrangements. Following Derrida, one could characterize depositioning as a movement that claims that 'every position is of itself confounded' (1987, p. 95, emphasis removed). Derrida calls this movement *différance*, which could be seen as a questioning, or deconstructing, of the present positioning of what is taken for granted as the full presence of reality:

Deconstruction means, among other things, the questioning of what synthesis is, what thesis is, what a position is, what composition is, not only in terms of rhetoric, but what position is, what positing means. Deconstruction questions the thesis, the theme, the positionality of everything. (1990, p. 8)

Différance thus points to a certain undecidability towards the presence of objects of reality, such as position or organization. *Différance* questions the basic presence of any position and organization; it puts into doubt the apparent synthesis of the reality of organization that seems so firmly positioned and emplaced in modernity. The depositioning project is generally based on such an understanding of *différance* and must be seen, as I have pointed out, as an important resistance against those positions that always already emplace and restrict organization.

As every position is generally seen as being contingent, the depositioning discourses discussed above emphasize the local and processual nature of reality construction. That is, the point of depositioning organization is to see the fallibility of every organized position. For Cooper, for example, 'concepts such as *différance*, undecidability and supplement "decompose" or "deconstruct" the ordered and organized character of social systems to reveal their essentially precarious foundation which founders on the process of differentiation' (1990, p. 181). Cooper calls this 'precarious foundation' disorganization, which, for him, always already resists order and organization (1990, p. 182). This is what in Chapter 4 I have discussed as the Lacanian Real, that which cannot be organized or symbolized. For Laclau and Mouffe as well as Žižek, organized reality can never be complete; there will always be an aspect of the Real that subverts the fullness and the complete transparency of reality. This is why social organization is impossible; it can never be fully accomplished; it is a never ending task. Laclau refers to this as the 'structural undecidability' of society, which can be related to Benjamin's concept of 'non-synthesis.' This implies that social organization can never be forged into a final synthesis. Cooper calls this the 'zero degree of organization' (1990, p. 182), which, for him, is the 'finite, limited nature of the signified which is seen as a lack that must be filled in' (1990, p. 183). This, then, I would describe as the main contribution of the depositioning project: to show the precarious nature of any organization and the impossibility of its finality. When Knights, for example, calls for a post-dualistic approach he aims to call established positions or dualisms of organized reality into question. When social constructionists emphasize the local and plural nature of reality their point is to show that there is more than one way of organizing the world; there is a multiplicity of possible worlds. The politics of the depositioning project is to show that order always already means disorder and that order always implies, as R. Munro puts it, 'the

reversibility of any order.' In short, 'not everything that is taken as normal remains so' (2001, p. 397).

My concern has been, however, to argue that, despite the precariousness of any order and the processual nature of organization, structure is always being found (R. Munro, 2002). That is, social organization is not simply a never-ending process that is characterized by multiple, local realities; instead, there are, as Meier Sørensen puts it, 'machines that *do* define, *do* cut off, *do* signify' (2001, p. 371, emphasis in original) – not only in local situations but in the wider spheres of the social as such. This is to say, there are structural forces of power and knowledge that do shape society. In Part II I discussed a range of philosophies that conceptualize politics as something that not only continuously depositions reality and shows the precariousness of any order, but indeed shapes reality and gives social organization an order. In Chapter 5 I discussed the powerful hegemonic politics of management and capital; a hegemony that not only works at a local level but, in fact, at a global one. In this chapter I have expressed my doubts whether the depositioning project's emphasis of the local, pluralism, dialogue and transparency are effective resistances against this hegemony, which always already seems to work along the registers of these resistances. To be more specific, part of what I have tried to argue in this chapter is that capital is always already plural and transparent; capital is a deterritorialization machine that produces the local. As we have seen in Chapter 5, capital and management are not simply local phenomena; instead, they have universal ambitions. As Cooper rightly points out: 'social power (authority, law, organization) is the forcible transformation of undecidability into decidability' (1990, p. 188); 'organization is the appropriation of order out of disorder' (1990, p. 193). Capital and management can be seen as this social power that always already decides for us, how society is to be organized. This decision can never be all-encompassing; that is, there are antagonisms and resistances that are implied by this decision. My critique of the depositioning project has been that these antagonisms are not merely conflicts that can be resolved by way of a dialogic 'linguaging' within local communities. Instead, a hegemonic decision involves social antagonisms, which imply the production of identities that endure over boundaries of time and space. I have suggested that a resistance that simply celebrates local constructions of identity, undecidability and disorganization will find it hard to engender those political struggles that seek to challenge hegemonic relations as such. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the political event of organization is to enable a decision about a different social order, an order that produces different localities, subjectivities and organizations.

In sum, then, one could argue that the depositioning project has been important because it has exposed the undecidability of organization. What has been missing, however, is the will to expose the ground on which a

decision is made possible, a decision that can reposition social organization. As one critic of Cooper's work, particularly referring to his essay 'Assemblage Notes,' has put it:

[W]hat is lacking is a positive affirmation, a will to power, indeed a will to another life, another people. The productivity of 'Assemblage Notes,' that is, its capability to connect to extratextualities and disconnect unproductive passions..., is to a very large extent thwarted by its endless deconstructions: rather than building a war machine, an immanent 'counter-Fordism' perhaps, the threat of a paralysing flow of debris is alarmingly real. The deconstructions themselves are indeed vivid, surprising and thoroughly encyclopaedic and scholared in the most positive of senses, but the whole endeavour avoids the affirmative and hence the political project of countering, pointing towards new ways of struggle. (Meier Sørensen, 2001, p. 372–373)

If this critique of Cooper can, perhaps, serve as a general critique of the depositioning project, one could suggest that what has been missing is the 'will to another life.' Relating back to my discussion in Part II, when I conceptualized the political event, one could say that the depositioning discourses have been very effective in negating established positions and questioning their uniformity. However, what often seems to be missing is an affirmation of this negation, a political project of pointing towards the production of new subjectivities and a new social. In Chapter 4 I suggested that the political event is not simply an exposition of the undecidability of reality. Instead, the deconstructive movement renders possible and necessary a decision concerning how the social is to be politically positioned or, indeed, repositioned. The task of the following chapter is to discuss the possibilities of such a project of repositioning.

7

Repositioning Organization: Impossibilities of 'The Movement'

In the previous two chapters I engaged in some detail with a range of organization theory literatures. I discussed two main discourses: the positioning and the depositioning projects of organization. While the politics of positioning mainly serves the established hegemony of capital and management knowledge, the depositioning project resists positioning discourses by emphasizing the precariousness, plurality and locality of processes of organizing. On one hand, these resistances have been theoretically and politically important because they point to the contingent and undecidable nature of all positions of organization. On the other hand, however, these depositioning discourses can be seen to have certain depoliticizing effects, because they seem ill-prepared to effectively engage with those positioning discourses, such as capital, that always already enplace and 'corner' social organization.

A project of repositioning aims to go beyond the restrictions of the depositioning discourses. If the depositioning project is primarily about showing the undecidability of all organized phenomena, the repositioning project is based on an understanding that the notion of undecidability, as I discussed it in Chapter 4, enables and even makes necessary political decisions about how to organize and position social organization. As I outlined in Chapters 1 and 4, the repositioning project is based on a Gramscian conception of social organization as hegemonic impossibility, which means that organization is produced as well as challenged in the wider spheres of the economy, state and civil society. It is precisely the link between these three spheres which describes the terrain of organizational politics and hence the possibility for repositioning organization theory.

In this chapter I will therefore engage with a range of organizational discourses in the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. Namely, I will consider the contributions made by labour process theory (economy), liberalist organization theory (state) and social movement theory (civil society). The analyses by the writers in these fields of enquiry vary considerably – theoretically and politically – but what they share is a deep suspi-

cion of the depoliticizing nature of many depositioning discourses and a commitment to repoliticize and hence reposition organization theory. As will become clear, however, there are also theoretical and political limitations and contradictions embedded within these repositioning discourses. I will dialectically critique these repositioning discourses by way of engaging with the anti-capitalist discourse, which explicitly challenges today's hegemonic positioning of society and seeks to explore alternative, counter-hegemonic, that is repositioned, regimes of social organization. I will argue that such counter-hegemony can only be articulated if all three spheres – economy, state and civil society – are brought together into a political and strategic framework that enables us to analyze social organization and the type of resistance possible today.

Labour process politics

Labour process theorists have been among the most explicit defenders of the need for a political critique of society and the way it has been shaped by dominant forces of capital. I am not attempting here to put forward a major commentary on the historical development of labour process theory and its contemporary debate. This would be quite an impossible task in the space available since this debate is multifaceted, and, as Grugulis and Knights note (2001, p. 3), there are, indeed, multiple labour process perspectives.⁴⁵ However, what I *do* attempt in this section is to discuss the politics of two camps of labour process theorists. The first camp defends the importance of the labour process and the workplace for the reproduction of capital; a politico-economic critique of capital therefore has to be concentrated on the analysis of the 'goings-on' of the capitalist workplace and the labour process. The second camp, the so called Foucauldians, would like to expand the notion of production beyond the workplace and show how identities are shaped in a variety of locations in society. Although I have already discussed some general themes of Foucauldian organization theory in the previous chapter, I would now like to revisit these in connection with the particularities of the labour process debate.

Firstly, what is the labour process? We find a very detailed analysis of the capitalist workplace and its processes of production in Marx's *Capital*, particularly Volume One (1976). Without going into a detailed discussion of Marx, one could generally say that his conception of the labour process shows how capital produces profit by employing workers who have to sell their labour power as a commodity in order to reproduce themselves. According to Marx, the capitalist is able to extract surplus value, that is, profit, from labour power by employing labour longer than necessary to reproduce the various inputs of the production process. As the capitalist owns the means of production and labour only owns its labour power, labour has no choice but to sell itself to the owners of the production

process. For Marx, this basic ordering of workplace relations, which is not a local organizational principle but something that is structurally inherent to capitalism, brings about two main antagonistic classes, labour and capital. Traditional labour process theory (Braverman, 1974; Cohen, 1987) privileges the labour process in the capitalist workplace as the prime articulation of the antagonisms between capital and labour. For them, labour is the sole producer of value for capital. The exploitative nature of the class relationship between labour and capital, and hence their antagonism, is expressed by the fact that capital appropriates the surplus value that is produced by labour. Traditional labour process theorists see this exploitative nature of capitalist workplace relations as the fundamental organization process of the wider politico-economic spheres of society.

As Jaros (2005) notes, the 1990s and 2000s have seen many labour process theorists focus on the capital-labour dynamics in a variety of different workplaces (Smith, Knights and Willmott, 1991; Jermier, Knights and Nord, 1994). While there are significant differences in the theoretical and empirical analyses of these workplace dynamics and their political implications for a critique of capitalist society,⁴⁶ it is nevertheless obvious that this body of literature is primarily focused on the 'goings-on' of the workplace. This is in line with Thompson's (1990) first point of his framework for a 'core labour process theory,' which maintains that the study of the labour process produces privileged insights for a theoretical and political challenge of the capitalist system.⁴⁷ It is argued that it is precisely the workplace where management, as an extension of capital, seeks to produce surplus value by exploiting labour power. Thompson and Smith, for example, write that 'management must, under competitive, standardizing, and differentiating conditions, seek to release and realize productive labor from living labor power' (2001, p. 61). For them, it is management's daily struggle to make the labour process more effective and efficient. According to Thompson and Smith (2001, p. 62) and other labour process theorists (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2001; and Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), a critical understanding of this daily struggle and its wider socio-economic as well as political consequences leads through the analysis of the workplace because it is the original place where the antagonistic classes, labour and capital, are produced and reproduced.

However, it would be a gross misrepresentation to argue that this labour process camp is only concerned with the workplace. As Thompson and Newsome (2004: 7) make clear, one of the main aims of labour process theory has always been to connect the workplace to broader politico-economic and social issues. Similarly, Thompson maintains that

[w]e need to pursue the connections between the various territories – the labour process, employment relations, firm governance structures, capital and product markets – through which restructuring takes place.

This is inherently complex because the balance between the circuits of capital is affected by conditions of competitiveness in different sectors, political struggle between different ownership and managerial interests, and institutional contexts of a regional or national character. (2003, p. 372)

What Thompson refers to as 'disconnected capitalism' is precisely the attempt to understand contemporary social relations of production as something that not only goes on in the workplace but indeed something that is multiple and connected to a variety of different struggles. Having said that, however, what is also clear in Thompson's above passage is that he sees these struggles to be primarily connected to the realm of the economic and the materialities of the capitalist workplace. As he says: 'Over the past decade there has been increasing emphasis on discourse and deconstruction rather than political economy and the material conditions of production' (2003, p. 372). In other words, while Thompson clearly sees the distributed character of contemporary capitalist production, he is still committed to his (1990) 'core' labour process theory framework that privileges the economic realm of the labour process as the prime site of capitalist production.

I find Thompson's project of pointing to the need of reconnecting to the material conditions of production and political economy very valuable. His aim is precisely to go beyond the limitations of the deposing discourses in order to reassemble the various images that we have of contemporary capitalism and paint a new, clearer picture that would enable us to radically critique the political economy of capitalist social organization (Thompson, 2003, p. 373). This is an admirable task. It goes beyond many of the apolitical discourses that have come out of organization theory in the past decade. My point of critique, however, is similar to Jaros (2005) who maintains that labour is only *one* input generating capitalist surplus value, and hence the material workplace can only be seen as *one* site for the production and reproduction of capital. What is thus important is to show how the economic realm of the workplace is connected to wider political processes in the state and civil society. The hegemony of capitalist relations is not only produced on the assembly lines of the car industry or indeed the call centre industry. It is also produced in the spheres of the state and civil society at large.

It is this attempt to go beyond the restricted politics of the workplace that I see at the heart of Jacques' (2000) and Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2004) discourses of a 'knowledge theory of value' and 'immaterial labour'.⁴⁸ Although Thompson (forthcoming) rightly points to many contradictions within these discourses, I think what is valuable is their emphasis of the need to go beyond the essentialism of workplace politics and their insistence that capitalist subjectivity is produced in a variety of different places.

This is why I discussed in Chapter 5 the production processes of the subjectivity of the *flâneur*, the 19th century bourgeois stroller who does not work but *consumes* images of commodities and mass society. What the particular subjectivity of the *flâneur* shows is that one can take part in the reproduction of capital without being embedded in the specificity of the labour process of the workplace. One could say that the *flâneur's* consumption is a different type of production; yet, it is an essential aspect of the 'goings-on' of capital's reproduction machinery. This interdependence of consumption and production is, in fact, what Marx points to, particularly in the second volume of *Capital* (1992; see also Marx and Engels, 1970). One of the points I tried to make in Chapter 5 is that the 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism produce a hegemonic emplacement of social relations, which must be understood as a libidinal economy of desires that intoxicates people, to use a Benjaminian expression. In Marx's (1976) view, the commodity is a sensuous thing with specific desires to look beautiful – we remember Marx's discussion of the 'grotesque table.' This aesthetic beauty of the commodity hopes to attract buyers and consumers. Marx's point is that this consumption aspect is an integral part of the production of an ideological structuring of society, which includes the production of a range of different subjectivities such as those of the *flâneur*, prostitute or labourer.

What is important to realize is that this ideological structuring of the social does not have a single centre. This is the point I discussed in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of hegemony, which highlights the impossibility of fixing social organization in a single place. In their view, social organization is continuously embattled and contested not only in the workplace but in a multiplicity of places. This is also one of the quintessential points of Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*, a concept that refers to today's globally integrated capitalism. For them, *Empire*

is a decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. *Empire* manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. xii)

In Hardt and Negri's view, *Empire* is a place that is depositioned or deterritorialized, a term they adopt from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). It is a 'non-place' which is characterized by a multiplicity of forces that cannot be represented in a single place. For them, this does not mean, however, that there are no positions or territories within *Empire*. They argue that the depositioning powers of *Empire* are both complete and particular. This is to say that the depositioning works along specific lines; there are specific folds that are created by forces of *Empire*. For them, one of the most significant positions is capital, which is *Empire's* reterritorializing force. Capital aims

to reposition all deposed fragments along its particular value form. Yet, in Hardt and Negri's view, this reterritorialization does not produce an Orwellian super-state where everything and everybody is subsumed into one totality. Instead, Empire is a dynamic system of 'radical contingency and precariousness' (2000, p. 60–61), a language which reminds us of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conceptualization of hegemony. Similarly to Laclau and Mouffe, Hardt and Negri maintain that this hegemonic regime, or Empire, should, in the first instance, be celebrated for its precarious dynamism: it produces breaks with traditional organizational apparatuses, which opens up possibilities for the production of new figures of resistance. This is what I showed in Chapter 6: the deposing project in organization theory is characterized by a plethora of micro-political resistances that produce difference and plurality in various local shapes and forms.

Within the realms of the labour process debate, as well as organization theory at large, one of the most valuable contributions has been the Foucauldian realization that struggle and resistance not only work along the lines of class contradictions but indeed various other lines of identity construction. As I discussed in Chapter 6, a Foucauldian understanding seems to highlight that resistance can appear everywhere where power is producing specific subjectivities – not just in the workplace but indeed in various other places of everyday life. As Fleming points out,

this Foucauldian sensibility seems to have shifted our attention away from class politics to those subtle micro-practices that do not necessarily aim for 'revolution' but nevertheless allow subordinates to construct counter-spheres within forms of domination, change the trajectory of controls and quietly challenge power relations without necessarily leaving them. (2002, p. 194)

Two of the labour process theorists who were among the first to introduce a 'Foucauldian sensibility' to the debate are Knights and Willmott (1989; see also Knights, 1997, 2001, and Willmott, 1990, 1994, 1997). In their view, power cannot be 'reduced to a property of persons, a dominant class, a sovereign or the state. Rather, it is dispersed throughout the social relations of a population in a diverse set of mechanisms and a multiplicity of directions' (1989, p. 553). Their concern is to show that social reality is the constitutive product of a plurality of disciplinary techniques of power and knowledge (1989, p. 549) rather than simply determined by the economic laws of capital. Following Foucault, they argue that 'forms of power are exercised through *subjecting individuals to their own identity* or subjectivity, and are not therefore mechanisms directly derived from the forces of production, class struggle or ideological structures' (1989, p. 553, emphasis added). What is thus important for Knights and Willmott is the emphasis of individual subjectivities and the way people become tied to themselves

by self-discipline and self-knowledge (1989, p. 550). They coin the term 'identity fetishism' to point to the process of self-identification 'solidifying meaning through the objectification of self in fetishized identities' (1989, p. 555). These identities, they argue, often involve questionable senses of security and belonging whose inconsistencies and contradictions they call on labour process theorists to expose (*ibid.*). In summary, one could argue that Knights and Willmott are interested in broadening the question of subjectivity beyond the restricted concerns of the economic relationship of the workplace by showing that, rather than solely being forged into labour, subjects are engaged in multiple identity fetishisms that are produced by a range of decentred disciplinary power and knowledge forces.

For some labour process theorists, such understandings are very suspect for a range of reasons. Ackroyd and Thompson, for example, maintain that Knights and Willmott and other so called Foucauldians reduce the antagonism between capital and labour to a 'local site of struggle,' 'and labour is not regarded as a distinctive or significant agency' (1999, p. 158) that can resist the domination and exploitation by capital. The specific character of capitalist employment relations in the workplace, they argue, is therefore lost (*ibid.*). Furthermore, they critique the focus of some Foucauldians on individual identities rather than collectivities. This is to say, Ackroyd and Thompson (see also Thompson and Smith, 2001; and Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995) are concerned that the Foucauldian emphasis on individual identity processes tends to lose sight of the way labour and employees are produced as collectivities or classes within objective capitalist categories. In sum, they say that their 'objection is, precisely, that when Foucauldian theory is applied to the workplace, it treats it as just another terrain of the individual's struggle for identity' (1999, p. 164). According to Ackroyd and Thompson, this is inadequate because 'there are conditions and struggles specific to the labour process and the employment relationship' (*ibid.*). Hence, the labour process in the workplace needs to be understood as a 'core' aspect of labour process theory (Thompson, 1990).

Coming back to Hardt and Negri's (2000) concept of Empire, one could respond to Ackroyd and Thompson by highlighting the distributed character of capital. As I already mentioned above, for Hardt and Negri, global capital is a 'non-place' that must be understood as network that is linked by a multiplicity of flows. They call these flows communication: 'Communication not only expresses but also organizes the movement of globalization. It organizes the movement by multiplying and structuring interconnections through networks' (2000, p. 32). For them, communication is the complete 'dissolution of the relationship between order and space;' it is a 'non-place,' it is 'the form of capitalist production in which capital has succeeded in submitting society entirely and globally to its regime, suppressing all alternative paths' (2000, p. 347). In Hardt and Negri's view, communication works across classes, cultures and other territories.

One could say that communication is that which turns the social into, what Marx calls, 'total social capital' (1976).⁴⁹ Hardt and Negri's point, then, is that global capital works along multiple lines of production that cannot all be represented by the labour process in the workplace. For them, the concept of production must be seen more widely than the traditional industrialist meaning, which still seems to be central to some labour process theorists. The concept of communication introduces the idea that capital not only reproduces itself in the workplace, but also across multiple networks, which, as Hardt and Negri argue, have become increasingly global. This seems to support Knights and Willmott's view that identities are produced along multiple lines of production. As I discussed earlier, their Foucauldian framework highlights the fact that people are forged into multiple forms of 'identity fetishism;' that is, their subjectivities are produced by a plurality of disciplinary techniques of power and knowledge.

This notion of a plurality of productions and discourses is at the heart of the concept of hegemony. As I discussed in Chapter 4, hegemony highlights the plurality of discursive fields and the impossibility of fixing social discourses into a final place of representation. However, the concept also emphasizes the possibility and even necessity of emplacing the social into particular social structures. Chapter 5 highlighted the fact that there are hegemonic positions, such as capital, which always already emplace the social in specific ways – in particular I discussed the 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism and showed how it produces subjects such as the *flâneur*. Now, within the conceptual framework of Knights and Willmott, the *flâneur's* subjectivity would be, presumably, a particular or local form of 'identity fetishism.' However, what I was concerned to show in Chapter 5 is that the subjectivity of the *flâneur* must be seen within the wider hegemonic 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism. This is to say, while the notion of 'identity fetishism' maintains that there are multiple ways of how identities can be produced, and while this is a politically important aspect, my concern is that it over-emphasizes individual aspects of identity construction and loses sight of the fact that forces of capital and the 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism always already emplace the social in specific ways.

This is to say that, while the Foucauldian depositioning of the site of identity production has been a valuable contribution, it seems to me that Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) and others *do* have a point when they say that some Foucauldians tend to over-emphasize individual identities and neglect certain forces of capitalist production, namely those that always already produce subjectivities and therefore emplace the social along specific lines of domination. Having said that, in this section I have also critiqued Ackroyd and Thompson and other labour process theorists for restricting their analysis and politics to the workplace. What one can thus find in labour process theory are two camps that seem to engender the two aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of the concept of hegemony:

while one camp emphasizes the political plurality of different identity productions, the other restricts its view of the political to a particular place, the workplace. Perhaps this corresponds to Laclau and Mouffe's 'logic of difference' and 'logic of equivalence' respectively. Their point is that both of these logics are inherent to the concept of hegemony; that is, one has to understand a hegemonic positioning of society as being simultaneously open and closed. What I have attempted to show is precisely this: in order to understand the hegemony of capital one can see capital as both an open regime, which emphasizes plurality and difference, and a closed one, which does, despite its plurality, organize, emplace and 'corner' the social in specific ways.

Liberalist politics in praise of bureaucracy

One of the concepts I discussed in the above section is Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*, which, for them, points to, what they call, today's 'decentred apparatus' of global capital. In their view (2000, p. xii), *Empire* is an open, communication-driven regime which continuously deterritorializes hierarchies, stable identities and other structures in order to expand its frontiers. Hardt and Negri argue that this expansion is partly driven by theories and practices of business organization and management, which, in their view, are at the forefront of the mobilization and flexibilization of traditional bureaucratic structures:

The corporations seek to include difference within their realm and thus aim to maximize creativity, free play, and diversity in the corporate workplace. People of all different races, sexes, and sexual orientations should potentially be included in the corporation; the daily routine of the workplace should be rejuvenated with unexpected changes and an atmosphere of fun. Break down the old boundaries and let one hundred flowers bloom! The task of the boss, subsequently, is to organize these energies and differences in the interests of profit. (2000, p. 153)

Hardt and Negri make reference, for example, to a book collection by Boje *et al.* (1996) on so called 'postmodern management,' which includes a range of theories and descriptions of practices of how to manage organizations in so called 'post-bureaucratic' times (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994). These new times are said to be characterized by complexity and ambiguity. 'Breaking down old hierarchies,' 'dialogue' and 'diversity management' are examples of the techniques that are supposed to enable a more 'successful' management of today's organizations. In Chapter 6 I also discussed various organization theories that hope to deposition established bureaucratic structures of organization. The process-view of organization, the community-based approach to the social construction of reality, the

jazz-view of managing, the emphasis of plurality and multiculturalism as well as the post-dualism approach can all be seen, to an extent, as attempts to call traditional hierarchies of organization into question. While many of these theories can be seen as resistances against established positions of social reality, Hardt and Negri's understanding of Empire points to the view that these resistances are, in fact, part and parcel of the 'goings-on' of global capitalism. This is to say, capital must be understood as an open apparatus that is continuously deterritorializing established hierarchies; it thus incorporates and, in fact, welcomes the type of resistances discussed in Chapter 6. It is for this reason that I expressed doubts over the political effectiveness of the depositioning project.

Following du Gay (2000a,b; see also 1994a,b; 2003a,b; 2004), the depositioning discourses of organization can be seen as part of a wider attack on bureaucratic ways of organizing. 'In popular usage,' du Gay says, 'the term "bureaucracy" is most strongly associated with the defects of large organizations in both public and private sectors' (2000a, p. 80). Naming an organization 'bureaucratic' popularly implies inefficiency, slowness, hierarchical decision-making, waste of resources, rules, rationality and impersonality, to name but a few terms that spring to mind.⁵⁰ In the past two decades a burgeoning management and organization literature has emerged that is explicitly 'anti-bureaucratic.' Du Gay (2000a, p. 61ff) engages particularly with what could be called the 'thriving on chaos' literature (Peters, 1987), a managerial literature that Tom Peters sums up by saying: 'I beg each and every one of you to develop a passionate and public hatred of bureaucracy' (cited in du Gay, 2000a, p. 61). Du Gay argues that this 'hatred of bureaucracy' is characterized by a contemporary management discourse which sees 'work not as a painful obligation imposed upon individuals, nor as an activity undertaken for mainly instrumental purposes, but rather as a vital means to individual liberty and self-fulfilment (2000a, p. 64). The bureaucracy is thus seen as something that restricts personal freedom. What is somewhat ironic is that anti-bureaucratic writers often exchange the bureau with some form of strong company culture that is led by charismatic leaders – let us remember, for example, Peters and Waterman's *In Search for Excellence*, which dominated managerialist writing in the 1980s (Armbrüster, 2003). What is often not explained by these writers is how such strong community-based cultures, characterized by teamwork, dialogue, company visions and bottom-up management, ensure more freedom than the bureaucracy. In fact, as Parker (2002a, p. 79–80) notes, communities are often as normative and coercive as bureaucracies. Du Gay (2000a, p. 66) and Armbrüster and Gebert (2002) thus detect in the anti-bureaucratic discourse a certain romantic belief in communitarian ways of a supposedly organic life. Besides the community approach, anti-bureaucratic writers often emphasize continuous change (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997), complexity (Weick

and Sutcliffe, 2001) and chaos (Peters, 1987). Such terms highlight the view that organized reality is seen as indeterminate, which, it is argued, unlocks the creative potentials of individuals (Biggart, 1977; Morgan, 1997). In the view of these writers, the bureaucracy is regarded as something which hinders the creative development of organizational members and thus the economic performance of the company.

Du Gay (2000a, p. 81ff) also shows how the 'anti-bureaucratic spirit' has taken hold in the public sector. In times of global competitiveness between nations the bureaucratic state is often seen as something that hinders economic activity within and between national economies. What is generally understood as neo-liberalism, which is sometimes also referred to as market liberalism, advocates the view that there is no alternative to the capitalist market, which is said to have proven to be an efficient and effective way of ordering economic activity. Within the logic of neo-liberalism individuals are their own sovereigns and pursue things for their own economic self-interest; subsequently, any government is seen as an unnecessary interference with the process of self-realization (Grugulis and Knights, 2001, p. 19); this is also referred to as libertarianism (Armbrüster, 2003). With the rise of neo-liberalism as one of the most dominant politico-economic ideologies over the past two decades, du Gay (2000a) shows that there have been consistent attacks on state bureaucracies, which are seen to limit the libertarian self-interests of individuals. He discusses, for example, a range of attempts to manage public service organizations more like entrepreneurial corporations, which are characterized by flat hierarchies, teamwork, internal markets and self-responsibility. This entrepreneurialism is supposed to make public services more agile and cost the taxpayer less money to run. However, not only are public services run *as if* they are companies; increasingly they are also run for profit. The 1980s and 1990s saw immense privatization programmes and, today, even state schools and hospitals are operated by companies that are not only interested in delivering a good public service but also in their profit levels (Monbiot, 2000). This has not only been a national phenomenon but indeed a global one. As many critics of globalization show (Frank, 2000; Hertz, 2001; Klein, 2000; Korten, 2001), neo-liberal policies now set the agenda in many parts of world – often enforced by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other non-governmental organizations controlled by Western governments and business interests. One can thus speak of neo-liberalism as a hegemonic discourse that has enplaced sociality in specific ways. This emplacement points precisely to Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, which can be seen as today's globally integrated regime of capital that aims to turn every territory into a market.

Now, the response by du Gay (2000a,b) and other organizational liberals (Armbrüster, 2002, 2003; Armbrüster and Gebert, 2002; and Adler and Borys, 1996; Gebert and Boerner, 1999) to the attacks on the bureaucracy

by anti-bureaucratic management writers, neo-liberalists and Empire at large, is one that stresses the need for a return to the bureaucratic ethos. When one speaks of liberalism one has to be careful to distinguish it from neo-liberalism and libertarianism. In contrast to the latter two, liberalists emphasize the need to organize democratic society through bureaucratic institutions. As one liberalist writes, 'from a liberalist viewpoint, there are no means other than institutional ones for securing plurality,' that is, freedom and democracy (Armbrüster, 2003, p. 23). At the heart of liberalism is a belief in the plurality of life forms, which are governed by contingent political and ethical rules. On one hand, the bureau is seen as one of these life forms itself; following Max Weber, du Gay, for example, asserts that the bureau must be seen as an institution that is guided by its own moral conduct (2000a, p. 5, 10). On the other hand, the bureau is also seen to ensure the plurality of different life forms in society at large. The bureaucrat is characterized as someone who has a 'strict adherence to procedure, commitment to the purpose of the office, abnegation of personal moral enthusiasms, [and] acceptance of sub- and super-orderination' (du Gay, 2000a, p. 44). The bureaucrat is thought to be someone who can make impartial and impersonal decisions by way of the bureau being a separate and rationally operating life-world in its own right. The bureaucrat is seen to be able to mediate between conflicting groups of society and ensure a plurality of competing life forms.

Such a discourse is generally valuable because it points to the need of organizing and institutionalizing society. In contrast to the deposing discourses discussed in Chapter 6, liberalists are very critical of conceptions of society that emphasize local, community-based processes of social organizing and of accounts that simply celebrate the indeterminacy and disorganized nature of organization. Within a liberalist viewpoint, society only becomes possible through an institutional organization of the various pluralist forces that characterize social reality. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) language, one could say that liberalists point to the need to establish 'chains of equivalence' between pluralist forces, in order to politically enact the 'structural undecidability' of social organization. This equivalence thus fills the inherent lack of the social and enables identification with a particular organization of social reality. The bureaucracy can be seen within this 'logic of equivalence;' it is a particular social decision about how to make society and organization possible. The bureaucrat is a subject that reproduces this social decision through a conduct of impartiality and impersonality. What du Gay (2000a) tries to achieve with his book, *In Praise of Bureaucracy*, is to defend this social decision against the host of anti-bureaucratic discourses that have emerged in recent times, some of which I have mentioned above.

Du Gay defends the bureaucracy largely by reminding us of the original bureaucratic ethos that he reads in Max Weber, which could be interpreted

as an inherently conservative move. This is, in fact, acknowledged by du Gay (2000b) who is, however, quite happy to be associated with this type of conservatism. Yet, in Parker's view (2002b, p. 131), du Gay runs the danger of presenting a nostalgic and idealist image of the bureaucracy and the bureaucrat. Du Gay (2000a), as well as Armbrüster and Gebert (2002), seem to imply, for example, that, if the bureaucracy had functioned properly, the Holocaust would never have happened. They argue that it was not the bureaucracy that enabled the Holocaust, as Bauman (1989) would have it. Instead, it was the undermining of the bureaucratic ethos, as imagined by Weber, which led to the totalitarian state of the Third Reich. While it might be the case that Hitler disassembled the bureaucracy of the Weimar Republic, Bauman's point seems to be that the organization of the Holocaust only became possible because of modern ways of organizing rationally and bureaucratically. Without fully engaging with the debate between du Gay and Bauman, my concern is that both writers do not seem to properly acknowledge that any institutional setup is embedded in particular political as well as economic contingencies. This is to say, there is no such thing as the bureaucracy *per se*; instead, it is a contested terrain that is employed for various political ends. While Bauman sometimes seems to regard the bureaucracy as something that can be made responsible for all the evil of modern society, du Gay tends to defend the bureaucracy on equally essentialist grounds by emphasizing an original bureaucratic ethos that exists outside all economic and political contingencies.

What is missing in du Gay is the concrete analysis of the ends of bureaucratic organizing across various socio-political and historical terrains. By adhering to Weber's original bureaucratic ethos, he might be able to resist contemporary anti-bureaucratic discourses and show that modern society only becomes possible by way of an institutional setup. However, he simultaneously runs the risk of not critically engaging with those often violent social outcomes that have been produced and continue to be produced by this very bureaucratic ethos. This is partly Benjamin's point in his essay 'Critique of Violence' (1978d) in which he associates the state's power with a reproduction of violence (the German word *Gewalt* means both 'violence' and 'power'). Benjamin (1978d, p. 288) argues that it is necessary for the state, after it has been brought violently into power, to institutionalize this violence in order to reproduce itself. This can be linked, perhaps, to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'war-machine' which is appropriated by the state (1987, p. 420ff). In their view, too, there is violence at the heart of the state. The point I am trying to make is that du Gay does not engage with the violent production processes of the state bureaucracy in order to ethically and politically evaluate the ends of this violence. While defending the role an institutional setup plays for the democratic governing of society is generally a very worthwhile project, du Gay fails to politically evaluate the particular ends bureaucratic institutions can be put to.

That is, his idealist image of a bureaucratic ethos makes him somewhat lose sight of the particular regime of violence and power that is produced and reproduced by states and governments. This critique can be extended by suggesting that du Gay's analysis is firmly embedded in the contemporary 'goings-on' of bureaucratic institutions of the state. His main aim seems to be to contribute to the public services debate and defend the status of the 'civil servant,' which has come under intense attack by both politicians and the new managerialism that has taken hold in the public sector (du Gay, 2000a, p. 114ff). While I would not want to suggest that this is not an important political and theoretical contribution, my concern is that because he does not evaluate in detail the political ends of bureaucratic organizing he seems to have very little time for alternative institutional setups other than governments and modern public bureaucracies.⁵¹

In my view, then, du Gay and other organizational liberalists can be seen to restrict the political to established places such as state bureaucracy. This restriction seems to mirror the politics of some labour process theorists who, as I discussed in the previous section, restrict the political to the capitalist workplace. In both cases it seems that the terrain of politics is restricted to a definite place. In Derrida's language, one could say that for both liberalists and some of the labour process theorists discussed above the political is not an undecidability but something that is always already decided. As we have seen in Chapter 4, however, for Derrida, the political event is when a social decision emerges out of an undecidable situation which cannot be pre-positioned in any way. Yet, liberalist and some labour process politics seem to be pre-positioned in the state bureaucracy and the workplace respectively. This restriction of the political becomes obvious when we consider that within the realms of organization theory both liberalists and labour process theorists have been somewhat quiet about the politics of new social movements and the wider realm of civil society. In particular the anti-capitalist movement, which has emerged over the past four years, and which I will consider later on in this chapter, has only found minute attention in organization theory. What this shows is that both organizational liberalists and labour process theorists do not see politics as something that transgresses the boundaries of the economy, state and civil society. While many labour process theorists are focused on the economic and materialist realms of the workplace, organizational liberalists focus on the 'goings-on' of the state bureaucracy. However, as I will show in the remaining part of this chapter, civil society and particularly the analysis of the organization and politics of these new social movements are of vital importance when thinking about a repoliticization and repositioning of organization theory. It is only a linkage of the spheres of the economy, state and civil society which will enable us to effectively critique the contemporary hegemony of managerialist discourses and explore different organizational futures.

The political organization of new social movements

Given the limitations of the labour process and organizational liberalist discourses discussed above, I will in the remainder of this chapter engage with, what can be called, one of today's most radical civil society movements, namely the anti-capitalist movement, which has gained increasing momentum since the end of the 1990s. I will contextualize this social movement historically, consider its political aims and discuss the organizational challenges it currently faces. The aims of this engagement with the anti-capitalist movement are three-fold: First, there is a practical need for this social movement to question its organizational and political aims, and, in my view, organization theory has a lot to offer in this regard. Second, this empirical engagement will illustrate the theoretical argument of this book, which has been concerned with the exploration of possibilities of a political repositioning of social organization. I will argue that the anti-capitalist movement can be seen as a political event, which is not only aimed at changing social organization on a local level – the main purpose of the depositions project – but indeed at the level of hegemony or universality. Such a project of repositioning is only possible, in my view, if the spheres of the economy, state and civil society are linked together analytically and politically. Third, this engagement can be seen as an event itself, which aims to explore possibilities for a repositioning of organization theory. That is, by engaging with the anti-capitalist movement I hope to contribute to a project that can effectively resist the hegemony of capital and management knowledge and affirm the field of organization theory as a practice for radical social change. However, before I turn to the specificities of the anti-capitalist movement, let me start by discussing some literatures that have been explicitly concerned with theorizing social movements.

According to Alan Scott, a social movement

is a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society. (A. Scott, 1990, p. 6)

In recent history one can identify a stream of social movements that have sought to radically change society. Let us think, for example, of the labour

movements that sprung up in most industrialist countries as the result of the advancement of industrial capitalism in the late 19th century; the socialist revolutions, or their attempts, in Russia, Germany, Italy and elsewhere in the 1910s and 1920s; the suffragettes movements, also at the beginning of the 20th century; the nationalist movements in Germany, Italy, Japan and other countries in the 1930s and 1940s; the anti-colonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s; the student protest and anti-war movements at the end of the 1960s; the Black civil rights, women's and gays' liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s; the anti-nuclear and Green movements of the 1980s; and the anti-state-socialism movements in the former Eastern-bloc countries at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. This list is, of course, not exhaustive. An extended list of social movements could, for example, also include pre-capitalist movements such as peasant revolts. The general point to make here is that the anti-capitalist movement, which has formed since the late 1990s, is embedded in a long history of social movement activities.

Recently, some social movement theorists (Crossley, 2002; Farrell, 1997; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995; Larana *et al.*, 1994; Melucci, 1989, 1996; A. Scott, 1990; and Tarrow, 1998) have distinguished between 'old' and 'new' social movements. Whilst the term 'old social movement' tends to be reserved for workers' or labour movements, the movements that started to appear in the 1960s, for example feminist, gay, green and pacifism movements, are usually referred to as 'new social movements.' Workers' and labour movements are referred to as 'old' social movements because they largely enact traditional categories of antagonistic class struggles, which emerge out of the specificities of the labour process discussed above. The struggles of the labour process are structured around the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour, between those who own all resources and are traditionally represented by the bourgeois political caste system and those who only own their labour power and have traditionally not been represented politically. One of the main purposes of labour movements, which started to appear during the time of Marx's writing in the mid-19th century, has been the adequate representation of workers, in order to improve their relative economic position within society. According to A. Scott (1990, p. 5), the movements that emerge out of antagonistic class struggles have generally been assumed to be the paradigm of social movements.

However, the social movements that have appeared since the 1960s have sparked a rethinking about how and why social movements are formed. These movements have been coined 'new social movements' (NSMs) because their struggles cannot only be seen along traditional lines of labour politics and economics. As A. Scott (1990), Melucci (1989) and others have argued, NSMs embrace struggles in a variety of different cultural and everyday spaces. According to Crossley (2003, p. 302), NSM theorists argue that society and its constitutive struggles have moved beyond traditional class

antagonisms, and NSMs are thought to be replacing the working class as new political challengers. Whereas Crossley suggests that NSMs could be seen to create a new political conjuncture, other NSM theorists believe that the newness of these social movements is that they are not political but, instead, seek cultural innovation. As Melucci argues:

Social movements...seem to shift their focus from class, race, and other more traditional political issues towards the cultural ground. In the last thirty years emerging social conflicts in complex societies have not expressed themselves through political action, but rather have raised cultural challenges to the dominant language, to the codes that organize information and shape social practices.... The action of movements deliberately differentiates itself from the model of political organization and assumes increasing autonomy from political systems; it becomes intimately interweaved with everyday life and individual experience. (1996, p. 8–9)

In Melucci's view, NSMs do not aim for political power by being politically represented or, indeed, by overthrowing an established political system. He maintains, instead, that NSMs are located within civil society and are engaged in the production of a wide variety of values, symbols and identities. This, according to Melucci, takes account of the fact that contemporary capitalist relations are not only concerned with the production of economic resources and the fight for representation on the level of the state, but also with the production of social relationships, symbols and identities in multiple situations of the everyday. This can be related to the concerns of Foucauldian organization theorists discussed above. Writers such as Knights and Willmott, and others, also point to the fact that social struggles do not only emerge out of the economic necessities of the labour process. Instead, individuals and groups engage in a range of different identity struggles. In contrast to Melucci, however, Foucauldians would regard these struggles as being deeply political. That is, Melucci seems to work with a conception of politics that is restricted to the level of political party representation, that is, the level of the state. The point of the identity struggles of new social movements is that the political is displaced into civil society, and hence the political terrain is widened.

While the distinction between old and new social movements might be a useful starting point to think about the type of struggles characteristic of contemporary society, and how they might be differentiated from other historical periods, there are, in A. Scott's (1990) view, numerous problems with such a crude categorization. For him, the concerns of labour movements and NSMs have intersected and indeed influenced each other's agendas. He uses the example of the German Greens, a social movement that has developed into a political party.⁵² The point A. Scott makes is that,

rather than debating how new certain social movements are, it might be more productive to engage with the concrete organizational and political challenges they face. Now, according to A. Scott (1990), one of the main organizational issues of social movements is the question of institutionalization. As I have already discussed in the previous section, this is not simply an organizational question but indeed a political one. Let me turn to a discussion of the problematic of institutionalization, which will be of importance when we analyze the challenges faced by the anti-capitalist movement.

NSMs are said to be marked by grassroots-type network structures (A. Scott, 1990, p. 19). That is, one reason why NSMs are thought to be new is that, in contrast to traditional labour movements, which are said to be organized in formal hierarchies, new social movements organize on local levels and often mobilize their resources on an 'ad hoc' basis. More specifically, in A. Scott's view, the social movement literature has characterized the organizational principles of NSMs as follows:

- (1) locally based or centred on small groups;
- (2) organized around specific, often local, issues;
- (3) characterized by a cycle of social movement activity and mobilization, i.e. vacillation between periods of high and low activity (the latter often taking the form of a disbandment, temporarily or permanently, of the organization);
- (4) where the movement constructs organizations which bridge periods of high activity they tend to feature fluid hierarchies and loose systems of authority;
- (5) shifting membership and fluctuating numbers. (1990, p. 30)

NSMs are thus described as social networks that are seen to be highly flexible, fluid and adaptable. Crossley (2002) points out that NSMs are often purposefully anti-authoritarian, because grassroots democracies – as these types of local movements are sometimes called – are thought to be more inclusive, pragmatic and quicker in responding to specific local issues. NSMs are therefore often organized in groups or cells, which gather spontaneously and in an 'ad hoc' fashion around single issues. 'Such groupings are often organized to oppose the local consequences of higher-level political decisions with respect,' for example, 'to road building, factory installation' or 'local pollution problems' (A. Scott, 1990, p. 31). Germany, for example, has a long tradition of so called 'citizens' initiatives' (*Bürgerinitiativen*), which organize themselves on a local basis around single issues, such as those just mentioned. According to A. Scott (1990) and Melucci (1989), such local initiatives can be seen as a response to the failure of traditional political systems to account for and incorporate the diverse agendas of the new cultural movements that have appeared since the 1960s. That is, while established political systems seem to be organized around grand signifiers, such as left versus right, labour versus capital,

people have increasingly defected from parliamentary democracy to invent their own local politics that traverse traditional political categories.

We can thus speak of two differing levels of politics. According to the anthropologist James C. Scott (1990), there is 'official politics,' which involves the public declaration of rights and negotiation of conflicts. This is often 'the realm of elites (for example, lawyers, politicians, revolutionaries, political bosses), of written records (for example, resolution, declaration, news stories, petitions, lawsuits), and of public action' (J. Scott, 1990, p. 200). Hence, this form of politics often depends on fairly hierarchical modes of organization and representation. This is the sphere of politics du Gay focuses on; it involves the bureaucratic channels of state communication and authority. Seen historically, this level of politics represents the traditional confrontation between old social movements, that is, labour movements, and the bourgeois system. However, the political struggles new social movements are engaged in involve different forms of organization. In contrast to unions and labour parties, new social movements are typically less formally and hierarchically organized, as resistance takes place 'below the line' of 'official politics' (Diani, 1992; see also Spicer and Böhm, under review). James C. Scott (1990) refers to this type of politics as 'infra-politics,' which is the zone of clandestine and direct action. This is 'the realm of informal leadership and non-elites, of conversations and oral discourse, and of surreptitious resistance. The logic of infra-politics is to leave few traces in the wake of its passage' (J. Scott, 1990, p. 200). Infra-political movements thus display less formal characteristics of bureaucratic organization (Weber, 1947). That is, these movements typically do not involve a professional elite, and its activities are not publicly recorded in written records, which can be used to hold them accountable.

Despite the political critique by new social movements of formal politics, their lack of formal organization can also be explained by the fact that they are often relatively small in scale and young in age (Spicer, Böhm and Fleming, under review). According to A. Scott (1990, p. 129), once social movements reach a certain scale they tend to look for possibilities of lowering the cost of collective action, which pulls them towards a more formal organization and even a political party scenario. He uses the example of the German Greens who have developed from a largely uncoordinated movement to the third biggest political party (in terms of its electoral success in the 2002 elections) over the course of about 25 years. For Michels (1962), however, the development of the Greens from movement to political party would probably demonstrate the inherent dangers of formal institutionalization. For him, the development from social movement to a fully institutionalized political party is a conservative move because, in his view (1962, p. 338), organization moves from being a means (in the case of social movements) to becoming an end in itself (in the case of political parties). Michels observed this in the case of the early labour movements, which

developed into socialist or communist parties in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The history of the international labor movement furnishes innumerable examples of the manner in which the party becomes increasingly inert as the strength of its organization grows; it loses its revolutionary impetus, becomes sluggish, not in respect of action alone, but also in the sphere of thought. (1962, p. 337)

Here, Michels warns of the dangers of formal institutionalization: the revolutionary impetus of a social movement, as he calls it, might get lost within the political party machinery. Certainly the Germany Greens, for example, seem to have lost many of their radical ideas and become entangled by the somewhat conservative party political system in Germany.

From a historical point of view, the infra-politics of new social movements can be seen as a response and resistance to the spheres of formal, bureaucratic politics the way it is practiced, for example, by political parties in the Houses of Parliament. As Blaug maintains, 'In the places of our everyday lives, a new anti-institutional orientation is in evidence' (Blaug, 1998, p. 34). While organizational liberals bemoan this development and seek to return to the bureaucratic ethos of formal, institutional politics, Blaug embraces decentralized, fluid networks of infra-political action, but warns: 'we need to know whether the localized, fragmented, face-to-face and strongly anti-institutional orientation of such initiatives could ever hope to deliver a radical practice which might change the world, or whether it will turn out to be yet another bloody cul-de-sac' (Blaug, 1998, p. 34). He goes on to affirm this question by engaging with the battle in the Teutoburg forest, in which seemingly disorganized, anarchic German hordes defeated a hopelessly outnumbered, well-organized and disciplined legion of 15,000 Roman soldiers in the 9th century. In his discussion of this battle Blaug shows how, what he calls, 'rhizomatic movements' can effectively coordinate their actions, intervene in a particular situation of social struggle and bring about change. What he provides is a theory of a social movement that challenges established orders precisely because it organizes differently: it is not a hierarchical order but a disorganized, rhizomatic order that is perceived as disorder. In his view, it is because of this organizational otherness, so to say, that any seemingly disorganized or anarchic movement is seen as a problem that needs to be dealt with by the ordered and organized forces of the state.

The age old accusation of utopianism, levelled at rhizomatic action from within the confines of hierarchism, cannot be sustained by the charge that it cannot co-ordinate action. It is not this that explains the failure of political science to take seriously these radical forms, nor does it

explain the absence of any serious attempt to stimulate and nurture grass-roots democracy, to develop ways that networks of groups might overcome the problems of partiality which always beset local actors in global systems, to make democracy real. Rather, at the heart of the accusation of utopianism is the charge that rhizomatic action is *too* effective, dangerously so, and thus prone to violent disorder. As such, it must be controlled, protected against. Otherwise, and here is the rub, it cannot provide the safety and stability required by elites to maintain their power, in other words, by the state. (Blaug, 1998, p. 51)

Blaug's valuable analysis shows how effective political action can be taken by rhizomatic, grassroots movements, which operate outside established institutional spaces of the state. In his view, the state is suspicious of these infra-political movements because they do not work along the same lines of organization. The state thus often confronts infra-political grassroots movements with hostility (see Mueller, 2004).

In what is a powerful plea for organization theory to refocus its attention – away from global corporations, state bureaucracies and managerialist discourses towards local civil society movements of resistance for radical social change – Fournier (2002) uses some of Blaug's insights to praise the disorganized, anarchist and rhizomatic nature of the organization of grassroots movements.

Dissensus, disunity, multiple points, far from diluting the strength of these grass-root movements stand as effective weapons against the seduction of closure, the snugness of comfort. The juxtaposition of disconnected grass-roots alternatives serves as a reminder that any form of organizing has to establish itself against others, that there are always alternatives. (Fournier, 2002, p. 209)

Similarly to Blaug, Fournier provides a powerful critique of hierarchism and established modes of organizing, which, in her view, always already privilege the powerful. It is her attempt to give voice to those who live their lives at the margins of society. For her, these margins can never be fully incorporated into the centre, as there will always be resistance and utopian alternatives to hegemonic organizational regimes. Fournier's argument has much in common with anarchist organizational principles, which have a long tradition (see Guillet De Monthoux, 1991) but only recently seem to have seen renewed attention due to the popularity of poststructural theories of organization. Reedy (2002), for example, is keen to 'hoist the black flag' to argue for anarchist modes of organizing that always resist hegemonies, hierarchies and other dominant organizational practices. For him, anarchism is an effective practice of resistance because it goes *nowhere*: it is not confined to established lines of bureaucratic

communication and organization; instead, it renders static forms fluid by permanently subverting the agendas of hegemonic discourses. This reminds us of some of the depositioning discourses discussed in Chapter 6, which highlighted the processual, fluid and precarious nature of organization.

Reedy, and also Blaug and Fournier, seem to argue that infra-political movements of resistance are about a permanent disruption and subversion of state institutions and established political spheres. They see these movements as something disorganized, ephemeral, rhizomatic, uncontrollable and ungovernable; in their view, these movements aim to 'challenge the machine of the state with viral micro-operations' (Blaug, 1998, p. 45). Similarly to some depositioning discourses discussed in the previous chapter, Blaug bases his understanding of such micro-political operations on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) understanding of rhizomatic action. In Blaug's view, rhizomatic action cannot and is not interested in running the state; 'Indeed, running a state is not, after all, a suitable task for the spontaneous and ephemeral, nor for the joyful, the committed or the autonomous' (1998, p. 51). This partly coincides with Holloway's recently popular view, which calls on us to 'think of an anti-politics of events rather than a politics of organisation' (2002, p. 214). What he calls 'anti-politics' is the infra-politics of radical social movements that aim to 'change the world without taking power,' because taking power would simply be the ugly mirror image of traditional state politics. In Holloway's and Blaug's view, the power of infra-political movements is to operate 'below the line' of official, institutionalized politics and explore possibilities of creating completely different events of political organization.

While I think that such discourses are immensely important in terms of expanding our conceptions of politics and organization, I also see some of the dangers associated with the politics of the depositioning project repeated here. One of my main points of critique I levelled at the depositioning project in Chapter 6 was that there is always a danger for movements of deterritorialization and depositioning to be simply reterritorialized on the plane of established signifiers, for example, capital. In the same way one has to be cautious of the possibilities of infra-political civil society movements to uproot the global network of capital and the state by simply engaging in rhizomatic direct action. As Holloway rightly says, the 'mere refusal is easily recaptured by capital, simply because it comes up against capital's control of the means of production, means of doing, means of living' (2002, p. 208). In Holloway's view, what is thus needed in addition to the negative movement of resistance and refusal is a positive movement of 're-taking,' of doing things differently. He uses examples like the setting up of social centres and the provision of alternative education, health and transport by local communities to show how social relations can be organized in new, positive ways.

What is thus important is to not simply talk of rhizomatic movements of resistance against hegemony but the need to think in terms of the creation of specific events of social organization. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) maintain, events are not only about continuous deterritorialization and movement, but also about 'invading a territory.' Similarly, in Hardt and Negri's view, Empire cannot simply be resisted within the realms of deterritorialization, multiplicity and hybridity, or what I have described as depositioning. They maintain that 'hybridity itself is an empty gesture, and the mere refusal of order simply leaves us on the edge of nothingness – or worse, these gestures risk reinforcing imperial power rather than challenging it' (2000, p. 216–17). That is, resistance on the level of hybridity, multiplicity or Blaug's 'rhizomatic hordes' might not be effective precisely because it always risks being reterritorialized by dominant forces of Empire. Thus, in Hardt and Negri's words, 'Empire can be effectively contested only on its own level of generality' (2000, p. 206). This implies that it would be necessary to organize an 'enlarging, inclusive movement oriented toward the future capable of producing a new unity' (Hardt, 1993, p. 20). In this movement towards a new unity 'the multiplicity of society is forged into a multitude. The multitude remains contingent in that it is always open to antagonism and conflict, but in its dynamic of increasing power it attains a plane of consistency; it has the capacity to pose social normativity as civil right. The multitude is multiplicity made powerful' (1993, p. 110). Put differently, the multitude is a multiplicity that has gained in power by being forged into an 'organized mass' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 348). In Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2004) view, then, the multitude is about challenging Empire on the terms of its own generality.

My concern is that Hardt and Negri as well as Holloway lack the language and concepts to think of this challenge in organizational and strategic terms. While they rightly point to the need to create specific events of organization that can challenge the generality of Empire, they are not able to give us the conceptual tools to strategically think about how such a challenge would be organized. For example, it seems clear that if the multitude is about challenging Empire on a level of generality, then what I discussed above in terms of the questions of formality and organization that arise when social movements reach a certain scale become of importance. This is the valuable contribution of organizational liberalist thought, discussed in the previous section. While some liberalists, like du Gay for example, seem to somewhat fetishize a certain original bureaucratic ethos, what can be taken from their position is the insight that society only becomes possible through certain institutionalizations. As Michels admits, despite the dangers of institutionalization that I pointed to above, 'it is none the less true that social wealth cannot be satisfactorily administered in any other manner than by the creation of an extensive bureaucracy' (1962, p. 347). Now, what I highlighted above was the idea

that there is no such thing as *the* bureaucracy, or *the* bureaucratic ethos, as some organizational liberalists might have it. Instead, an institutional setup is always a process of contestation. This contestation generally involves two aspects: first, the contestation about how to organize an institution; and, second, the contestation about the political ends institutions should be put to. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), it is precisely the role of the political to engender these processes of contestation – to strategically bring about a social decision about how to institutionalize society and, thus, to make social organization possible. The development of a social movement into a political party is only one of the possibilities, which is to say that there are many different ways of institutionalizing political action and society at large.

When I talk here about institutionalization I do not necessarily think about setting up formal, bureaucratic organizations that can administer society. The critique of this type of official politics put forward by infra-political social movements is, in my view, very valuable. However, what institutionalization also points to is the strategic need to forge organizational links between different political actors that operate in the spheres of the economy, state and civil society. As I discussed in Chapter 4, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the political event is when an established, hegemonic emplacement of social organization is questioned and a new hegemony is made possible. The conceptualization of this event is based on the understanding that resistance against a hegemonic content cannot only be effective through, what Laclau and Mouffe call, the 'logic of difference.' In their view, a force of resistance also needs to engender the 'logic of equivalence' which forges different social actors into a unity. This is not too dissimilar to Hardt and Negri (2000) who maintain that the movement from multiplicity to the multitude is the event of creating a political subject that can effectively resist Empire on the level of generality, or universality. It is the event in which a force is created capable of 'not only organizing the destructive capacities of the multitude, but also constituting through the desires of the multitude an alternative' (2000, p. 214). Thus, if Empire is a 'non-place,' the question Hardt and Negri ask is how to construct 'in the non-place, a new place' (2000, p. 217). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provide us with the language and concepts to actually think about how this new place can be organizationally put into place, and the key to this is the question of strategy. Following the 'logic of equivalence,' it is important to strategically transgress the artificial lines between new and old social movements as well as between official politics and infra-political action in order to organize an enlarging movement of resistance. This involves resistance actors in all three spheres, that is, the economy, state and civil society, to find a degree of strategic commonality and bring about an effective challenge to the generality of Empire and institute new regimes of social organization.

The anti-capitalist movement

Now that I have discussed some perspectives of the political organization of social movements, I will turn to the specificities of the anti-capitalist movement, which is a new social movement that has gained momentum since the end of the 1990s. While in this section my main aim is a general introduction to the anti-capitalist discourse,⁵³ the next section will engage with the organizational and political challenges of the anti-capitalist movement in much more detail.

One of the significant founding dates of the contemporary anti-capitalist movement is November 1999. At this time the World Trade Organization (WTO) held one of its annual meetings in Seattle and a new round of global trade liberalization talks was supposed to be launched. Although the WTO was used to dealing with frequent opposition from individual non-governmental organizations and pressure groups, it was not prepared for what would turn into 'the battle of Seattle' (Yuen, Rose and Katsiaficas, 2002):

40,000 demonstrators, drawn from a wide spectrum of constituencies that extended from core sections of American organized labour...to a plethora of non-governmental organizations and activist coalitions campaigning around issues such as the environment, fair trade, and Third World debt. The numbers and militancy of the protesters, and the *innovative methods of organizing* they used, took the authorities by surprise. (Callinicos, 2003, p. 4, emphasis added)

Whereas the WTO has always had to deal with opposition against its policies – opposition that has come from groups with diverse geographical and social backgrounds as well as political agendas – the innovation of the Seattle demonstrations was that for the first time protesters were able to organize themselves in such a way that, out of the multiplicity of their demands, a powerful, albeit temporary, unity was formed. The common aim was an effective disruption of the WTO meeting and to give voice to alternative views of organizing global trade. The Seattle protests were regarded as a success because that particular WTO meeting was discontinued, and thanks to massive media coverage, the discontentment with the neo-liberal politico-economic agendas, which have been shaping societies around the world since the early 1980s, when Reagan and Thatcher came to power, could be heard worldwide.

Seattle could be seen as a trigger, an event of politics. Suddenly, there was talk of 'the movement' against globalization and neo-liberal capitalism:

Since Seattle, and reinforced by Genoa, a broader picture has come into view which shows we are no longer alone in our privatised, downsized,

deregulated lives – *we are part of a movement* that is determined to respond, that understands an alternative is possible. We have come to understand that the system which oppresses us in one corner of the world, or in one aspect of our lives, is the same system wreaking its havoc elsewhere. We have realised that a fundamental change in society is required. (Bircham, 2001, p. 3, emphasis added)

What has followed Seattle are numerous protests that have coincided with meetings regularly staged by various inter- and extra-governmental organizations; for example, the G8, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Union (EU), World Bank, to name but the most important and powerful ones. The cities that have hosted these meetings have gone into the history books of the anti-capitalist protest calendar: Washington, Melbourne, Prague, Gothenburg, Nice, Quebec City, Genoa and Evian. In these and numerous other places massive protests and counter-summits have been staged attracting millions of demonstrators worldwide. What this sequence of events has increasingly produced is a language of 'us' against 'them.' This is apparent in the language of Bircham cited above: 'us,' the oppressed, exploited and deprived, who have to live in a society that is increasingly characterized by the disappearance of public spaces, against 'them,' the global corporations, which are only responsible to their shareholders, and the neo-liberal politicians who only help to further the interests of capital. One could say that this language of 'us' against 'them' points to the construction of a political identity (Laclau, 1994), that of the anti-capitalist movement. As I discussed in Chapter 4, this identity can be seen as an articulation that hopes to expose certain antagonisms of a particular social regime; it reduces the plurality of society to some specific 'chains of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 130).

The identity of the anti-capitalist movement has also been shaped by a string of recent book publications. Principally, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* has contributed to the analysis of today's constellation of social struggles, and could be seen to have helped to reignite many people's imagination of the possibility of radical social change. If *Empire* is explicitly a theoretical endeavour, Klein's *No Logo* (2000) journalistically presents a plethora of detailed facts to expose the ways global corporations, such as Nike, McDonald's, Starbucks, Shell, Wal-Mart and others, have often become more powerful than national governments. In her view, these corporations have entangled social life in a web of brands from which there seems to be no escape; even traditional public spaces – such as city squares, schools and universities – are now becoming spaces of brand commodification. However, Klein does not paint a picture of an Orwellian totalitarian state that is all-encompassing and non-escapable. Almost half of her book is committed to showing how the corporate 'brand bullies,' as she calls them, can be resisted by a range of innovative activist strategies. For example, she

talks about the 'culture jamming' activities of Adbusters who turn corporate ads into subversive anti-corporate images; she engages with activism networks such as Reclaim the Streets that aim to reclaim public spaces, which have been increasingly turned into private, commercial properties. She also reports on anti-corporate activism against companies such as Nike, Shell and McDonald's whose labour relations and environmental practices have come under fierce attack. While Klein's book can be regarded as mainly 'non-theoretical' (Parker, 2002c), it offers a review of practical strategies that have been used by activists to expose and resist hegemonic corporate practices. *No Logo* has been translated into more than forty languages and has sold in millions. This book has been one of the most important tools for the formation of the identity of the anti-capitalist movement. Because of its global reach, *No Logo*, has helped to create, first, an awareness of, and sensibility towards, issues such as unequal globalization processes, the disappearance of public spaces and the social costs of neo-liberal socio-economic policies, and, second, a sense of the possibility of resistance against today's hegemony of capital.

There have been a plethora of other writings that have described, conceptualized and critiqued today's politico-economic constellation; writings which have also played an important role in the formation of the identity of the anti-capitalist movement. First and foremost one should mention the work of Chomsky (1992, 1998, 2000) who, in his long career, has published dozens of books many of which have attempted, in one way or another, to expose and challenge the hegemony of global capitalism. Bourdieu (1998, 1999), too, has used his standing as a leading French intellectual to publish books that explicitly try to expose and critique the workings of today's neo-liberal economic policies and its global social consequences. There has also been a growing anti-corporate literature that challenges the hegemony of market capitalism and the increasing privatization of all aspects of public life (Bové, 2001; Frank, 2000; Hertz, 2001; Monbiot, 2000, 2003; Schlosser, 2002; and Stiglitz, 2002). More explicitly concerned with the dynamics and organization of 'the movement' have been the edited collection by Birchman and Charlton (2001) and Callinicos' *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (2003). While all these books have contributed, in one way or another, to the formation of 'the movement,' it has been the Internet that has served as the main distributor of information about the various resistance movements worldwide. Websites or networks of websites such as Indymedia, Znet, SchNEWS and many others have reached millions of people with their alternative news and analyses of contemporary social reality; they have been important technologies for the identity formation of the global anti-capitalist movement and have helped to create a sense of possibility and the need for a struggle of 'us' against 'them.'

Yet, despite the political discourse of 'us' versus 'them,' 'the movement' is often described as an inherently multiple and pluralistic social body.

Bircham and Charlton's (2001) edited guide to 'the movement,' for example, makes explicit its geographical and cultural diversity as well as its heterogeneity in terms of the multiple, sometimes contradictory agendas it seems to encompass. Their guide shows that the anti-capitalist movement is made up of a number of different actors and discourses: anti-corporatism, environment or Green movements, labour and union movements, women and feminist movements, student movements, anarchists, socialists, anti-GM and organic food movements, anti-war and pacifism movements. Whereas Bircham and Charlton's classification of the anti-capitalist movement is organized in terms of its different actors and the social issues they address, Callinicos (2003, p. 67–105) distinguishes between different political orientations of anti-capitalist movements and judges them in terms of their radicality. For him, there is: (1) reactionary anti-capitalism – the nostalgic and romantic movement for an idealist, perhaps, organic past; (2) bourgeois anti-capitalism – the opinion that capitalism is still the most productive (that is, the best) system, which, however, has gone too far in many respects; (3) localist anti-capitalism – the supporters of a radical reorganization of trade and the economy in order to redirect power towards small-scale communities – this movement often organizes itself around green issues, supports fair trade and campaigns against the power of global corporations; (4) reformist anti-capitalism – the liberalist assertion that today's global capitalism needs to be strictly controlled by international governmental and other democratic organizations; (5) autonomist anti-capitalism – which organizes decentrally and anarchically – it aims to obey and actively fight against any central or hierarchical control; and (6) socialist anti-capitalism – which organizes itself around some traditional Marxist (or even Stalinist or Maoist) conceptions of struggle to bring about change by revolutionizing the working class. While Callinicos' categorization of different strands of anti-capitalist movements can be contested on various grounds, it is, perhaps, still a good starting point to show that this movement is anything but singular; instead, it is plural, multiple and ridden with antagonisms.

The multiplicity of 'the movement' is especially apparent in the numerous social forums that have been set up recently. The social forum movement, which is sometimes referred to as 'the movement of movements' was started when in 2001 the first World Social Forum (WSF)⁵⁴ took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to coincide with, and form an opposition to, the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WEF is an annual meeting of leaders from the world of politics, global business, science and culture that has taken place in Davos, Switzerland, for the past three decades.⁵⁵ The explicit aim of the WSF organizers is to establish a counter-forum that gives voice to those social groups and movements that are not represented by the hegemonic discourse of the WEF. Alongside traditional union organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals, social forums provide

an open space (Keraghel and Sen, 2004) for a great variety of new social movements that resist the hegemony of global capitalism in many different ways (Sen *et al.*, 2004). Yet, the general aim of the WSF is not only to oppose the WEF, but to launch a new stage of global resistance and 'offer specific proposals, to seek concrete responses to the challenges of building "another world"' (Whitaker, 2002). That is, the WSF was set up to simultaneously build on the growing protest movements and offer affirmative alternatives to today's hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism.

Since the first WSF in 2001, the forum has taken place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, four times. In order to further internationalize the social forum movement and represent its global multiplicity, the fourth WSF took place in Mumbai, India, in January 2004.⁵⁶ One of the main outcomes of the second WSF was the call for the setup of local social forums around the world. Since then social forums have been created in many cities, regions and countries around the world. For example, in November 2002 the first European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Florence, Italy.⁵⁷ Up to sixty thousand people (Khalfa, 2002) gathered in numerous workshops, seminars and conferences to discuss strategies of opposition and civil disobedience against neo-liberal globalization agendas and a European order based on corporate power. Rather than a traditional representative space, the ESF sees itself as an open space of dialogue for a great variety of movements. Social forums, it is claimed, are not political coalitions 'in the traditional sense of various organizations building an alliance for some pre-given common aim.' Instead, according to the London Social Forum organizers, social forums 'are organizational devices that continuously redefine their aims. The people participating are open to learn from each other, to recognize and respect each other, and to put aside disagreements over political/ideological lines.'⁵⁸ In other words, social forums are not thought of as political spaces which legitimize themselves through a series of traditional representative and organizational criteria. Instead, their organizers stress the openness and multiplicity of aims: social forums are thought of as movements, or as gathering points of movements, rather than traditional representative spaces such as political parties. In fact, political parties are explicitly not allowed to take part in social forums, because of the fear of their contamination with the agendas of traditional party politics (Teivainen, 2003).

The point which is clearly visible in the discourse of the anti-capitalist movement, then, is the emphasis on organizational multiplicity, which cannot and should not be represented or infiltrated by traditional political spaces, such as political parties. Commentators on the protests in Seattle, Genoa, Prague and the other places of recent anti-capitalist activities, as well as the organizers of these events themselves, are always keen to point to the diversity of action groups present at these protests: trade unions, community movements, international solidarity organizations, organizations working

against social exclusion, human rights organizations, organizations of environmentalists and ecologists, farmers' organizations, economic networks offering social solidarity, youth organizations, migrant organizations, cultural networks, feminist networks, networks of researchers and lecturers.⁵⁹ The Florence ESF, for example, specifically highlighted its 'respect for diversity'⁶⁰ and indeed the different, often opposing agendas of the groups present at the ESF were clearly felt. The image of the ESF is one of a melting pot of multiple, rhizomatic grassroots movements that temporarily come together for an ephemeral event. This fits the rhetoric of infra-political grassroots movements discussed in the previous section. Indeed, the anti-capitalist movement is sometimes described as a rhizomatic and nomadic network (I. Munro, 2001; Wood, 2003).

As I showed in my montage (Böhm, 2001) of the London Mayday demonstrations in 2001, anti-capitalist protests are temporary events.⁶¹ One of the aims of the paper was to show how a diverse range of anti-capitalist movements can come together in a temporary arrangement and collection of forces to gain maximum strength on a particular protest day. According to Blaug (1998), it is this temporary, ephemeral arrangement of rhizomatic movements that is seen as being dangerous by the established political system, because there are no hierarchical structures nor any leaders with whom one can rationally negotiate. These direct actions are designed to disrupt, disobey and express anger, which often, as in the 2001 Mayday protests in London, as well as many other anti-capitalist protests, leads to violent clashes with the police. Perhaps one can say that precisely because of the lack of common goals, leaders and unified decision-making structures amongst the protesters traditional, democratic means of conflict resolution, such as dialogue and negotiation, cannot be applied by the state, which means that it has to exercise its monopoly of violence.⁶² Without attempting to discuss the question of violence in any more detail, the question, however, that emerged out of my discussion in the previous sections is whether such a temporary, rhizomatic protest event can be regarded as being the most effective resistance against Empire, especially if we follow Hardt and Negri's view that Empire is always already rhizomatic in nature. The question is thus whether the much celebrated multiplicity and openness of the anti-capitalist and social forum movements can be regarded as fruitful strategies for a project of anti-capitalist resistance. It is this question to which I will now turn in the final section of this chapter.

The impossible event of repositioning

As I discussed in Chapter 4, for Laclau and Mouffe, society is an inherently open space (1985, p. 95). This inherent openness of social organization makes it possible to align the political not only with what is usually regarded as politics, that is, parliamentary democracy or party politics, but

indeed with a wide range of multiple or plural identity politics that occur at many different levels and in many different places of society. In such a view, politics is inherently undecidable as it faces a multiplicity of possibilities. Laclau and Mouffe's conception of social organization as an impossible, open space seems to coincide with the idea of the social forum being an open space that aims to include a multiplicity of different anti-capitalist voices. However, as we discussed throughout this book, this embracing of multiplicity, or impossibility, can only be the first move. That is, although the concern with organizing social forums as truly inclusive events is of great importance, this cannot be the end of the matter.

For Laclau and Mouffe, the impossibility of an open space requires a *decision* to establish links, or, what they call, 'chains of equivalence,' between a range of different social actors in the spheres of the economy, state and civil society in order to represent the social. It is this decision that describes their event of hegemonic politics; it is this decision that moves us beyond the politics of inclusiveness – although important – to embrace a discourse of political strategy. In my view, it is precisely this strategic decision, this event of politics, which points to the challenge and possibility of the anti-capitalist and social forum movements. According to Laclau and Mouffe,

it is clear...that a left alternative can only consist of the construction of a different system of equivalents, which establishes social division on a new basis. In the face of the project for the reconstruction of a hierarchical society, the alternative of the Left should consist of locating itself fully in the field of the democratic revolution and expanding the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression. The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy. (1985, p. 176, emphasis removed)

Following Laclau and Mouffe, the question anti-capitalist and social forum movements face is whether they are able to forge strategic links between divergent political actors. In their view, it is only through this method of 'expanding the chains of equivalence between the different struggles' that democratic society can be renewed and repositioned, as it were. According to them, this is the radicalization of the liberal-democratic view which maintains that society needs to be institutionally organized and represented at a political level. The difference between this position and the views of liberalists in organization theory, which I discussed above, is that Laclau and Mouffe try to lay the theoretical ground that enables the imagination of a radically different social organization. This is to say that they do not base their hopes on a bureaucratic ethos that has produced the current political system, but indeed strive for the possibility of organizing the social differently, for institutionalizing modern life in a different way.

In their view, institutionalization has to go through, what they call, the 'logic of difference' (1985, p. 129). This logic sees the question of the social and the political as inherently open, and does not share the liberalist idea that society can be fully represented within given political structures. In this sense, the possibility of the anti-capitalist movement could be seen in its task to embrace the 'logic of difference' and construct a new place for the social and the political. When I say that this is the possibility, then I imply that there is no inevitability that the anti-capitalist movement will, indeed, be able to fulfil its promises. As I argued above, resistance requires strategic organization and not all resistances are equally effective.

One of the tasks of theory, in my view, is to analyze how resistance is organized and how effective the strategies and tactics employed are. This is why it is not enough to produce books such as Klein's *No Logo*, which is sometimes celebrated for its journalistic style and practical reviews of resistance strategies (Parker, 2002c). What theory can contribute is not only an analysis of the effectiveness of resistance strategies and an evaluation of the organizational means and political ends of social movements but also a questioning of the concepts and assumptions that underpin the practices of resistance movements (Böhm, 2002a). 'What is politics?;' 'What is a political event?;' 'What is social organization?' – These and other broad questions were at the heart of my philosophical explorations in Part II. Although one might never be able to get definite answers to these questions, in my view their explorations are nevertheless important for the analysis of social struggles the way they are manifested, for example, by the anti-capitalist movement. Let me, then, expand my analysis of the anti-capitalist movement and evaluate whether it has yet been able to turn itself into a political subject that can embrace the strategic possibilities described above.

As I discussed above, the anti-capitalist movement is often described as a multiplicity that incorporates a diverse range of groups that articulate different, sometimes contradictory, demands. In this sense one can hardly talk about 'the movement' as homogeneity; instead, it works along the 'logic of difference.' As Callincos (2003) and others have shown, there are many anti-capitalisms. Equally, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that the potential strength of the multitude is that it continuously seeks to enlarge its networks, to increase its diversity, to include as many people, groups and movements as possible. In Klein's language, the 'key to this process is developing a political discourse that is not afraid of diversity, that does not try to cram every political movement into a single model' (2002, p. 245). However, how multiple and open is the anti-capitalist movement?

Crossley (2003) critiques the social movements literature for having a 'distinctly Western and national bias' (2003, p. 302). In his view, what is unique and new about the anti-capitalist movement is that it is not only centred in Western cities and university campuses but indeed includes a

diverse range of Third World movements, such as the Zapatistas (2002) in Mexico or the movement of landless peasants (MST) in Brazil. While it is certainly true that the anti-capitalist movement is not only a First World movement, and clearly has global ambitions, one also needs to acknowledge that many anti-capitalist protest actions and social forums are still mainly comprised of Western-white-middle-class-type activists and social critics. The first three European Social Forums in Florence, Paris and London, for example, were clearly dominated by Western and South-western European movements. In my view, the ESF still has to go a long way to be truly inclusive and needs to expand its networks beyond its traditional strongholds, which seem to be centred in countries such as Italy, France and the UK. What about Eastern Europe, for example? In the social forums I have attended only a handful of people were present from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. What about immigrants? I saw few different colours in Florence, Paris and London. This is also what Khalfa (2002) notes about the Florence ESF: 'Even though the subjects of exclusion and immigration were discussed in the conference and the seminars, there were still...too few immigrants present.' Hardt (2002) makes a similar point in his response to the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. In his view, 'the movement' is not yet global enough. For example, when I attended the 2005 WSF there were still very few faces from Asia and Africa in Porto Alegre. Furthermore, Hardt (2002) maintains that the voices who dominate large aspects of the WSF's agenda (The French leadership of ATTAC, for example) are often arguing for the strengthening of *national* institutions which would be, in their view, a viable response to globalization and the erosion of national socio-economic politics. In Hardt's view, this is a dangerous position to hold, as national interests would always interfere with the need to continuously broaden the network of global resistance against Empire, in terms of geography and diversity. Negri (Negri and Zolo, 2003), too, makes quite clear that the response to Empire should not be a call for the return to national politics, that is, the politics of national states and their bureaucracies. As I discussed in relation to liberalist thought, such a move can be regarded as a limitation of the diversity and multiplicity of the political.

Having said that, one point of critique, which has been advanced at Hardt and Negri is that they do not sufficiently acknowledge the powerful resistance that *can* be produced by traditional representational politics, at the level of the party and the nation. Mertens (2002), for example, maintains that resistance is not only practiced by infra-political grassroots networks. In his view, old-style party and state politics can still be important in the struggle against neo-liberal formations of power. He points out, for example, that the 2002 WSF could have never taken place without the regional municipal government in Porto Alegre.⁶³ Equally, one could add that the Florence and Paris ESFs would not have been possible without the

generous financial and organizational support of the respective mayors and regional governments. Thus, the fact that the ESFs were fairly well organized in both Florence and Paris must be mainly attributed to the efforts of local party politics,⁶⁴ which Hardt and Negri often seem to dismiss when they talk about the infra-political spheres of the multitude.

In this light, one could see the exclusion of political parties from social forums as a serious limitation of the political potential of 'the movement.' As Teivainen (2003) points out, this policy of exclusion seems rather hypocritical given that political parties and regional governments clearly seem to be involved in the organization and finance of social forums. Yet, this policy is not only organizationally questionable. It also raises some important theoretical and strategic questions. As Laclau and Mouffe make clear, one should not see the state as

a homogeneous medium, separated from civil society by a ditch, but an uneven set of branches and functions, only relatively integrated by the hegemonic practices which take place within it. Above all, it should not be forgotten that the state can be the seat of numerous democratic antagonisms, to the extent that a set of functions within it...can enter into relations of antagonism with centres of power, within the state itself, which seek to restrict and deform them. (1985, p. 180)

What they paint is a picture of the state which is, just as civil society, ridden with antagonisms (see also Harney, 2002). That is, the state is not a homogeneity – as some infra-political voices sometimes make it to be – but something that is comprised of multiple politics. There are many potential political alliance partners within the realms of the state, which could help to further advance the anti-capitalist discourse and increase its reach.⁶⁵ I therefore regard the simple exclusion of political parties, which are seen to be too close to established hegemonic agendas of the state, as a limitation of the political possibilities of social forums and 'the movement' in general. In this sense, the WSF – in contrast to its rhetoric – is not truly an open space, as it consciously excludes certain political actors. This is not necessarily a problem, as a truly open space – that is, a space that includes everybody and everything – is logically impossible and politically based on certain liberal-pluralist fantasies (Böhm and De Cock, under review). However, this exclusion of some political actors is limiting because of *strategic* reasons.

This lack of inclusivity can partly be explained by the fact that social forums are often dominated by relatively few organizations or even individuals. Take the World Social Forum as an example. For the first two to three years since its inauguration, the WSF was run by a relatively small Organizing Committee that consisted of eight Brazilian non-governmental organizations, some of which were only represented by less than a handful

of people. As the forum movement grew in size and reach, an International Council (IC) was set up as well as a so called Secretariat. These bodies are said to function as facilitators of the organizing process, as the whole WSF is seen as an open space and not as a formal organization, nor a parliament, which makes formal, political decisions (Haddad, 2005). But these organizing bodies remain fairly non-transparent. When, at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, I asked a member of the IC about how one becomes a member of the IC, it was confirmed to me that this involves a fairly arbitrary process. There are no set election rules; it seems as if one is simply asked, presumably by a friend or colleague, to become a member, and this is it. Now, for any small infra-political resistance group this type of informality might be fine. But if we talk about an organization – and let us not pretend that we are not really talking about an organization – that organizes events with more than 150,000 participants from more than 130 countries⁶⁶ – an organization that claims to be one of the focal spaces of the contemporary anti-capitalist movement, which hopes to challenge the hegemony of neo-liberal, global capitalism – then it is clear that some question arise about the legitimacy and democratic representation of these organizing bodies.

For many it has become clear that there is a real democratic deficit in the way social forums are organized (Patomäki and Teivainen, 2004; Teivainen, 2003; Treanor, 2002). Treanor (2002), for example, names the organization of the Florence ESF in 2002 as an exclusive, semi-democratic, hidden process that was dominated by local and national political power-plays, rather than a truly enlarging pan-European movement. He (2002) claims that ‘the “organizing meetings” for the ESF in other countries were unreal, they had nothing to say about its structure. The organizing committees in Italy made all the major decisions about the ESF – about who to exclude, about censorship, and about co-operation with the sponsors, acceptance of their conditions, about the structure of the ESF, and its agenda.’ This leads Treanor to call for the abolition of the ESF, as it has, and he shows this too, financial links to business and governments and is, according to him, generally an undemocratic movement.

In the same way questions about the financing of the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre were asked in one of the seminars that I attended in the WSF’s Youth Camp. Big, semi-public corporations, such as the oil company Petrobras and the bank Banco do Brasil, were partly financing the WSF and allowed to set up information pavilions. The Brazilian organizing committee must have taken the decision to involve these big corporate players; but what democratic legitimacy does such a decision have? Is the involvement of these companies not seriously damaging given their environmental, economic and social track-record and their integration into the wider global corporate system that WSF participants are eager to critique? Of course, these questions are complex and I do not pretend that there are

easy answers. But the point to make is that there is currently no democratic space within the WSF in which one is able to not only discuss and reflect upon these organizational and political issues but also make a democratic decision about them. 'This is why there is a widespread perception,' according to Patomäki and Teivainen, 'that the WSF is a top-down organization, despite all talk to the contrary. It has even been stated that taking part in the WSF International Council was "a bit like being in the Politburo and not knowing who Stalin is"' (2004, p. 150). For the WSF, which sees itself more like a facilitator and open space for radical grassroots movements rather than a formal, hierarchical (or even Stalinist) organization, such critique must be seriously damaging. But this confirms that flat, non-hierarchical structures do not automatically lead to participatory democracy. The infra-political and anti-bureaucratic ambitions of social forums might be well intended – and their critiques of traditional forms of politics must clearly be welcomed – but the danger is that they actually reproduce or even increase the democratic deficit of these traditional political spaces.

Some progress, however, towards the democratization of social forums has been made. At the 2005 WSF, for example, the Brazilian Organizing Committee consisted of 24 organizations, instead of the earlier eight. In the run up to the event there have also been genuine efforts to consult participating movements, organizations and individuals about the programme of the WSF. There are also clear moves that seek to further internationalize the social forum process: after the 2005 WSF it was decided that the next World Social Forums will take place outside Porto Alegre, the place of its inauguration. In the same vein, the organization of the 2006 ESF in Athens, Greece, promises to be more participatory, as a consultation phase was started early in 2005. There are a variety of ways in which one can, as participating individual, organization or movement, get involved with the organization of the ESF. So, there are clearly attempts to broaden the reach of the social forum movement and to build its organizational process on a more democratic, transparent and inclusive base. Yet, much remains to be done, as many social forums continue to be organized by a somewhat hidden network of individuals and groups. Having said that, one does not have to be as pessimistic as Treanor and call for the abolition of the ESF and other social forums; this would be a purely negative move that would not engage with the process productively. In contrast, and this is what I am attempting to do with this chapter, the task is to positively influence this process of mobilization and organization of the 'the movement' in general.

To pursue a process of democratization of social forums involves taking into account the various critiques that have been advanced at the liberal-democratic system in general. This means that a call for a democratic WSF does not necessarily have to be seen as a conservative move.⁶⁷ Instead, a radical democratic project of repositioning social organization aims at inventing new forms of institutions. Such a project would, first of all,

recognize that the open space of social forums is not free of struggles and antagonisms. On the contrary, this space is really a clash of different identities as well as histories partly because of the different locations and types of actions participating resistance groups are embedded in (Spicer, Böhm and Fleming, under review). The 2004 London ESF, for example, made explicit the type of 'internal' struggles that can occur when a multiplicity of movements, organizations and individuals come together in a social forum (Reyes *et al.*, 2004). The terms 'verticals' and 'horizontal,' which emerged out of the London preparatory process, reflect precisely these struggles (Osterweil, 2004). While 'verticals' (for example, unions, political parties and some NGOs) are seen to operate with traditional, that is bureaucratic and hierarchical, structures, 'horizontal' are new social movements that are arguably more participatory and non-hierarchical in the way they organize themselves. As the various struggles between 'verticals' and 'horizontal' during the preparatory process of the London ESF made clear, the open space of a social forum cannot be truly open in a liberal-pluralist tradition. That is, an open space cannot be truly inclusive – just like the political space of liberal parliamentary democracy cannot fully reconcile the competing, pluralist demands in society (Böhm and De Cock, under review). Instead, this openness is characterized by antagonisms and struggles.

Given this insight of the impossibility of an open space, it is apparent that the call for an ever increasing multiplicity and inclusivity of social forums and 'the movement' at large should not be an end in itself. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the 'logic of difference,' that is, the realization that the social is an inherent multiplicity or impossibility, can only be one aspect of the political event (see also Laclau, 1990, p. 90–1). As I have discussed throughout this book, Laclau and Mouffe highlight that a politics that aims to challenge a hegemonic positioning or emplacement of social organization also needs to simplify the field of difference and establish a 'logic of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 130), a logic of 'us' against 'them.' Whereas the 'logic of difference' points to the fundamentally antagonistic reality of social organization, the 'logic of equivalence' gives presence to some of these antagonisms in order to politically and strategically act upon them. The 'logic of equivalence' points to an event in which groups that 'we thought in objective contradiction to one another...[are] suddenly able to work together' (Hardt, 2002, p. 117). In Hardt and Negri's view, it is in such an event that the multitude becomes a political subject that can potentially constitute and institutionalize a new society. For Laclau and Mouffe, it is of utmost importance that politics is not only about micro-political strategies of resistance on the level of difference. Such micro-politics would simply be acknowledging that 'horizontal' and 'vertical,' for example, are both legitimate articulations of contemporary struggles and should therefore be allowed to exist in parallel. Such

liberal-democratic pluralism can only be the first step, which recognizes difference. However, there is a need to take this further. In Laclau and Mouffe's view, 'the strengthening of specific democratic struggles requires...the expansion of 'chains of equivalence' which extend to other struggles. The equivalential articulation between anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism, for example, requires a hegemonic construction which, in certain circumstances, may be the condition for the consolidation of each one of these struggles' (1985, p. 182). This logic of a 'hegemonic construction' between different struggles implies a process of organization that can forge some of the multiple demands of social movements into a political agenda.

This is precisely why Tormey (2004b) calls for social forums to be less social and more political. That is, in his view, social forums should not only be about the celebration of the carnivalesque, multiplicity and difference. Given that capital is often quite happy to go along with such a multi-cultural celebration of difference (Žižek, 1997b), there is a real danger for social forums to simply reproduce existing social relations. At the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, for example, I had the feeling to be in the middle of a big market place, where literally thousands of traders – including the above-mentioned multi-national companies – offered their products and services to the multitude. This therefore means that the task of the anti-capitalist and social forum movements cannot only be to become more multiple and include ever more social actors but also to turn itself into an actionable political subject that can emplace and defend some specific 'principled positions' (Squires, 1993). In my view, 'the movement' has only just started this institutionalization process.

One of the first moments that offered a glimpse of the political power of 'the movement' was when the 2002 ESF called for a day of global protest against the then looming war in Iraq on 15 February 2003. This call for a particular protest day led to coordinated actions across the world – it is said that up to 15 million people took part in these protests on that day alone. According to Watson, with this particular day of protest the ESF had become more than simply a talking shop, as he calls it (2003, p. 145). It had become a constitutive space able to engage in concrete political actions: 'The ESF was the driving force behind the largest ever mobilization against war in history. The 15th of February 2003 will be recorded as the first co-ordinated day of global political protest; the results of which are immeasurable' (2003, p. 141). One could say that it was this specific event which provided a glimpse of the organizational and political possibilities of 'the movement.' On that day it reached out, not only to grassroots movements, but indeed to the anti-war movement, labour movements, political parties and ordinary people to protest against a specific issue: the war against Iraq.

After that day of protests some groups attempted to maintain and institutionalize this newly found unity. According to Watson (2003, p. 143), there

was a call for establishing peoples assemblies on local and national levels in the UK, in order to build permanent links between the groups, organizations and movements present at the anti-war demonstration. Yet, this event of opportunity to broaden 'the movement' and somewhat organize itself into a political subject was missed. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), it is exactly this building of 'chains of equivalence' between different political demands that would have worked towards a hegemonic event of politics, enabling the constitution of a different social organization. In Laclau's view, this could have made a production of new societal values possible; as he writes:

For the very emergence of highly particularistic identities means that the particular groups will have to coexist with other groups in larger communities, and this coexistence will be impossible without the assertion of values that transcend the identities of all of them. The defence, for instance, of the right of national minorities to self-determination involves the assertion of a universal principle grounded in universal values. These are not the values of a 'universal' group, as was the case with the universalism of the past but, rather, of a universality that is the very result of particularism. (1994, p. 5)

The event in which a new universal value becomes possible cannot, according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 185), be seen as a strictly political event. Instead, it is an event in which the production of life and society themselves are under consideration and a new hegemony of social organization becomes possible. This event, then, 'is the terrain of the...anti-capitalist struggle' (*ibid.*). As my analysis has attempted to show, 'the movement' has started to engender this terrain, but it seems that it has still to fully embrace the possibilities of constituting a different, repositioned social organization. To be clear, such a constitution of a new social hegemony can never finalize society; the social will always be an organizational and political impossibility, as Laclau and Mouffe highlight. Yet, what I have tried to argue throughout this book is that it is precisely this notion of impossibility that makes different organizational and political positions possible.

Part IV

Conclusions

8

Repositioning Organization Theory

This book has studied the political positioning of organization theory. Although the discourse of positioning – that is, fixing, placing and locating – has, in the wake of the so called postmodern project, not been very popular, I have argued that there can only be something called society because social relations are organized and positioned in particular ways. Society and organization thus go hand in hand. This implies that, if we care about how society looks like, we need to know about how it is organized and positioned – and this is essentially the realm of politics.

I have argued that in contemporary organization theory we can identify two main projects: the positioning project and the depositioning project. The positioning project comprises those ‘mainstream’ organization and management discourses that continuously seek to emplace organization along the lines of the hegemony of management. I discussed the ‘goings-on’ of this project by engaging with the knowledge management discourse, which has been very popular in organization and management studies since the early 1990s. While my particular concern in Chapter 5 was to show how ‘mainstream’ discourses predominately see knowledge as a commodity, I also attempted to paint a picture of the wider ‘goings-on’ of the contemporary hegemony of management and capital.

This picture shows us knowledge management as part of a globalizing Empire of capital that not only aims to geographically invade all territories in this world but also tap into the tacit terrains of individuals’ bodies. The final frontier of the commodity is not only the conquering of distant markets in Africa, Asia and elsewhere. What indeed is at stake is the human subject and life as such. The *flâneur*, prostitute and knowledge manager – the ‘heroes’ of Chapter 5 – are signs of this ongoing expansion of capital and its aim to become ‘total social capital,’ as Marx calls it. It is, however, not enough to conceptualize global capitalism as this ever expanding Empire that exists like a machinic network everywhere and nowhere. While the global ambitions of capital are a well established fact, it is also important to realize that this expansion is dependent on specific

political decisions made across the realms of the economy, state and civil society. That is, total social capital does not become total by solely advancing the reach of the economic realms of the labour process, as some would have it (see Chapter 7). Equally, global capitalism cannot be reduced to the withering away of state bureaucracies and the introduction of neo-liberal agendas. What is also important is to consider the legitimation processes in civil society, which hold capital socially in place. Following a Gramscian frame, the hegemony of management and capital is produced across all three of the spheres of the economy, state and civil society.

The depositioning project has critiqued and resisted the hegemony of management in a variety of different ways. Instead of contributing to the continuous affirmation of established positions of management, the depositioning project has worked towards deconstructing, dislocating and displacing the taken-for-granted truths of management and organization. Depositioning discourses have, for example, emphasized the processual nature of organization and the local construction of identities. What has been evident in these discourses is a certain tendency to regard social organization as something that is fluid, plural, moving, transparent and locally constructed. While this resistance has been an important contribution that makes explicit the precarious and undecidable nature of organizing, I have highlighted a range of theoretical and political limits of this depositioning project. These can be summed up by saying that the emphasis of movement, fluidity and local processes of organizing has blinded many researchers to those forces that do emplace and position social reality; for example, capital. Part of this is the failure of many so called critical voices in organization theory to adequately engage with the demands put forward by anti-capitalist and other social movements. How can such a silence be explained, given that organization theory should be well placed to contribute to a better understanding of social movements and other civil society organizations? I suggest that this relative silence is a direct outcome of the theoretical insufficiencies of the depositioning project, which continuously fails to take seriously those hegemonic forces that emplace social reality. Because of this failure to properly engage with the structuring forces of capital and formulate an effective critique against it, I have argued that the depositioning project has certain depoliticizing effects.

To dialectically overcome the limits of the positioning and depositioning projects, this book has argued for a synthesis of repositioning. The repositioning project has to be seen in a context of a renewed interest in the discourse of positioning, precisely because an understanding of positions in society involves the realization that it is the realm of politics that cannot be disconnected from organization. The purpose of this book has been to conceptualize this political event that characterizes the repositioning project. Two key terms have emerged out of this discussion:

impossibility and strategy. The concept of the impossibility of organization seeks to simultaneously critique the hegemony of contemporary discourses of management knowledge and explore possibilities for different organizational futures. That is, on one hand, impossibility points to the impossibility of positioning and finalizing social organization, and, on the other, it makes it possible to think about alternative ways of positioning the social. What is crucial is that this two-fold movement does not simply render organization impossible – this is how far the depositioning project goes. Instead, it also makes social organization possible, which implies that we have to see this as a strategic project. Repositioning organization is thus an impossible project that renders possible the strategic repositioning of social organization.

The anti-capitalist movement is of such political importance today because it is one of the few forces in society that is embedded in the strategic possibilities of the repositioning project. The immense political possibilities of the anti-capitalist movement are characterized by the co-existence of the two aspects of the movement of impossibility: first, anti-capitalism is an inherently multiple project that comprises a vast amount of different demands, identities and agendas. The anti-capitalist movement is thus not a single-issue party, as it were. Instead, it reaches across different social actors, whether they are located in the realms of the economy, state or civil society. At the same time, however, the anti-capitalist discourse has the opportunity to forge strategic links between these often incompatible demands, identities and agendas in order to produce a counter-hegemonic project of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ Regardless of its inherent multiplicity, the anti-capitalist movement is named ‘anti-capitalist’ because it engenders the possibilities of forming an alternative ‘historical bloc,’ as Gramsci calls it, against the hegemony of global capital and Empire.

However, is there not the danger for the repositioning project to simply reproduce the positioning project? Is there not always a danger that a project of re-positioning simply re-produces existing relations of power and thus re-inforces the established hegemony of capital and management? In other words, what exactly is so different about this event of repositioning? It is these questions that I now want to revisit in the concluding sections.

Events of repositioning

As I discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, for Benjamin, modern society is continuously positioned by the dazzling shocks produced by the commodity: products on display in the Parisian arcade seek customers’ attention; advertisements flashing in colourful light; and prostitutes offering their bodies for ‘love.’ The *flâneur* is in the midst of these shock encounters, and his subjectivity is positioned in relation to them. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* is

part of a class that was thoroughly destructed by the modern shocks produced by the commodity:

The very fact that their share could at best be enjoyment, but never power, made the period which history gave them a space for passing time. Anyone who sets out to while away time seeks enjoyment. It was self-evident, however, that the more this class wanted to have its enjoyment in this society, the more limited this enjoyment would be. The enjoyment promised to be less limited if this class found enjoyment of this society possible. If it wanted to achieve virtuosity in this kind of enjoyment, it could not spurn empathizing with commodities. It had to enjoy this identification with all the pleasure and the uneasiness which derived from a presentiment of its own destiny as a class. Finally, it had to approach this destiny with a sensitivity that perceives charm even in damaged and decaying goods. (BGS I.2, p. 561; 1973, p. 59)

What Benjamin describes in this passage is that the enjoyment experienced by the class of the *flâneur* cannot be disconnected from the commodity. For Benjamin, the passage into modernity is characterized by the commodity becoming a 'pleasure machine:' if one wants to enjoy life, one has to identify with the specific 'pleasure principle' of the commodity. The commodity displaces existing regimes of enjoyment and appropriates enjoyment for its own purposes. This is what the positioning project does: it positions enjoyment in relation to the commodity. In Chapters 4 and 5 I discussed the Lacanian notion that this identification with the commodity can be seen as a fantasy that has filled the lack of social reality, or the Other.

That is, the commodity assumes the role of the Other; it becomes social reality itself. This is essentially what Marx aims to show with his notion of 'commodity fetishism.' The modern subject fetishizes the commodity precisely because the commodity is the Other that provides pleasure and enjoyment. In Benjamin's eyes, the *flâneur* sees modern life destructing his existing enjoyment. His only option is thus to perceive charm 'even in damaged and decaying goods', as Benjamin writes in the above passage. For Benjamin, the *flâneur* succeeded 'beautifully' in enjoying this 'damaged and decaying' society, but only 'as someone who had already half withdrawn from it' (BGS I.2, p. 561; 1973, p. 59). Benjamin maintains that the *flâneur* always 'remained conscious of the horrible social reality' that surrounded him, 'but only in a way in which intoxicated people are "still" aware of reality' (*ibid.*).

Benjamin's *flâneur*, then, is intoxicated by the 'pleasure machine' of the commodity and modern mass-society. Marx's point is that this intoxication is structural; that is, commodity fetishism is not a subjective fantasy. Rather, it is precisely through the 'goings-on' of commodity fetishism that capital continuously emplaces society within the realms of the commodity.

What I suggested in Chapter 5 is that the *flâneur*, prostitute and knowledge manager are intoxicated by the commodity, which perhaps conceals the 'true' power relations that produce the contemporary hegemony of capital. As Benjamin suggests, the Parisian class of the *flâneur* was only able to share its enjoyment, but never power. That is, by intoxicating the senses of the *flâneur* with its 'pleasure principle' the commodity reproduces the hegemonic power of capital. What this hegemonic power of the commodity and the intoxication of the modern subject make impossible are ways to see the inequalities and contradictions that are produced through this hegemonic rule. Equally, what it suppresses are alternative organizational regimes of society that might be able to replace the social differently.

The repositioning project must thus include a two-fold movement: first, it must be able to effectively critique the enjoyment machine produced by capital; and second, it must be able to offer an alternative regime of enjoyment that can reposition existing social relations. In my view, this is precisely what Benjamin tries to achieve with his *Arcades Project*. His project is to expose the limited enjoyment the Parisian arcades offers to the *flâneur* and other modern subjects by juxtaposing text from a vast array of different sources. By cutting up texts, Benjamin subverts the established order of existing narratives and discourses of modern reality. What becomes important, however, is how the fragments of text are positioned in relation to each other. As Benjamin writes, 'What is decisive is knowing the art of setting' these fragments (1999a, p. 473). So, a repositioning of enjoyment emerges out of the strategic positioning of ruins of text, or fragments of reality. Let us briefly look at an example of how this can be achieved.

'*Passage*' is one of Benjamin's short essays on the Parisian arcades, which ends with the contemplation of a 'triumphal gate that, gray and glorious, was built in the honor of Louis the Great. Carved in relief on the pyramids that decorate its columns are lions at rest, weapons hanging, and dusky trophies' (1999a, p. 871). What Benjamin does here is to position images of the arcades next to the triumphal war architecture of the seventeenth century, which stands as a ruin in the middle of Paris. With this cunning historical positioning he deconstructs the contemporary beauty of the arcades and portrays them as today's triumphal architectures that will one day be ruins too. This cunning move, this 'alarm clock,' so he hopes, will awaken the 'sleeping collectivity' that takes the arcades and their positioning within Parisian modernity for granted:

We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to 'assembly.' This genuine liberation from an epoch has the structure of awakening in the following respect as well: it is entirely ruled by cunning. For awakening operates with cunning. Only with cunning, not without it, can we work free of the realm of dream. (1999a, p. 883)

What is therefore needed, according to Benjamin, is a cunning assembly or positioning that is able to destruct or deposition the narrative reality of today's world. 'Cunning' is a word that can be translated into German as *List*, which also means knowledge, not in the sense of a representation or thing-in-itself – or even a commodity – but in the sense of a particular skill, an artistic technique of hunting and war. Cunning knowledge is not the knowledge that counts in the realms of hegemonic power: the king, the academy, the property owner. Cunning is practiced by minorities, by those who live at the fringes and who have to make a living away from the well trodden paths of society. It is a knowledge that is practiced by nomads, gypsies, hunters, partisans, clowns and other outsiders who do not fit into the normal 'goings-on' of ordered society. Cunning is a knowledge that disrupts and depositions normal knowledge. In the same way, the dialectical triad of positioning, depositioning and repositioning has hoped to be such a cunning construction. It has sought to produce knowledge that can disrupt the taken-for-granted 'goings-on' of the depositioning as well as the depositioning projects and offer glimpses of the way a repositioning project might look like.

But 'knowledge comes only in lightening flashes' (1999a, p. 462). This is how Benjamin describes the experience of reading the *Arcades Project*, which, one could say, can never provide a narrative of knowledge or a major language. All it can offer is the possibility of some 'lightening flashes.' These flashes simultaneously illuminate and blind us. In the twilight zone of the flash, between seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing, it is undecidable whether one has been illuminated or not. As I discussed, particularly in Chapter 6, this notion of undecidability points to the depositioning of objects of reality that are usually taken for granted. What I termed the depositioning project in organization theory questions the basic presence of any positions of organization; it puts into doubt and resists the reality of organization that is continuously produced by major languages or hegemonic discourses of society. To point to the undecidability of organized reality is thus a political resistance against those objects of reality that seem firmly positioned and emplaced. The depositioning project highlights the precariousness of any form of organization and points to the fact that any positively positioned object of organization is dependent on a negative process of disorganization. In relation to the *Arcades Project* one could say that Benjamin reveals the precariousness of the triumphal presence of 19th century Parisian arcades. When he pictures the arcade as a future ruin he depositions its positivity and envisages its destruction.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, however, this destruction should not be seen as the eradication of an object; Benjamin does not simply want to do away with or destroy the arcades. Instead, it is a dialectical negation of the presence of the arcades. Dialectical destruction is interested in questioning the

presence of an object and exposing its limits; a process that tries to explore passages beyond that very object and thereby transform it. Destructing the presence of organized reality requires the analysis of the concrete modes of power and knowledge which produce that reality. This is to say, the dialectical process is interested in analyzing specific modes of production and domination, 'in order to maintain a grasp on the...organization, which is to be transformed effectively' (Derrida, 1987, p. 71). There is thus a question of the effectiveness of depositioning established realities of organization. That is, not all depositionings are equally effective in achieving the aim of transforming existing modes of production. This is, perhaps, what Benjamin points to when he writes in the *Arcades Project* that it is decisive for a dialectician to know the art of setting or positioning concepts (1999a, p. 473). The concern I expressed in Chapter 6 was that many depositioning discourses, within the realms of organization theory, fail to maintain a grasp on the concrete modes of production of organization which they seek to transform. For example, the failure of many depositioning discourses to engage with the 'goings-on' of capital prevents them from analyzing, critiquing and resisting those hegemonic discourses that always already shape today's organizational realities. Capital and the commodity, it seems, have been relegated to the back seat of many depositioning discourses in organization theory. My concern in Chapter 6 was that this failure to engage with the 'goings-on' of capital, and other hegemonic discourses, has restricted the effectiveness of the depositioning project and has thus had certain depoliticizing effects.

Failures of repositioning

What my dialectical critique has tried to achieve is to expose the limits and failures of the positioning and depositioning projects. But can my synthesis, the repositioning project, be seen as being superior? Is there not a kind of failure at the heart of the repositioning project as well? What I have tried to emphasize is that the repositioning project should not be thought of in terms of finality. Instead, my exploration has been based on Laclau and Mouffe's understanding that a hegemonic position can never be final or all-encompassing. While, for them, the concept of hegemony refers to a certain *unity* in particular discursive formations, it also points to a *contingency* of that very unity (1985, p. 65). This is to say, the apparent unity of dominant discourses, such as capital and management, is always already subverted by a multiplicity of alternative voices of organization. Capital and management cannot be the final answer to the question of social organization precisely because society will always fail to fully constitute itself. Equally, a repositioning project that aims to construct a new hegemonic link between social actors can always just be a partiality; that is, it can never be finalized. Therefore, even a repositioning project must

be understood as failure. This failure of a full constitution of society is described by Laclau in the following passage:

On the one hand, any political order is a concrete form of organization of the community; on the other, it incarnates, against radical disorganization, the principle of order and organization as such. Now, if the split between these two dimensions is constitutive, does this not mean that no ultimate order of the community is achievable, and that we will only have a *succession of failed attempts* at reaching that impossible aim? Again, this is true in one sense, but its consequences are not necessarily negative: because in the case that the split could be superseded, this would only mean that society would have reached its true order, and that all dissent would thereupon have come to and end. Obviously no social division or democratic competition between groups is possible in such conditions, since the very condition of democracy is that there is an insurmountable gap between what the social groups attempt to achieve and their abilities to succeed in such attempts. It is only if there is a plurality of political forces substituting for each other in power – as the attempt to hegemonize the very principle of ‘order’ and ‘organization’ – that democracy is possible. (Laclau, 1994, p. 5, emphasis added)

For Laclau, then, social organization is a ‘succession of failed attempts’ to reach its true order. He refers to a Lacanian gap, or lack, that is constitutive of society, which is to say that social groups will always question the way society is organized – they will always deposition established positions of society. This notion of a lack points to the idea that a hegemonic emplacement will always be contested by different social actors. In this sense, the commodity and management are only temporary hegemonic contents that have filled the lack of society with their phantasmagoric pleasure machinery. Equally, a repositioning discourse can not be the final critique of this hegemony. However, it is precisely because of this failure at the heart of any social discourse which allows for the possibility of a different social organization.

The depositioning project of organization, discussed in Chapter 6, engenders these possibilities of reading organization differently. Laclau and Mouffe call this the ‘field of discursivity’ or the ‘logic of difference,’ which is a ‘surplus of meaning’ that is characteristic of every social formation (1985, p. 111). This ‘field of discursivity’ exists at the margins of society and must be seen as a multiplicity of resistances that seek to subvert dominant social discourses from within. It is this ‘logic of difference’ which renders a full constitution of society impossible; that is, there is a certain failure at the heart of the social. This implies that society is fundamentally antagonistic; it is continuously contested. For Laclau and Mouffe, society can never be fully represented, that is, made transparent.

In this sense, society and history can never end, although the possibility of such a 'happy ending' has been suggested recently (Fukuyama, 1992). As much as proponents of capitalism and the liberal-democratic consensus want everybody to believe that history has come to an end and that all ideological struggles are relicts of the past, we need to insist on the impossibility of such a 'happy end.' Such an end is an illusion; all attempts to finalize the social will fail from the outset. According to Laclau and Mouffe, however, precisely this failure to finalize society is society's very hope. Their concept of impossibility renders any hegemonic social formation contingent; that is, an emplacement of the social can never be final and all-encompassing. This, then, opens up a gap that creates possibilities for political intervention and resistance.

A project of repositioning organization aims to go beyond the restrictions of the depositioning discourses. While the depositioning project is primarily about showing the undecidability of all organized phenomena, the repositioning project is based on the understanding that the notion of undecidability also enables decisions to be made about how to organize society. Laclau argues that society is characterized by a certain 'structural undecidability' (1995, p. 93). Yet, it is precisely this undecidability, he argues, that enables social decisions about how society should be constituted and positioned. One could say that, in his view, society is not only about the limitless play of undecidable differences but also about the limitation of that play. What I tried to show in Chapter 4 is that it is this decision about how to limit society which describes the political event. Laclau's understanding of the concept of undecidability can be seen as a call for political decisions about how to constitute and order society. The point of Chapter 6 was to suggest that many depositioning discourses in organization theory seem ill-prepared to conceptualize the political event as something that is able to position society itself. Rather than connecting the concept of undecidability to questions of the politics of society as such, depositioning discourses often highlight local, community-based processes of reality construction and micro-political resistances. I argued that, while these resistances have been important for showing the precariousness of processes of organizing, they have failed to engage effectively with those positions and emplacements of society that traverse local boundaries of space and time.

In Chapter 7 I therefore discussed discourses that are explicitly concerned with exploring possibilities of positioning society differently. The anti-capitalist movement, I argued, is not only interested in showing the local contingencies of social reality, but presses for political decisions that can renew and reposition society itself, by way of organizing multiple forms of protest actions and social forums. This necessitates a critical engagement with the 'goings-on' of today's global capitalism and the neo-liberal consensus that seems to characterize many political fronts. The anti-capitalist

movement does not only organize micro-political resistances in local communities, but explicitly resists today's hegemonic forces, which seem to 'corner' and emplace social organization on a global basis. As I argued in Chapter 7, this resistance seeks to establish a new social synthesis, a repositioned social reality that goes beyond today's hegemonic emplacement of society. However, as has hopefully become clear by now, such a synthesis can itself never be final, which is to say that the repositioning project – as indeed the positioning project – must be understood as an impossibility.

Such an understanding is based on the notion that the dialectical process does not automatically produce progress or a higher stage of development, as is sometimes assumed. According to Benjamin, dialectics should be seen to produce a 'non-synthesis;' or, as Adorno would have it, dialectics is negative as it continuously fails to complete itself. Such notions see the dialectical process as always resulting in failure; the failure to produce a final synthesis. As Žižek puts it:

It is a standard argument against Adorno's 'negative dialectics' to reproach it for its inherent inconsistency; Adorno's answer is appropriate: stated as a definitive doctrine, as a result, 'negative dialectics' effectively IS 'inconsistent' – the way to grasp it correctly is to conceive of it as the description of a process of thought.... 'Negative dialectics' designates a position which includes its own failure, i.e. which produces the truth-effect through its very failure. To put it succinctly: one tries to grasp/conceive the object of thought; one fails, missing it, and through these very failures the place of the targeted object is encircled, its contours become discernible. (2001c, p. 87–8)

In Žižek's view, the dialectical process will always result in failure. Yet, for him, it is the continuous failure of the synthesis to deliver a final answer which functions as the answer itself (1989, p. 177). That is, Žižek sees a kind of hope in the failure of the dialectical process to complete itself. This is the hope in the incompleteness of society, the hope that society can never be made transparent and history be ended. It is this hope that describes the repositioning project.

Futures of repositioning

This takes us to the end of this book, which set out to explore political possibilities of repositioning organization theory. If there is a conclusion we can draw from this exploration, it is that there cannot be a conclusion. This is to say, there cannot be a final answer to the question of how to position and organize the social. As I have highlighted throughout the book, society must be understood as impossibility. It is, however, precisely this notion of impossibility that opens up strategic possibilities of political intervention

and resistance that might be able to reposition and reorganize society. This book has, perhaps, failed to give any definite answers. What I have tried to suggest, however, is that it is precisely this failure which can be seen as a hope in a different organization of society. This hope must be strategically enacted. It does not materialize automatically. This is what Benjamin's book of quotations, his *Arcades Project*, makes so vividly clear: one must read and one must also try 'to read what was never written' (BGS I.3, p. 1238). The montage of the *Arcades Project* invites us to read and reread, again and again. While this might be an infinite process, what, according to Benjamin, is important are the temporary illuminations, the events and passages, that are produced by these acts of reading.

The repositioning project can thus not be as an end in itself. Repositioning should not be seen as an essential synthesis. The way I have conceptualized dialectics in this book is to see it as a strategic process, a movement, which calls for analysis and enactment. It is a movement of undecidability, which, however, requires a decision. It is this decision which differentiates the repositioning project from depositioning discourses. This decision requires the continuous and careful analysis of the relations of power that describe the hegemonic bloc that is to be critiqued. This dialectical critique will always be partial and thus be described by contingencies and failures. What I would like to do in the remaining paragraphs is to suggest ways of how to overcome some of the failures of the dialectical analyses in this book.

First, to stay with dialectics, what would be needed is an extended critique of the way dialectics is treated in organization theory. As I suggested in Chapter 2, there is still a vast gap seen by organization theorists between so called modern philosophies, which are associated with the German Enlightenment, and postmodern philosophies – mainly of French origin. Dialectics is said to belong to a past philosophical age, which, of course, is a very non-dialectical critique of dialectics. This book has tried to begin to reread dialectics as a movement that cuts across the artificially erected barriers between certain philosophical periods. What I have tried to show is that there are many connecting lines between Frankfurt and Paris – between critical theory and poststructuralism. However, a much more thorough analysis of dialectics is required, and this would need to involve a detailed reading of Kant, Hegel and other Enlightenment philosophers who have not had a very good press in organization theory as well as the wider realms of social theory. It seems to me that such a reading is urgent, also because many contemporary, fashionable critiques of capitalism – primarily those coming out of the autonomist and anarchist tradition (see Hardt, Negri and others) – rely explicitly on a questionable anti-dialectical ideology. In this regard Žižek's⁶⁸ project is noticeable, which aims to reread the German Enlightenment tradition and to put dialectics to work as part of an anti-capitalist project of critique. As many organization theorists are stuck

in their fashionable, Parisian corners, there is a lot that remains to be done in terms of a project that aims to recover the dialectical traditions of critique.

Following on from this, second, there is an urgent need to recover critical theory from the Procrustean bed it has been forced into by critical management scholars. For example, the way critical theory features in Alvesson and Deetz (2000) or Alvesson and Willmott (2003) is very questionable, to say the least. What is required is to rescue critical theory from the liberal-pluralist interpretations that have dominated the critical management tradition. Such a rescue mission must include a renewed interest in the emancipatory potentials of critical theory. As the possibility of emancipation has been increasingly questioned – see, for example, Alvesson and Willmott (1992) – it seems to me that there is a direct relationship between the theoretical and political insufficiencies of the depositioning project and the failure of organization and management theorists to adequately analyze the concept of emancipation. It seems to me that this renewed interest in emancipatory possibilities might benefit from a reading of Benjamin's work, which has had very little attention within the realms of organization theory. Although Benjamin was very closely associated with the Frankfurt School, critical management and organization theorists have so far failed to adequately engage with his work, which might disrupt, as I suggested in Chapter 3, some of the artificial barriers between critical theory and the poststructural project.

Third, although there is a growing interest by organization theorists in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (see Chapters 1, 4 and 7), it seems to me that a lot remains to be done in terms of connecting their political theory to questions of organization. For example, it would be interesting to study the exact organizational processes involved when 'chains of equivalence' are established between different actors and discourses. In my view, institutional theory might offer some interesting insights into how exactly these chains are established. In Chapter 7 I started to look into processes of institutionalizing chains of equivalence, but more needs to be done in this respect. As my discussion showed, a discourse of strategy is closely connected to Laclau and Mouffe's political theory. Needless to say that contemporary discourses of strategy within organization and management studies are hopelessly inadequate to deal with the radical-democratic questions Laclau and Mouffe point us to. There is thus a need to radicalize the discourse of strategic organization and management studies, which is still primarily preoccupied with the study of managerial strategies of companies and other managerial institutions. This radicalization would involve the analysis of the way hegemonic links between actors in the economy, state and civil society are established. As I showed particularly in Chapter 7, it is only this analysis of hegemonic regimes which will enable us to assess the political dimensions of strategy.

Following on from this, fourth, it is important to realize that there are manifold tensions between the work of Laclau and Mouffe, on one hand, and Hardt and Negri, on the other. What I have tried to do in this book is to read productively between both of these bodies of text. I am fully conscious of the difficulties with this, as there are many contradictions between their works, which I have not always been able to discuss in this book. Although both camps are keen readers of both Marx and Foucault, there are clearly important differences in the way they conceptualize capital and the strategies of resistance possible today. While Laclau and Mouffe work within a Gramscian tradition that emphasizes a discourse of politics and strategy, Hardt and Negri work within a Spinozian tradition of politics and resistance as immanence, which was also a key inspiration for Deleuze and Guattari. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss the connections between these different theoretical projects and outline their manifold differences. As a starting point, readers can refer to Laclau's (2004) critique of *Empire* and Žižek's (2004) book on Deleuze. Personally I believe there are more connecting lines between these traditions as these commentators want to admit, but such a claim needs to be obviously fully worked through in order to become justifiable. Again, I think that organization theory can offer a great deal to this discussion, as it unfolds in the wider spheres of social theory. Particularly labour process theory seems to provide a good starting point to discuss competing understandings of contemporary capitalist relations and the strategies of resistance possible today. However, for labour process theory to engender these possibilities, it must urgently expand its horizon to include a critical analysis not only of the realms of the economy but also the state and civil society.

Fifth, what has been missing from almost all areas of organization theory is a serious engagement with contemporary anti-capitalist and social forum movements. If organization theorists want their work to be politically and socially relevant, I think it is urgent that they expand their analyses of processes of organization and resistance in the workplace and state institutions to include an analysis of the spheres of civil society. Organization is not just about what is happening inside corporations and government departments. It is also about what is going on within and around NGOs, charities and resistance movements. Social movement research is one of the most promising fields that organization theorists should take seriously. The work of Davis *et al.* (2005), McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996), and Zald and McCarthy (1989) provide examples of how organization theory can be expanded to include questions concerning the organization and politics of social movements. In Chapter 7 I tried to start a project that closely analyzes the anti-capitalist and social forum movements. But this was not more than a start. Clearly, much more needs to be done, and I can only call on other organization theorists to leave their comfortable university offices and study those organization processes of resistance which tend to be

ignored by contemporary discourses of organization and management theories and practices.

Finally, in relation to the previous point, in my view, organization theory cannot be allowed to remain within the closed compartments of business schools and management departments. Organization theory can potentially be a radically interdisciplinary subject. In order to fulfil this potential, it needs to leave the restricted realms of the business/management school behind and engage with other subject areas, such as social movement research. Part of this call is a renewed attention to the relationship between theory and practice (see Böhm, 2002a). In my view, organization theory cannot really be of any relevance, if it is carried out by theoreticians who never leave their offices or academic campuses; organization theory needs to be politicized (Palonen and Böhm, 2004). They need to immerse themselves into the daily politics of the critique of contemporary managerial regimes as they are actualized in the economy, state and civil society. In this sense organization theory needs to become a kind of academic activism that is able to respond to the urgent questions faced by today's society. This book has tried to contribute to such an academic activist project by exploring the impossibilities and strategies of resistance against the hegemony of management.

Notes

- 1 All references to the German collection of Benjamin's works (i.e. his *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1974–85) appear as BGS plus the number of the volume.
- 2 The Arcades Project's historical analysis of modernity was Benjamin's life project, which was cut short by his death in September 1940 when he is said to have committed suicide in Portbou, a small Spanish border town, while fleeing from the Nazis on his passage to join the Adornos and Horkheimers in America. Although the exact circumstances of his death remain mysterious, 'it has generally been accepted that he took his own life, in despair at an impossible situation' (Brodersen, 1996, p. 256). It is said that he was carrying a big manuscript with him on this journey, which, unfortunately, was lost without trace. This manuscript must have been of high importance to Benjamin, otherwise, why would he have carried it on his tortuous passage across the Pyrenees? It is very likely that this was the manuscript of the Arcades Project. Thankfully he had left a copy with a librarian of the Parisian National Library, someone called Georges Bataille. It is thanks to Bataille that we, today, are able to have access to this vast collection of quotations and commentaries, which, however, was only edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser for the German publisher Suhrkamp in the 1980s. It was 1999 when it finally appeared in English.
- 3 See Rose (1978) for a short discussion of the Frankfurt School and particularly Adorno's role in it. For an extended history of the Institute, see Jay (1973).
- 4 Benjamin and Adorno met each other in 1923 and quickly developed a close friendship. They began a lively exchange of letters in 1928, which lasted until Benjamin's death in 1940. This correspondence reveals interesting insights into their analysis of capitalist society as well as their understanding of immanent critique as speculative, affirmative technique of destruction. While Adorno was firmly embedded in the German university system, Benjamin operated at its fringes. Benjamin never held an academic position – his text, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, was not accepted by the University of Frankfurt as habilitation thesis, which in the German context means that one cannot become a university professor.
- 5 For Adorno, 'immanent critique' cannot be a critique that comes from above, from an idealist, essential category. Instead it must be immanent in the sense that it is embedded in the specific societal and political reality and its dynamics (AGS 10/2, p. 470). Thus, for Adorno, immanent critique is that which 'takes seriously the principle that it is not ideology in itself which is untrue but rather its pretension to correspond to reality. Immanent critique of intellectual and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension. It names what the consistency or inconsistency of the work itself expresses of the structure of the existent. Such critique does not stop at a general recognition of the servitude of the objective mind, but seeks rather to transform this knowledge into a heightened perception of the thing itself. Insight into the negativity of culture is biding only when it reveals the truth or untruth of a perception, the consequence or lameness of a thought, the coherence or incoherence of a structure, the substantiality or emptiness of a figure of speech.

Where it finds inadequacies it does not ascribe them hastily to the individual and his psychology, which are merely fac[.]ade of the failure, but instead seeks to derive them from the irreconcilability of the object's moments. It pursues the logic of its aporias, the insolubility of the task itself. In such antinomies critique perceives, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure' (Adorno, 1967, p. 32, translation modified).

- 6 The Parisian *flâneur* was a man in a full bourgeois wardrobe – including a large hat, stick and cigar – who would stroll through Parisian urbanity. To visualize the *flâneur*, see, for example, Parkurst Ferguson (1994).
- 7 Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is a gigantic literary montage, which is a 'juxtapositioning of quotations so that the theory springs out of it without having to be inserted as interpretation' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p. 73, quoting a letter from Adorno to Horkheimer). Another example is his book *One-Way Street* (Benjamin, 1999b). Benjamin writes about his approach: 'Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them' (Benjamin, 1999a, p. 460; *BGS* V.1, p. 574, emphasis in original). Hence, montage as writing method must be seen to call the epistemological role and status of text into question; it shows every text to be a bricolage, a joining-up of past, present and future; with the author always being a guest in his own text. For my own attempts to construct textual montages, see Böhm (2001, 2002b).
- 8 Adorno asks the question of philosophy primarily in his essay 'Why still philosophy' (*AGS* 10/2), but also in, for example, 'The actuality of philosophy' (*AGS* 1; 1977) and 'On the Meta-critique of the theory of knowledge' (*AGS* 5) as well as the introduction to his book *Negative Dialectics* (*AGS* 6; 1970a). All quotes from these texts are my own translations. (Regarding the meaning of the acronym *AGS*, please see the following note.)
- 9 All references to the German collection of Adorno's works (i.e. his *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1970–77) appear as *AGS* plus the number of the volume.
- 10 It would, of course, be a gross simplification to say that Adorno, by going against the institutional positivity of philosophy, denies a role for institutions *per se*. On the contrary, education, also philosophical education, is crucial for him; see, for example his essay 'Philosophy and Teachers' (*AGS* 10/2).
- 11 The original translation of *Being and Time* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Heidegger, 1962) is poor in many passages. For example, they translate Heidegger's '*Destruktion*' as 'destroy.' This is absolutely unsatisfactory as 'destroy' has usually a very negative meaning. However, the German '*Destruktion*' and Heidegger's usage of this term is to be understood as '*De-struktion*,' the negation (*de*) of a structure or structuring process (*struktion*). Hence '*Destruktion*' implies both a negative and positive movement, that of destroying or destructing and, *at the same time*, constructing something. In a new translation of the Introduction of *Being and Time* Joan Stambaugh, J. Glenn Gray and David Farrell Krell translate '*Destruktion*' as 'deconstructing,' which highlights this process of negativity and positivity. I prefer, however, to simply translate it as 'destruction,' which, in fact, could also be written as 'de-struction' or 'de/struction:' the slash, or cut, highlights here the simultaneity of negativity and positivity.
- 12 See also Heidegger's essays 'What is metaphysics' (1993a), 'Overcoming of Metaphysics' (1954), and 'The Essence of a Fundamental Metaphysical Position; The Possibility of Such Position in the History of Western Philosophy' (1984).

- 13 Adorno's fierce and unapologetic criticism of Heidegger can be found, for example, in his already mentioned essays on philosophy (see earlier note). Additionally, see his essays 'Cultural Criticism and Society' (1967), 'On the Meta-critique of the theory of knowledge' (AGS 5), and *The Jargon of Authenticity* (AGS 6; 1973b). For a discussion of Adorno's criticism of Heidegger see also Rose (1978).
- 14 Heidegger distinguishes between 'being,' which is 'all there is,' and 'Being' (that is, with a capital 'B'), which is the 'basic' conception of being, the questioning of being: 'Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 19). The concept of 'Being' is thus Heidegger's attempt to put Being itself into question, to question it under the horizon of Time, which is not spatialized time but more 'basic' than that. He writes: "'Being" cannot be understood as being.... "Being" cannot be defined by attributing beings to it. Being cannot be derived from higher concepts by way of definition and cannot be represented by lower ones. But does it follow from this that "Being" can no longer constitute a problem? By no means. We can conclude only that "Being" is not something like a being' (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 44). What Heidegger, thus, points out is that we cannot conceptualize 'Being' with the traditional conceptual tools of metaphysics. In this sense, Being stands outside language. 'Being' can thus be seen as something that is not from this world; it might be seen as the 'essence' of being. One could also say that Heidegger ontologizes being into an absolute Being, which is not to be understood as a questioning of being, which would involve a questioning of the concrete social relations of today's life. Instead, according to Adorno, Heidegger tries to put forward a theory of the realm of the ontology of Being, which is the realm of the ontic (AGS 5, p. 191–2). Being thus becomes a notion of essence; Being is beyond being, it stands outside and above being.
- 15 In his writings, Adorno is often specifically concerned to point out that today 'things' should not simply go on as they were before the Holocaust, Auschwitz and the whole event of Nazism. For example, he once said: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (1967, p. 34). So, when he asks with one of his essays 'Why still philosophy?,' he also asks 'Why do we still need a philosophy that was not able to help, as 'hammer,' to smash the ideological structure of the Nazis, a philosophy that even indirectly supported this ideology.' This is Adorno's serious charge against Heidegger, whose thought was all too easily incorporated by the Nazi state. This, of course, does not mean that one should not read Heidegger or 'use' his thought affirmatively for today's political struggles.
- 16 *kairos* [Gk, fitness, opportunity, time; perh. akin to Gk *keirein* to cut]: a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment. (Webster's Third International Dictionary). In antique times *kairos* had not only a temporal meaning. Homer used the concept to signify 'the right place' (Brockhaus Encyclopaedia). Thus, we can see *kairos* not only as a moment in time, but also a moment in space.
- 17 The Parisian *flâneur* was indeed a *man*; a man in a full bourgeois wardrobe including a large hat, stick and cigar. The sexual bias of Benjamin (and Baudelaire, who is Benjamin's *flâneur par excellence*) has been challenged recently by feminist writers who argue that women, too, engage in *flânerie*; see, for example, Gleber (1999), Wolff (1985) and Wilson (1992). Whenever I mention the *flâneur* in this book I will attempt not to reproduce this sexual bias. However, when I occasionally *do* refer to the *flâneur* as a man I mean to point to the particular subjectivity Benjamin was concerned with when he studied the 'goings-on' of the arcade in 19th century Paris.

- 18 Although thorough and detailed engagements with Derrida's work have been rare within organization theory, Jones (2003a,c) delivers an example of how Derrida can be productively read in relation to a project of resisting and transforming organization theory.
- 19 In fact, Derrida explicitly describes his books as a displacement, and as the displacement of a question (1987, p. 3).
- 20 For more extended readings and discussions of Lacan's work, see Bowie (1991), Jones and Spicer (2005), and of course the vast array of Žižek's books (for example, 1989).
- 21 Laclau and Mouffe write about their conception of antagonism: 'Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity' (1985, p. 125).
- 22 Equivalence refers to the logical relationship or correspondence between two statements if they are either both true or both false. The term 'equivalence' is used by Laclau and Mouffe to explain how a political 'playing field' is established within society that always already lacks a clear centre, that is, that is defined by difference. They base their conceptualization of difference and equivalence on Lacan's concepts of metonymy and metaphor respectively. For a further discussion of these concepts see, for example, Stavrakakis (1999, p. 74ff); see also Lacan's discussion of metaphor and metonymy (for example, 1977, p. 156, 164).
- 23 Starbuck (2003) argues that pre-modern forms of organizing included, for example, large armies, such as those of Genghis Khan; building projects, such as the Chinese Wall; or colonial trading companies, such as the Hudson Bay Company. See also Cummings (2002) for the Greek origins of the word 'organization.'
- 24 For Ritzer, 'McDonaldization is the process by which the principle of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of world' (1996, p. 1).
- 25 For a further discussion of how, in modern times, time is managed, see Adam (1990, 1995), Gurvitch (1964) and Nowotny (1994). For an overview of the literature on organization in relation to questions of time (and space) see, for example, Butler (1995), Burrell (1992), Clark (1985, 1990), Gherardi and Strati (1988), Lee and Liebenau (1999), Hassard (1996) and Holmer-Nadesan (1997). See also Whipp, Adam and Sabelis (2002) and the special issue of *Organization* (2004).
- 26 For example, German companies have arguably had a more long-term view than their Anglo-American counterparts. So far, the German so called corporatism system has ensured a close dialogue between, and to some extent joint decision making by, management and labour representatives. Japanese capitalism has also taken a much more long-term view than the fetishism of shareholder value practiced in the Anglo-American world. The so called Asian Tigers, for example, South Korea and Taiwan, only became Tigers in the 1980s and 1990s, because governments played an important role in the long-term planning of industries, and foreign competition was kept out for a long time – see Hall and Soskice (2001) and Whitley (2000) for a comparative view of different capitalist systems. However, in the wake of the recent liberalization of trade and the worldwide implementation of neo-liberal policies, these regional differences in the capitalist system become increasingly challenged, and arguably the Anglo-American shareholder value system has become the hegemonic form of economic organization.

- 27 Some of the authors who have elaborated on the concept of the knowledge worker are: Zuboff (1988), Kumar (1995), Drucker (1992), Handy (1989), and Hage and Powers (1992).
- 28 Abrahamson and Rosenkopf (1990; 1993) argue that companies often adopt new management techniques for fear of lost competitive advantage. By drawing on neo-institutional theory, Abrahamson (1991; 1996) provides a model to understand processes of the diffusion of management fashions. He highlights socio-psychological factors (frustration, boredom, striving for novelty) and techno-economic factors (economic, political and organizational) that shape management fashion demand.
- 29 What I am trying to do here is to read productively between the works of Laclau and Mouffe, on one hand, and Hardt and Negri, on the other. I am fully conscious of the difficulties with this, as there are many contradictions between these bodies of work. See my discussion in the conclusions.
- 30 There are types of knowledge that have been referred to in the literature. In common language one distinguishes between two types of knowledge: know something 'in theory' and 'practical common sense' (Spender, 1996). In many world languages this distinction can be made more explicit, for example, *wissen* and *kennen*, *savoir* and *connaître*. In English this could be expressed by 'know-what' and 'know-how.' Other writers distinguish 'knowing about something' and 'knowing through direct experience' (King, 1964) or 'knowledge about' and 'knowledge of acquaintance' (James, 1950). While experience is directly related to 'know-how,' 'know-what' is the result of 'systematic thought that eliminates the subjective and contextual contingencies of experience' (Spender, 1996, p. 49). Referring to studies of organizational knowledge, Blackler (1995) has found the following main types of knowledge in the literature: embrained, embodied, encultured, embedded and encoded. Spender (1996), in his analysis, distinguishes among four types: conscious (explicit individual knowledge), objectified (explicit organizational knowledge), automatic (preconscious individual knowledge) and collective (practical, context-dependent organizational knowledge).
- 31 Adorno and Horkheimer write: 'Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. The technical contrast between the few production centers and the large number of widely dispersed consumption points is said to demand organization and planning by management...No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole thing together...It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. This is the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today's economy' (AGS 3, p. 142; 1979, p. 121).
- 32 For an analysis of the 'Human Information Processing' school, see, for example, Anderson (1990) and Winograd and Flores (1986). The purpose of this school's rather mechanical understanding of knowing becomes clear when one looks at its connection to artificial intelligence (AI): 'AI aims at understanding cognitive processes in such a manner and to such a level of detail that it can build artificial devices that perform the same cognitive function in a way that, in principle, makes it possible to substitute them for human performers' (De Mey, 1982, p. 5).

- 33 See Weber (1996) as well as Benjamin and Osborne (2000) for extensive discussions on how and where Heidegger's and Benjamin's philosophies meet.
- 34 Benjamin uses the concept of 'dream-time' to describe the collective dream consciousness of the masses of nineteenth century Paris: 'The nineteenth century, a space-time "Zeitraum" (a dream-time "Zeit-traum") in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep. But just as the sleeper – in this respect like the madman – sets out on the macrocosmic journey through his own body, and the noises and feelings of his insides, such as blood pressure, intestinal churn, heartbeat, and muscle sensation (which for the waking and salubrious individual converge in a steady surge of health) generate, in the extravagantly heightened inner awareness of the sleeper, illusion or dream imagery which translates and accounts for them, so likewise for the dreaming collective, which, through the arcades, communes with its own insides. We must follow in its wake so as to expound the nineteenth century – in fashion and advertising, in buildings and politics – as the outcome of its dream visions' (BGS V.1, p. 492–3; 1999a, p. 389).
- 35 Let me point out again that one can criticize Benjamin for his gender stereotyping. As I noted above, some writers have emphasized that the *flâneur* can indeed be a woman. However, to take into account that Benjamin's 'empirical object' was indeed a man, I will, at times, refer to the *flâneur* as being male, specifically when I discuss Benjamin's text.
- 36 Etymologically, 'allegory' can be translated as 'other speech' or as 'speech of the Other.' In contrast to the symbol, which cannot exist without semiosis that discursively organizes the signification system of the symbol, allegory does not depend on a fixed system as it signifies non-discursively. Allegory is a non-systematic fragment; that is, allegorical meaning is created by extracting fragments out of their 'original' context – the original symbol is turned into an Other, a theatrical space. In Lacanian language one could perhaps say that allegory points to 'the Other speech' of the Other. This is to say that allegory can be seen as that which unsettles the symbolic order, the Other, that which goes beyond it; it is the Real of the Other. See Bürger (1984) for a further discussion of allegory.
- 37 Benjamin writes: 'Empathy with the commodity is fundamentally empathy with exchange value itself. The *flâneur* is the virtuoso of this empathy. He takes the concept of the marketability itself for a stroll. Just as his final ambit is the department store, his last incarnation is the sandwich-man' (BGS V, p. 562; 1999a, p. 448). The Parisian 'sandwich-man' walks through the city while wearing a board full of sandwiches, which he sells to the 'passer-by.'
- 38 Benjamin refers to the prostitute as woman, which continues his somewhat stereotypical gender analysis mentioned above. Of course, the prostitute does not have to be female, nor does the *flâneur* have to be male. My attempt here is to see modern subjectivity to be related to the experiences of both of these Benjaminian 'modern heroes.' However, it is also clear that the reality of the particular historical constellation Benjamin was writing about, that is, mid-19th century Parisian modernity, was probably characterized by the stereotypical gender roles described here.
- 39 Part of the Virgin/WBS book series are: Barrow (2001), Barry (2002), Craven (2001), Cumming (2001), Dickinson (2001), Wolff (2001).
- 40 Anthropologically the term 'fetish' was first applied by the Portuguese in the 16th century – as *feitici[ç]o* – to idols and amulets, which were supposed to possess

magical powers, and which were used by the natives for their religious worship. De Brosses (1760) was one of the first anthropologists who employed 'fetishism' as a general descriptive term and he claimed that Egyptian hieroglyphics were the signs of a fetishistic religion. Thus, according to the anthropological meaning of the term, the fetishist believes the fetish to be something supernatural; the fetish is seen to be an objective fact – natural; transcendental. Polhemus and Randall describe how the Portuguese must have felt upon their arrival in West Africa where they first encountered the worship of fetishes: 'How wide their eyes must have been, how confused their thoughts, as they first came into contact with ways of life untouched by Europe – an experience which today could only be matched by the arrival of extraterrestrials. So many things must have amazed them, but the one which history has focused upon is their fascination with the way the tribal peoples of West Africa believed that certain seemingly unmiraculous objects – a stone, a knotted string, an animal pelt, an amulet – possessed magical powers' (1994, p. 39).

- 41 I have slightly amended the translation and exchanged 'desk' with 'table' to make the obvious link between Lacan's psychoanalytical to Marx's politico-economic example. Is it a coincidence that Lacan refers to the same wooden 'thing' as Marx?
- 42 There are also other valuable critiques of the knowledge and learning literature within the field of organization theory. See, for example, Contu, Grey and Örtenblad (2003), Contu and Willmott (2003) and the special issue of *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2003) on 'Appraisals of organizational learning as emancipatory change.'
- 43 Adorno must have specifically referred here to the extreme commercial success of Swing Jazz in the 1920s and 30s.
- 44 Such conflict overcoming strategies are discussed within an emerging field called 'Positive Organization Studies.' See, for example, the research centre for Positive Organizational Scholarship at the University of Michigan (www.bus.umich.edu/Positive), whose members have organized a range of conferences and conference streams in North America and Europe.
- 45 For an overview of these perspectives see, for example, Knights and Willmott's collection *Labour Process Theory* (1990), and the special issue of *International Studies of Management & Organization* (2001); see also Parker's (1999) commentary on labour process theory.
- 46 For critiques of this body of research, see, for example, O'Doherty and Willmott (2001) and Tinker (2002). For extended reviews, commentaries and extensions of this research, see Jaros (2004, 2005).
- 47 Thompson's 'core' labour process theory incorporates four points: '(1) The function of labor in generating surplus in capitalism, and hence the centrality of production to the system, and the privileged insight this affords labor for a theoretical and political challenge to the system; (2) The necessity for constant renewal and change in the forces of production and the skills of labor due to the discipline of the profit rate and competitive accumulation of capital. This impacts on the composition of skills, both cheapening labor costs and creating a complex structure of the workforce; (3) The necessity for a control imperative in the labor process in order for capital to secure profitable production and translate its legal purchase of labor power into actual labor and a surplus; and (4) Given the dynamics of exploitation and control, the social relations between capital and labor in the workplace are of "structured antagonism." At the same time, capital, in order to constantly revolutionize the production process, must

seek some level of creativity and cooperation from labor. The result is a continuum of possible, situationally driven, and overlapping worker responses – from resistance to accommodation, compliance, and consent’ (Thompson and Smith, 2001, p. 56–57). Besides revising some of Thompson’s points, Jaros also adds two more: ‘(5) Labour process theory is not analytically pre-disposed to any particular kind of method. Quantitative or qualitative methods utilizing dialectical or non-dialectical reasoning may all be capable of shedding light on the nature of work under capitalism, depending on the specific research question being investigated; (6) Given the objective, structurally unequal power relations between capital and labour that shapes the effort-bargain transaction, LPT is normatively pre-disposed to favour labour when labour and capital engage in struggle. The LPT researcher is committed to acting politically to ameliorate the effects of this unequal relationship in the short run, and eliminate it in the long run. This means that the LPT researcher should critically interrogate his/her ethical stance towards the “subjects” of research, so as to ameliorate the possibility that the research process reproduces systems of domination that the researcher is committed to undermining’ (Jaros, 2005, p. 23).

- 48 See my discussion in Chapter 5 as well as Jaros (2004) and Thompson *et al.* (2001).
- 49 See also the contributions in the special issue of *ephemera* (2004) on the ‘Theory of the Multitude.’
- 50 See also the special issue of *Organization* (2004) entitled ‘Bureaucracy in the Age of Enterprise.’
- 51 In contrast to du Gay, Harney’s (2002) *State Work*, for example, shows that one can engage with the institutions of the state without relying on idealist notions of a bureaucratic ethos. In fact, Harney gives us a productive account of how analyses of the economy, state and civil society can be integrated to provide a powerful critique of contemporary social relations.
- 52 At the time of writing, the German Greens are governing in Germany in a coalition with the Social Democrats who themselves have originally emerged out of the early labour movements of the 19th century.
- 53 See also the introductions to the anti-capitalist discourse by Notes from Nowhere (2003), Saad-Filho (2003), and Tormey (2004a). Also useful are Kingsnorth (2003), Mertes (2004), and Bello (2002).
- 54 The official WSF website says about itself: ‘The World Social Forum is an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, for formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action. Since the first world encounter in 2001, it has taken the form of a permanent world process seeking and building alternatives to neo-liberal policies. This definition is in its Charter of Principles, the WSF’s guiding document. The World Social Forum is also characterized by plurality and diversity, is non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party. It proposes to facilitate decentralized coordination and networking among organizations engaged in concrete action towards building another world, at any level from the local to the international, but it does not intend to be a body representing world civil society. The World Social Forum is not a group nor an organization’ (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=19&cd_language=2).
- 55 For more details about the origins of the World Social Forum and its oppositions to the World Economic Forum, see www.forumsocialmundial.org.br and Teivainen (2003).

- 56 In 2005 the decision was made that future WSFs will not be held in Porto Alegre anymore, in order to further internationalize the process. For a range of discussions of the history, organization and politics of social forums, see the special issue of *ephemera: theory & politics in organization* (2005).
- 57 Since then the ESF has taken place in Paris (2003), London (2004). The next ESF is planned for Athens in 2006.
- 58 Quoted from www.londonsocialforum.org/about-why.htm.
- 59 These are the type of organizations and groups that the organizing committee of the second European Social Forum in Paris addressed (see the French Mobilization Committee's 'Proposal to create a European organizational structure' posted to <http://lists.mobilise.org.uk/old-archives/esf-uk-info>).
- 60 Quoted from the Call of the European Social Movements, 12 November 2002, <http://www.fse-esf.org>.
- 61 For another montage that engages with protest movements, see Sullivan (2003).
- 62 For a discussion of issues of violence, see Sullivan (2005), Mueller (2004) as well as Böhm and Meier Sørensen (2003).
- 63 At that time the regional government was led by the PT party, which then went on to win the national elections in Brazil in 2002 (see also Baiocchi, 2003).
- 64 The city of Florence provided, for example, the forum's conference locations for free, helped with translations as well as provided free temporary accommodation for literally thousands of people in schools, stadiums and other buildings. The London ESF in 2004 lacked this type of generous support by local government. Although the Mayor of London helped financially and organizationally to organize the ESF, he could not offer the type of vast support offered by the local governments in Florence and Paris because of the way UK neo-liberal policies have diminished the public sphere to a bare minimum.
- 65 See, for example, Baiocchi (2003) for a discussion of radical governmental politics in Brazil.
- 66 According to Haddad (2005), a member of the International Council of the WSF and the Brazilian organizing committee, the following number of people took part in the WSFs so far: 20,000 people from 117 countries in Porto Alegre (POA) in 2001; 50,000 from 123 countries in POA in 2002; 100,000 from 123 countries in POA in 2003; 80,000 from 132 countries in Mumbai in 2004; 155,000 from 135 countries in POA in 2005.
- 67 Monbiot's (2003) call, for example, to turn the WSF into a World Parliament has a certain conservative flavour about it. It is conservative because it tries to simply globalize a liberal-democratic system that was originally invented for the political spheres of a nation state. This is, however, not to say that a World Parliament can not, *a priori*, radicalize the liberal-democratic idea of parliamentary democracy. Such a move is possible, as it were, but I am not certain that Monbiot's organizational outline for a World Parliament takes full advantage of the radical possibilities of a politics of impossibility, which would imply an invention of a different democracy the way we know it today.
- 68 Commentaries on Žižek's work are now slowly emerging in organization theory; see, for example, Jones and Spicer (2005); Fleming and Spicer (forthcoming); and Böhm and De Cock (under review).

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Index

- Abrahamson, E. 197n28
- Academia/Academic 7, 9, 19, 21, 73,
76–7, 94–6, 192, 193n4
- Accounting 73–4, 81
- Ackroyd, S. 144–5
- Activism 164, 192
- Actuality 45, 47, 49, 113, 118, 194n8
- Adam, B. 196n25
- Adbusters 164
- Adler, P.S. 148
- Adorno, T.W. 22, 32, 34–5, 42–5,
49–50, 68, 85, 100, 112, 117–20,
132, 188, 193nn2, 3, 4, 5, 194nn7,
8, 9, 10, 195nn13, 14, 15, 197n31,
199n43
- Aesthetics 97, 142
- Affirmation 29, 33, 35, 38–9, 42, 44–5,
49, 51, 53–4, 57, 67, 99, 111–12,
137, 166, 180, 193n4, 195n15
- Africa 98, 170, 179, 199n40
- Aircraft carrier 118
- Aldrich, H.E. 124
- Allegory 46, 94, 198n36
- Alvesson, M. 20, 23, 30, 126, 190
- Ambiguity 119, 121, 146
- Anarchist/Anarchism 85, 158, 165, 189
- Anderson, J.R. 197n32
- Antagonism 17, 34–5, 43, 48, 51, 60,
122, 124–5, 136, 160, 163, 199n47
- classes of 140, 144, 153–4
- and dualism 133
- getting rid of 37–8, 40, 165, 171,
174
- and phenomena 31
- and social organization 62, 65–6,
114, 186
- Laclau and Mouffe's conception of
196n21
- within natural and social world 32
- Anti-capitalist movement 24–5, 66,
139, 162–7, 168–72, 176, 179–81,
189, 200n53, *see also* Social
movements
- political organization of 152–5, 187,
191
- Apocatastasis 49–50, 68, *see also*
Benjamin, W.
- Appreciative inquiry 123
- Araujo, L. 105
- Arcades Project* 33–5, 50–1, 72, 134,
183–5, 189, 193n2, 194n7,
see also Benjamin, W.
- Argyris, C. 31
- Armbrüster, T. 147–50
- Armitage, J. 85
- Art 46, 50–1, 87, 90, 113, 119, 183, 185
- Articulation 4, 18, 21–3, 52, 63–6, 84,
104, 121, 127, 139, 140, 163, 169,
174–5
- Artificial intelligence (AI) 80, 197n32
- Ashcraft, K.L. 31
- Assemblage 105, 128, 137
- Assembly line 74, 77, 85, 141, *see also*
Ford
- ATTAC 170
- Augenblick 46, *see also* Benjamin, W.
- Augé, M. 40
- Aura 46, 87, 90, 97, 196n24, *see also*
Benjamin, W.
- Baiocchi, G. 201nn63, 65
- Banco do Brasil 172
- Baroque 46
- Banerjee, S.B. 128
- Barnett, S. 35
- Barratt, E. 21
- Barred subject 99, *see also* Lacan, J.
- Baum, J.A.C. 8
- Bauman, Z. 79, 150
- Baumard, P. 83–4
- Beauty 97, 142, 183
- Being/being 5, 9, 43–6, 90, 105,
109–10, 112–13, 195n14, *see also*
Heidegger, M.
- Bello, W. 200n53
- Benjamin, A. 46
- Benjamin, W. 18–19, 22, 29, 32–5, 42,
44, 46–51, 53–4, 59, 67–8, 72, 74,
84–96, 100–2, 108–9, 113, 120, 130,
132, 134–5, 142, 150, 181–5,

- 188–90, 193nn1, 2, 4, 194n7,
195n17, 198nn33–35, 37, 38
- Benschop, R. 109
- Berger, P.L. 117
- Biggart, N.W. 148
- Biopower 9–10
- Bircham, E. 163, 165
- Blackler, F. 81, 115, 197n30
- Blaug, R. 157–60, 167
- Body 94, 101, 105, 131, 140, 164,
198n34, 199n46, 200n54
- Böhm, S. 11, 21, 24, 89, 120, 123, 156,
167, 169, 171, 174, 192, 194n7,
201nn62, 68
- Boisot, M.H. 80–1
- Boje, D.M. 126, 146
- Boland, R.J. 115–16
- Borg 86
- Bourdieu, P. 164
- Bové, J. 164
- Bowie, M. 196n20
- Branson, R. 95
- Braverman, H. 140
- Brodersen, M. 193n2
- Brooking, A. 82
- Brown, J.S. 115
- Brown, S.L. 147
- Break 31, 35–8, 40, 107–8, 113, 119,
143, 146
- Buck-Morss, S. 85, 94, 194n7
- Burawoy, M. 22
- Bureaucracy 5, 146–51, 160–1,
200n50
- Burrell, G. 7–9, 11, 19, 31–3, 105,
123–4, 127, 130, 196n25
- Business school 94–6, 192
- Butler, J. 36, 54
- Butler, R. 196n25
- Bürger, P. 198n36
- Callinicos, A. 162, 164–5
- Calori, R. 31–2
- Capital/Capitalism 13–15, 34, 40–1,
59–60, 68, 74–85, 89, 91, 93–6,
102–3, 138–48, 152–3, 180–5, 191,
195n14, 199–200n47, 200n54
and backward cultures 98
Deleuze and Guattari's definition of
134
as dominant discourses 10, 139
global network of 159
'goings-on' of 7
hegemonic discourses of 6, 18, 104,
138, 164, 179
versus labour 155
modern life 111–12
politics of 136
and production 71, 129
technics of 120–1
in Tormey's view 175
- Carousel (merry-go-round) 89
- Carr, A. 31–2
- Carter, P. 75, 126–7
- Caygill, H. 88
- Change 108, 110–11, 113–14, 119–20,
199n42
- Chaos 56–7, 62, 108, 147–8
- Chia, R. 5, 11, 105–6, 108–9, 113
- Chomsky, N. 164
- Chronos* (chronologic) 46–7, 56, 74,
89, 115
- Civil society 6, 9, 15–16, 22–5, 63–4,
99, 138–41, 151–2, 154, 158–9, 161,
168, 171, 180–1, 190–2, 200nn51,
54
- Clark, P. 196n25
- Class struggle 22, 143, 153
- Clegg, S. 8
- Codification/Codifying 82, 84, 86
- Cognitivism/Cognition 33, 50, 81, 91,
100–1, 115, 193n5, 197n32
- Cohen, S. 140
- Collective 88, 110, 125, 152, 156,
197n30, 198n34
- Commensurability 124, 126–7,
see also Incommensurability
- Commodity (commodification) 15, 80,
92–103, 134, 145, 183–6, 198n37,
see also Capital/Capitalism
in Benjamin's views 34, 50, 72, 85,
92, 182
destructive programme of 89
'eternal return' of 18
fetish commodity, *see* Fetishism,
fetish: commodity fetishism
jazz as a 119–20
knowledge as 179
labour power as 139
libidinal economy of 104
Marx analysis of 74, 92, 142
monstrous spectrality 93
shocks of 92, 181

- Communication 82, 85, 88, 90,
 115–16, 124, 144–6, 156, 159
 Communism 13, 64, 133, 157
 Communities 15, 117, 121–2, 124,
 136, 147, 159, 165, 176, 188
 Communities of practice 80, 115–16,
 120, 129, 130–1
 Complexity 15–16, 82, 88, 95, 98, 103,
 105–8, 119, 125–6, 141, 146–7, 154,
 172, 199n47
 Computer 82–3, 86–7, 101
 Consensus 17, 56, 116, 121, 124, 130,
 187
 Constellation 33–4, 47–8, 50–1,
 72, 163–4, 198n38, *see also*
 Benjamin, W.
 Consulting/Consultancy 76–7, 80, 85,
 87, 94–5, 97, 130, 173
 Consumption 94, 142, 197n31, *see*
also Production
 Contingency 10, 15, 40, 47, 63–4,
 67, 93, 110–11, 121, 131–2, 134–5,
 138, 143, 149–50, 160, 185, 187,
 189, 197n30, *see also* Equivalence;
 Unity
 Continuum 18, 49, 51, 57, 68, 89–91
 Contu, A. 20, 23–4, 199n42
 Control 4, 6, 9–10, 16–17, 52, 64, 73,
 77, 79, 81, 86, 88, 91, 108, 110,
 128, 131, 143, 148, 158–9, 165,
 199n47
 Cooper, R. 5, 7, 11–12, 88, 105–7, 112,
 121, 124, 135–7, 200n47
 Corbett, J.M. 20, 86
 Counter-hegemony 139, *see also*
 Hegemony
 Critical Management Studies (CMS)
 20–1
 Critical theory 20, 22, 30–2, 34, 54,
 189–90
 Critique 14, 30, 33–5, 37, 106–12,
 115–17, 120–1, 128, 144–5, 151,
 156, 158–61, 172–3, 180–1, 185–92,
 193nn4, 5, 194n8, 195n13,
 199nn42, 46, 200n51, *see also*
 Critical Management Studies (CMS)
 of Cooper 137
 by Crossley 169–70
 of depositioning project 136
 of enjoyment machine 183
 of Foucauldians 131
 of the ‘goings-on’ of knowledge
 management 72, 84
 of history and society 19–22
 immanent critique 49, 51
 of knowledge society rhetoric 78
 mechanisms of 7
 need for political critique 139–41
 of neoliberal economic policies 164
 of official history 89
 of positivism 8
 of the process-view of organization
 133
 of restricted economy 11–12
 of social organization 45
 of Torfing 66
 Crossley, N. 153–5, 169
 Cummings, S. 196n23
 Dale, K. 7
 Data 80, 82, 88, *see also* Information;
 Knowledge
 Davenport, T.H. 79–80
 Davis, G. 191
 Death 7–8, 17, 46, 51, 53, 74, 90–2,
 107, 193nn2, 4
 De Brosses, C. 199n40
 De Cock, C. 23, 123, 171, 174, 201n68
 De Mey, M. 197n32
 Decision 62–7, 117, 136–8, 149,
 196n26, 201n56, *see also*
 Undecidability
 in Chia’s words 108
 and contemporary social reality 126
 and discourses of dispositioning
 14–15, 19
 Laclau and Mouffe’s views of 161,
 168
 and organization theory 3, 40, 58,
 102, 113, 132, 147, 187, 189
 and pluralism 128
 and political events 151, 155, 172–3,
 180
 in the structures 59, 61, 132, 167
 Deconstruction 16, 38, 41, 137
 David Knight’s argument for 131–2
 and Derrida 53–7
 and destruction 30
 and discourse 141
 and impossibility 32, 52–68
 meaning of 135
see also Destruction

- Deetz, S. 20, 30, 190
- Deleuze, G. 130
 and Guattari 14–15, 18, 35–6, 40, 68, 89, 91, 121, 134, 142, 150, 159–60, 191
 and Hegel's dialectics 37
- Democracy/Democratization 16–18, 63–4, 150, 158, 165, 171–5, 190, 200nn52, 54, 201n67
 and capitalism 13–14, 133, 187
 and conflict resolution 167–8
 between groups 186
 and liberalists 149
 parliamentary democracy 156, 167
 for repositioning organization 24
- Depositioning 3, 10–16, 17–25, 29–33, 39–41, 59–60, 141–9, 152, 184–90, *see also* Positioning; Repositioning
 affirmation of 67
 and Benjamin's words 87
 in contemporary organization 179–81
 and deconstruction 54–6
 description of 160
 and Heidegger 44–5
 impossibilities of 134–7
 organization 104–37
 and positioning 138–9
- Derrida, J. 12–19, 22, 35–41, 52–8, 62, 67, 75, 93, 112, 124, 131–4, 151, 185, 196nn18, 19
- Desire 60, 99, 131, 142, 161
- Destruction 52–4, 67, 87–93, 113, 161, 193n4, 194n11, *see also*
 Deconstruction
 in Benjamin's eyes 85, 132, 182–5
 and fetishism 102
 and idea of politics 22
 philosophical traditions of 30–4, 41
 as political event 42–51
- Deterritorialization 14–15, 40, 68, 89, 91, 128, 134, 136, 142, 146–7, 159–60, *see also* Deleuze, G.; Guattari, F.; Reterritorialization
- Dialectics 42–6, 66, 101–2, 139, 194n8, 200n47, *see also*
 Benjamin, W.; Hegel, G.W.F.;
 Non-synthesis; Synthesis
 and Benjamin 188–90
 and forces 113
 and impossibility 22–4, 38–41
 and politics of thoughts 29–41
 between antagonisms and equivalence 62
 between negativity and positivity 67–8
 between order and change 108
 between positioning and
 depositioning 19, 180, 184–5
 between possibility and impossibility 58, 132
 between production and domination 185
 dialectical image 32–5, 48–51, 59, 90–1, 113
 in organization theory 30–2
- Dialogue 114–16, 118, 121–4, 127–30, 132–3, 136, 146–7, 166–7, 196n26
- Diani, M. 156
- Différance 12, 124, 134–5, *see also*
 Derrida, J.
- Difference 10, 35, 39, 54, 127–33, 146, 161, 169, 174–5, 186–7, 191, 196nn22, 26
 in capitalist system 75
 and the concept of being 45
 and depositioning discourses 41, 58, 62
 and Marx 98
 between method and movement 52
 between negativity and positivity 42
 in organization theory 168
 philosophical differences 123–5
 in political project 109–13, 143
 and strategic engagements 23
 in workplace dynamics 140
- Discontinuity 13–14, 17–18, 37–9, 43, 45, 89, 91, 113
- Discourse 3–10, 14–25, 30–41, 75–82, 84–5, 91, 101, 103–10, 113–28, 135–41, 147–52, 162–9, 179–92, 200n53
 anti-capitalist discourse 139, 162, 171, 181, 200n53
 Benjamin's discourse 50
 and 'field of discursivity' 62
 Hegemony discourse 6, 14–15, 63–8, 71–2, 95–6, 148, 158–9, 165, 184–5
 Lacanian theorization 60
 and post-dualistic transparency 129–34

- Disorder 108, 135–6, 157–8
- Diversity 54, 124, 128–9, 143, 146, 155, 162, 165–7, 169–70, 200n54
- Donaldson, L. 8
- Donnellon, A. 146
- Dream-world 34, *see also* Benjamin, W.
- Drucker, P.F. 13–14, 17, 71, 76, 91, 197n27
- du Gay, P. 95, 147–51, 156, 160, 200n51
- Duguid, P. 115
- Dunkerley, D. 8
- Dynamis* 47, 105, 107–8, 120, 143, *see also* Stasis
- Economy 4–6, 8–19, 22–5, 54, 63–5, 75, 94–9, 106, 128, 164–8, 196n26, 197nn28, 31, 199n41, 200nn51, 55
and capitalist production 75
and fetishism 104
and organization 111, 138–44
and politics 148, 150–4, 161–2, 170, 172, 180–1, 190–2
knowledge as a resource for 71–2, 77–88, 94–9
of subjectivities 103
- Egan, D. 23, 36, 92, 193n4
- Eisenhardt, K.M. 147
- Elliott, C. 23
- Empire 6, 10, 36, 40, 77, 95, 128, 142–9, 160–1, 163, 167, 170, 179, 181, 191, *see also* Hardt, M.; Negri, A.
- Emplacement 54, 67, 87, 103, 107, 109, 127, 148
hegemonic emplacement 65, 75, 84, 142, 161, 174, 186–8
of modernity 4–6, 8–10, 85
of Parisian modernity 33–4
- Engels, F. 142
- Engeström, Y. 115
- Entrepreneurship/Entrepreneurialism 13, 23, 65, 93–5, 148
- ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 20, 201n56
- Epistemology 8–9, 20, 51, 78, 96, 114, 123, 194n7
- Equivalence 60, 77
chains of equivalence 66, 96, 149, 163, 168, 175–6, 190
logic of 62, 146, 161, 174, *see also* Laclau, E.; Mouffe, C.
- Essentialism 31, 60, 63–4, 141, 150
- Eternal return 18, 48, 74, 120
- European Union (EU) 163
- Event 106–11, 117, 119, 126, 129, 195n15, 196n21
Benjamin's event 46–51
of capitalist reality 17
of deconstruction and impossibility 52–68
of destruction 42–51
of discourses 14
hegemonic events 19
knowledge as 84–92
of modernity 8
of politics 24, 29–30, 33–5, 38, 105, 132–4, 151–2, 159–63, 187, 189
of repositioning 167–76, 181–5
of resistance 134–7
- Experience 38–41, 89–92, 106, 108, 118, 197n30, 198n38, 199n40, 200n54
of Benjamin 182, 184
historical 33–5, 48, 88
of reality 72
undecidability 59
- Exploitation 78, 140, 144, 199n47
- Failure 35, 39, 60–1, 68, 155, 157, 180, 189–90, 194n5
of repositioning 185–8
- Fantasy 60, 93, 98–102, 171, 182
- Farrell, J.J. 153, 194n11
- Fascism, Nazi 45, 51, 193n2, 195n15
- Feminist movement 165
- Fetishism, fetish 24, 47, 131, 160, 196n26, 198–9n40, *see also* Sexual fetishism
commodity fetishism 18, 72, 96–102, 104, 120, 142, 145, 182
and depositioning 3, 15
and hegemony 96–103
identity fetishism 144–5
and knowledge management 86
- Field of discursivity 10, 18, 39, 58, 62, 186, *see also* Laclau, E.; Mouffe, C.
- Film 46, 50, 87, 90, 147, *see also* Cinema
- Fiske, S.T. 116
- Flâneur* 50, 72, 97, 134, 142, 145, 181–3, 194n6, 195n17, 198nn35, 37, 38, *see also* Benjamin, W.
and Arcades Project 50

- and fashionable commodities 34
- and prostitute 92–6, 100, 103–4, 130, 179
- Fleming, P. 20, 23, 78, 143, 156, 174, 201n68
- Flores, F. 197n32
- Ford 74, 77, 85, 137, 199n47, *see also*
 - Assembly line
- Forgetting 31, 37, 66
- Form/formation* 4, 11, 37
 - of time and space 3
- Foucauldian organization theory 15, 125, 131, 139, 143–5, 154
- Foucalt, M. 9–10, 12, 58, 64–5, 130–1, 143, 191
- Fournier, V. 8, 20, 158–9
- Fragment/Fragmentation 14, 29–30, 33–5, 40, 47–8, 50–1, 57, 112, 131, 143, 157, 183, 198n36
- Frank, T. 148, 164
- Frankfurt School 20, 31, 34, 190, 193n3, *see also* Adorno, T.W.; Benjamin, W.
- Free market 16, *see also* Neo-liberalism
- Freud, S. 88, 99
- Fukuyama, F. 13–14, 17, 37, 133, 187
- Fuller, S. 95
- Functionalism 19, 34, 123–4, 127

- G8 163
- Gabriel, Y. 127
- Gebert, D. 147–8, 150
- Gebild* 4, 10, *see also* Heidegger, M.
- Gergen, K.J. 114–16, 122–3, 128
- Germany 153, 155, 157, 200n52
- Gestell* 4–5, *see also* Heidegger, M.
- Gherardi, S. 196n25
- Gibbons, M. 95–6
- Giddens, A. 124
- Gleber, A. 195n17
- Globalization 128, 144, 148, 162, 164, 166, 170, 179, 201n67
- Goings-on 15–18, 133–4, 151, 179, 182, 184, 187, 195n17, *see also* Heidegger, M.
 - of capitalism 66, 68, 71, 91, 104, 112, 139–40, 142, 147, 185
 - of capitalist modernity 34, 47
 - description of the term 5
 - and fetishism 98, 102, 120, 145
 - Heidegger's reference as 65, 75
 - and knowledge management 7, 72, 77, 79, 84, 96
 - of the modern positioning project 12
 - of reality 54
- Goldenson, R. 81
- Government 66, 148, 151, 162–3, 165, 170–2, 191, 196n26, 200n54, 201nn63, 64, 65
- Gramsci, A. 6, 9–10, 22, 63–4, 138, 180–1, 191
- Grant, R.M. 76, 81
- Grassroots movements 158, 167, 173, 175, *see also* Social movements
- Green movement/Green party 153–4, 156–7, 165, 200n52
- Grey, C. 8, 20, 199n42
- Grugulis, I. 139, 148
- Guattari, F. 14–15, 18, 35–7, 40, 68, 89, 91, 105, 121, 134, 142, 150, 159–60, 191
- Guillet De Monthoux, P. 158
- Gurvitch, G. 196n25

- Haddad, S. 172, 201n66
- Hage, J. 197n27
- Hall, P.A. 196n26
- Hamlet* 16
- Hancock, P. 11, 31, 109
- Handy, C. 197n27
- Hardt, M. 6, 9–10, 36–7, 40, 66, 77–8, 113, 128, 141–8, 160–1, 163, 167, 169–71, 174, 189, 191, 197n29
- Hardy, C. 129–31
- Harney, S. 171, 200n51
- Hassard, J. 11, 124, 128, 140, 196n25
- Hatch, M.J. 119–21
- Haworth, N. 23
- Heckscher, C.C. 146
- Hegel, G.W.F. 30–2, 35–9, 44, 66, 101, 189
- Hegemony 14–16, 22–5, 41, 62–8, 128, 136–43, 148, 151–2, 158–61, 164–8, 171–6, 179–81, 183–92, 196n26, *see also* Counter-hegemony
 - analysis of 111
 - of capital 104–7, 121
 - concept of 10, 18, 29, 132, 146
 - and depositioning 39
 - and the fetish knowledge commodity 96–103

- Hegemony – *continued*
 of management knowledge 6–7,
 71–103
 possibility and impossibility,
 described by 58
 provisional hegemony 57
- Heidegger, M. 53, 90, 194nn11, 12,
 195nn13, 14, 15, 198n32
 Adorno's response to 42–6, 112
 'goings-on' referred by 65, 75
 and positions and positioning 4–5,
 9–10, 87
- Hellström, T. 31
- Hertz, N. 148, 164
- Heterogeneity 11, 38, 107, 165,
see also Homogeneity
- Hierarchy 6, 8–9, 13, 55–6, 106, 117,
 142, 146–8, 155–8, 165, 167–8, 173–4
- Historical bloc 6, 9, 22, 64, 181,
see also Gramsci, A.
- History 33–51, 53, 64–7, 85, 88–93,
 99, 109, 113–15, 129–30, 150,
 182–3, 187–8, 193nn2, 3, 194n12,
 198n38, 199n40, 201n56
 of capitalist work organization 74
 and dialectical image 33, 59
 discourse of hegemony 63
 end of 17–19
 Fukuyama's discontinuity of 14, 133–4
 of Labour process 139, 157
 and mobilization 175
 as progress 32
 and social movements 152–4
 textual field of 56
- Holloway, J. 159–60
- Holmer-Nadesan, M. 196n25
- Holocaust 150, 195n15
- Homogeneity 37–8, 91, 169, 171,
see also Heterogeneity
- Horizontals 174, *see also* Verticals
- Hoobler, J.M. 129
- Hosking, D.-M. 116
- Huber, G.P. 76
- Hughes, S. 11, 23
- Hybridity 160
- Hypertext 80, 83
- Hyslop, A.G. 23
- Identity 59–61, 65–6, 99, 122, 127–32,
 142–6, 152, 154, 163–4, 176
 and dialectics 38–40
- identification 60–2, 66, 96, 101, 103,
 144, 149, 182
- identity fetishism 144–5
- local constructions of 136, 139, 180–1
- politics of 168
- and social forum 174
- and social struggle 63
- Ideology 13–14, 23, 117–20, 127,
 133–4, 142–3, 166, 190, 193n5
 and capitalism 100, 187
 and commodity fetishism 101
 and Derrida's views 17
 and hegemony 67
 and management knowledge 75, 84,
 114
- Nazi ideology 45, 195n15
- and neo-liberalism 148
- of organization theory 8
- and Parisian modernity 33–4
- Illumination 48, 51, 59, 90, 184, 189
- Image 8, 17–20, 74, 84–93, 97, 100,
 104, 106–7, 109, 111, 113
 of the bureaucracy 150–1
 'dialectical image' 32–5, 47–51, 59,
 90–1, 113
 empty spaces for 119
 of the ESF 167
 'eternal image' 18, 33–4, 89–90
 and Heidegger 4, 10–11, 87
 of knowledge management 84–5
 and metaphoric approach 126–8
 and organizational analysis 24, 41,
 45, 71
 and positioning 72
 of traditional state politics 159
- Imagin-i-zation 33, 126, *see also*
 Morgan, G.
- Immanence 191
- Immanent critique 34, 49, 51,
 193nn4, 5
- Immaterial labour 78, 141, *see also*
 Hardt, M. and Negri, A.
- Immortality 91
- Impossibility, *see also* Laclau, E.;
 Mouffe, C.
 of an 'absolute form' 38
 concept of 129, 181, 187–9, 192
 and deconstruction 32, 52–68
 of depositioning 134–7
 dialectics as 38–41
 of fixing organization 107

- and hegemony 29
- and organization 10, 22–5, 45, 104, 109, 113, 121
- politics of 201n67
- and possibility 51
- society as 61–3
- of ‘the movement’ 138–76
- Improvisation 119
- Incommensurability 123–8, *see also* Commensurability
- Industrial relations 23
- Indymedia 164
- Information 72, 77, 79–86, 89–92, 106, 115, 154, 164, 172, 197n32, *see also* Data; Knowledge
- Information and communication technology (ICT) 85
- Innovation 14, 50, 72, 76, 81, 119–20, 122, 154, 162–3
- Institution/Institutionalization 13, 17, 56, 62, 66, 71, 106–7, 110–11, 114, 141, 194n10, 200n51
- and Foucault’s subject 130–1
- and knowledge management 7–11, 43
- and social movements 155–61, 168–70
- and social organization 5, 149–51, 173–5, 190–1
- Intellectual capital 81–2, *see also* Knowledge
- International Council (IC) 172–3, 201n66, *see also* World Social Forum (WSF)
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) 148, 163
- Internet 21, 86, 88, 164
- Interpretativism 123
- Jack, G. 21
- Jackson, N. 75, 126–7
- Jacques, R. 76–7, 141
- James, W. 197n30
- Jaros, S.J. 140–1, 199n46, 200nn47, 48
- Jay, M. 193n3
- Jazz 119–21, 147, 199n43
- Jermier, J.M. 140
- Jones, C. 11, 13–14, 20, 23, 120, 130, 196nn18, 20, 201n68
- Jouissance*, *see also* Lacan, J. 61, 112
- Kaghan, W. 124
- Kairos* 46–7, 195n16
- Kant, I. 31, 189
- Kavanagh, D. 105
- Keraghel, C. 166
- Khalfa, P. 166, 170
- Kilduff, M. 116
- King, D. 197n30, 200n53
- Kingsnorth, P. 200n53
- Kirkeby, O.F. 87
- Klein, N. 148, 163–4, 169
- Knights, D. 15, 126, 130–3, 135, 139–40, 143–5, 148, 154, 199n45
- Knowledge 3–10, 13, 25, 32–5, 43–8, 52, 59, 65, 68, 71–104, 109–18, 120–1, 124, 128, 130–8, 141–5, 152, 179–85, 194n8, 195, 13, 197n27, 199n42
- Cunning knowledge 184
- Explicit knowledge 81–4, 94
- Know-how 197n30
- Knowing 5, 51, 77, 86, 94, 113, 115, 173, 183–4, 197nn30, 32
- Knowledge creation 76, 82–3
- Knowledge economy 13
- Knowledge management, *see individual entry*
- Knowledge manager 72, 76, 83–4, 92–6, 103–4, 120, 179, 183
- Knowledge society 71, 73–9, 101
- Knowledge transmission 80, 82, 98, 115–16
- Know-what 197n30
- Management knowledge, *see* Knowledge management
- Mode 1/2 of knowledge 95, 115, 122
- Sociology of knowledge 114, 117–18
- Tacit knowledge 81–4
- Knudsen, C. 124
- Kondo, D. 130
- Korten, D.C. 148
- Kriesi, H. 153
- Kumar, K. 197n27
- Kvale, S. 116
- Labour 17, 44, 64, 71, 93–4, 97–8, 131, 133, 162, 164–5, 175, 180, 196n26, 199nn45, 47, 200nn47, 52, *see also* Immaterial labour; Labour Process Theory
- and dialectics 38
- and knowledge management 84

- Labour – *continued*
 and organization 5, 22, 73–9
 politics in labour process 139–46,
 151–6, 191
 Labour Process Theory (LPT) 23, 77,
 138–41, 144–5, 191, 199nn45, 46,
 47, 200n47, *see also* Labour
 Lacan, J. 59–61, 111, 135, 182,
 196nn20, 22, 198n36, 199n41
 theories of 59, 93, 96, 99–101, 186
 Lack 59–62, 73, 99–103, 111–12, 135,
 149, 156, 160, 167, 171, 182, 186,
see also Lacan, J.
 Laclau, E. 132, 135, 167–8, 171, 190–1,
 196nn21, 22, 197n29
 and the concept of Being 45
 and knowledge management 96
 and social organization 109, 127,
 129, 149, 161, 163
 and dialectical process 38–40, 102–3
 and ‘logic of difference’ 174–6
 and Mouffe, political philosophy of
 hegemony 57–9
 and hegemony, concepts 6, 14, 87,
 101, 142–3, 145–6
 and hegemonic discourse 10, 15, 18,
 21–2, 61–6, 185–7
 Lam, A. 81
 Land, C. 86
 Language 9, 14, 17–22, 40, 45–6, 65,
 79–80, 82, 111–30, 143, 160–4, 169,
 184, 195n14, 197n30, 198n36
 Linguaging 116, 129–31, 133, 136,
see also Knowledge: knowing
 Larana, E. 153
 Lash, S. 85, 93
 Lave, J. 115–16, 119
 Law, J. 109
 Leadership 64, 156, 170
 Lehman, D. 54
 Leslie, E. 85–6
 Levitt, B. 76
 Levy, D.L. 23
 Lewin, A. 120
 Liberalism 17–18, 23, 64–7, 95, 138,
 146, 152, 157, 160–70, 196n26,
 200n54, *see also* Neo-liberalism
 and bureaucracy 146–51
 Libertarianism 148–9, *see also*
 Liberalism; Neo-liberalism
 Libidinal economy 99, 101, 103–4, 142
 Life 5, 9–11, 15–16, 36, 42, 45, 50–3,
 72, 78, 81, 86, 88–9, 91–3, 96,
 98–9, 103–11, 114, 117, 122, 137,
 143, 147, 149, 154, 163–4, 168,
 176, 179, 182, 193n2, 195n14,
 199n40
 Linstead, S. 11, 107–8, 128
 Luckmann, T. 117
 Lynn, G.S. 82
 Machine/Machinic 9, 15, 40, 44, 85–7,
 89, 91, 101–2, 119, 134, 136–7, 142,
 150, 157, 159, 179, 182–3, 186,
see also Deleuze, G.; Guattari, F.
 Management, *see also* Critical
 Management Studies (CMS);
 Knowledge management;
 Management knowledge viii, 6–5,
 20–5, 71–96, 102–9, 112, 115, 117,
 120–3, 128–9, 131, 136, 140, 146–7,
 149, 152, 179–81, 185–6, 190–2,
 196n26, 197n28, 199n42, 45
 Management education 23
 Management guru 13, 72, 84
 Managerialism 6–8, 151
 Public sector management 95, 148,
 151
 Mannheim, K. 117–18
 March, J. 76
 Marsden, R. 131
 Marx, K. 47, 94, 145, 153, 165, 179,
 182, 191, 199n41
 and commodity 92–3
 and Derrida 16–17
 and dialectical thoughts 31–5
 and hegemony 63, 96–101
 labour process theory of 77–8, 84
 and time management 74–5
 work and subjectivity theories of
 131, 139–42
 Maturana, H. 116
 Mayday 167, *see also* Protest
 McAdam, D. 191
 McCarthy, J.D. 191
 McDonald 74, 163–4, 196n24
 McKinley, W. 124
 Media 81, 162
 Medicine 7
 Mehra, A. 116
 Meier Sørensen, B. 136–7, 201n62
 Melucci, A. 153–5

- Memory 88, 99, 101
 Mertens, T. 170
 Metaphor 83, 86, 115, 119–20, 125–6, 196n22
 Metaphysics 43, 53, 92, 194n12, 195n14
 Method 16, 30, 35, 37, 39, 41–2, 52–3, 114, 123, 132, 162, 168, 194n7, 200n47
 Michels, R. 156–7, 160
 Mingers, J. 116
 Migrants 16, 170
 Military connotations 8, 119
 Minor language 35–6, 113, *see also* Deleuze, G.; Guattari, F.
 Missac, P. 89, 134
 Mitchell, W.J.T. 98
 Modernism, *see* Postmodernism
 Monbiot, G. 148, 164, 201n67
 Mone, M.A. 124
 Money 74, 98, 148
 Montage 34–5, 50–1, 167, 189, 194n7, 201n61, *see also* Benjamin, W.
 Morgan, Gareth 8–9, 31–3, 123–7, 148
 Morgan, Glenn 15
 Mouffe, C.
 and hegemony, political philosophy of 57–9
 and Laclau, E., *see individual entry*
 Movement 3–4, 22–5, 47, 49–68, 72, 88, 105–13, 180–3, 187–92, 194n11, 197n31, 200nn52, 54, 201nn60, 61
 of anti-capitalists 162–7
 deconstruction 132–7
 depositioning as 12
 and dialectics 35, 38
 impossibilities of the 138–76
 of knowledge management 72, 80, 85
 between negativity and positivity 30–2, 41–4
 Mueller, T. 158, 201n62
 Multiculturalism 128, 147
 Multiplicity 10, 12, 15, 39–40, 64, 66, 104–15, 122, 126, 129, 135, 142–4, 160–2, 165–70, 174–5, 181, 185–6
 Multitude 77, 160–1, 169, 171, 174–5, 200n49, *see also* Empire; Hardt, M.; Negri, A.
 Munro, I. 10, 167
 Munro, R. 6, 135–6
 Music 119–20
 Nation state 16–17, 201n67
 Negative dialectics 35, 43, 49, 58, 68, 188, 194n8, *see also* Adorno, T.W.
 Negativity 22, 30, 32, 37, 41–5, 52–4, 57, 66–8, 193n5, 194n11
 Negri, A. 6, 9, 10, 36–7, 40, 66, 77–8, 128, 141–8, 160–3, 167, 169–71, 174, 189–91, 197n29
 Neo-liberalism 64–7, 95, 148–9, 200n54, *see also* Liberalism; Libertarianism
 Network 10, 81–3, 105, 116, 142, 144–5, 155, 157–60, 164, 167, 169, 170–3, 179, 200n54
 Newell, P. 23
 Newsome, K. 140
 Nietzsche, F. 36, 53
 No Logo 163–4, 169, *see also* Klein, N.
 Nonaka, I. 72, 76, 81–3
 Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) 148, 162, 165, 171, 174, 191, 200n54
 Non-place 40, 93, 144, 161
 Non-synthesis 35, 49, 67, 103, 113, 129, 135, 188, *see also* Dialectics
 Notes from Nowhere 200n53
 Nowotny, H. 196n25
 Now-time 47–8, *see also* Benjamin, W.
 Nuclear weapons 17
 O'Doherty, D. 130, 199n46
 Objective 92–3, 97–8, 120, 144, 174, 193n5, 194n5, 196n21, 199n40, 200n47, *see also* Subjective
 knowledge as 81, 116
 for management 75
 of middle-class knowledge workers 77
 Newtonian objective 74
 and social relations of reality 33, 61–2, 100
 and subjective 50, 56, 59–60, 123, 130–1
 Ogbor, J.O. 23
 Ontology 9–10, 43, 53, 78, 96, 103, 105, 109–11, 114, 123, 129–30, 195n14
 Open space 57, 166–8, 171–4, *see also* Social forum
 Openness 18, 22, 40, 42, 62, 124, 129, 166–7, 174

- Order 5–8, 18, 43–9, 55–6, 58–64,
74–5, 107, 160, 168, 198n36,
199n47, 201n56
versus change 108
in dialectics 38–9
versus disorder 108
in history 89
of modernity 93, 97–100
'new world order' 16
in selectivity organization 132–6,
148, 184, 186–7
and social movement 157–8
and space 144
in workplace relations 140
'world order' 16
- Organization, *see also* Social forum;
Social movements
Disorganization 12, 39, 106–8,
112–13, 135–6, 184, 186
Organization Science 76, 119
Organization theory, *see separate entry*
Organization 4, 196n25, 200n50
- Organizational learning 23, 72, 76,
199n42
- Osborne, P. 46, 198n33
- Osterweil, M. 174
- Other, the Other 59–62, 90, 93, 96,
98–103, 182, 198n36, *see also*
Lacan, J.
- Palonen, E. 192
- Paradigms, sociological paradigms 9,
123–8, 153, *see also* Burrell, G.;
Moran, G.
- Parker, I. 114
- Parker, M. 5–6, 10–11, 20, 71, 73, 79,
109, 131, 133, 147, 150, 164, 169,
199n45
- Parliament 41, 156–7, 167, 172, 174,
201n67
- Patomäki, H. 172–3
- Peters, T. 147–8
- Petrobas 172
- Phantasmagoria 34, 85, 100, 134, *see*
also Benjamin, W.
- Phillips, N. 124, 129–30
- Pietz, W. 98–9
- Pina e Cunha, M. 31
- Piore, M.J. 74
- Pluralism 122–9, 134, 136, 175
- Polanyi, M. 81
- Political event 17, 19, 24, 33–4, 41,
105, 129, 132–7, 151–2, 161, 169,
174, 176, 180, 187
of deconstruction and impossibility
52–68
of destruction 42–51
- Police 10, 128, 167
- Politics, political
Anti-politics 159
Depoliticizing 16, 19–20, 105, 133,
138–9, 180
Infra-politics 156–7, 159
Micro-politics 22, 174
Ontological politics 109
Para-politics 128
Political economy 14, 141
Political event, *see separate entry*
Political party 152, 154, 156–7, 161,
166, 171, 174–5
Post-politics 133
Relational politics 122–3, 128
- Porto Alegre 165–6, 170, 172–3, 175,
201nn56, 66, *see also* World Social
Forum
- Positioning 33, 43–4, 48, 51, 54, 64,
120–1, 134, *see also* Depositioning;
Repositioning
of organization theory 3–25, 29–31,
39–40, 107, 138–9, 179–88
of organization 4–11
of organization, the hegemony of
management knowledge
71–103, 146, 174
- Positivism 4, 6, 8–9, 43
- Post-bureaucracy 146
- Post-dualistic/Post-dualism 129–34, 135
- Postmodernism 3, 20, 30, *see also*
Modernism
- Poststructuralism 22, 30, 54, 189
- Power 11–14, 18, 21, 33–4, 38, 43, 46,
64–8, 74, 78, 86–9, 112–18, 125–32,
136–45, 150–4, 158–66, 171–2,
197n31, 199nn40, 47, 200nn47, 51
of capitalist phantom-state 17, 103
of disciplinary institution 10, 110
and deconstruction 56
and hegemony 183–6, 189
and knowledge 3, 9
and old-style party 170
and re-positioning 181
and 'the movement' 175

- Powers, C.H. 197n27
- Pragmatism 6, 8, 43, 133
- Prichard, C. 72, 84
- Privatization 148, 164, *see also*
- Neo-liberalism
- Process 15–16, 86–7, 102, 116–36,
148–54, 159, 161, 164, 172–5, 180,
184–91, 200n54, 201n56
- of capitalism 100
 - of depositioning 19–20
 - of dialectics 32, 35, 37–9, 45, 49, 58,
68
 - of diffusion of management
197nn23, 31, 32
 - in knowledge management 73–8, 92
 - in knowledge-creation 83–4, 115
 - of labour, politics in 139–46,
199nn45, 47, 200n47
 - of McDonaldisation 196n24
 - organization as a 3–5, 7, 10–12, 23,
30, 41, 105–13, 138
 - of structuring 194n11
- Production 15–16, 22, 33–4, 50, 66,
72–9, 83, 86–91, 101, 105, 129–30,
134, 150, 154, 159, 197n31,
199n47, *see also* Consumption
and dialectics 185
- knowledge 43–5, 85, 94–8
 - in organization 9, 11, 64, 113, 120,
136–46, 176
- Profit 75, 80, 139, 146, 148, 199n47
- Progress 18, 32–5, 38, 40, 47–8, 74, 79,
84–7, 89–91, 142, 173, 188
- Prostitute 50, 72, 97, 100, 103–4, 130,
142, 179, 181, 183, 198n38, *see also*
Benjamin, W.
- and flâneur 92–6
- Protest 24, 153, 162–3, 166–7, 170,
175, 187, 201n61
- Prusak, L. 79–80
- Psychoanalysis 60
- Psychology 4–5, 46, 54, 59, 86, 99,
194n5, 197n28
- Psychologism 113–21
- Quotations 34, 50–1, 189, 193n2,
194n7, *see also* Benjamin, W.
- Radical
- Radical change 123, *see also*
Paradigms
 - Radical humanism 123, *see also*
Paradigms
 - Radical social change 29, 152, 158,
163
 - Radical structuralism 123, *see also*
Paradigms
- Railways 85
- Rationality 12, 39, 71, 85, 98, 147
- Reagan, R. 64, 162
- Real, the Real 60–1, 112, 135, 198n36,
see also Lacan, J.
- Reality 33–4, 38–43, 49, 51, 72, 82,
198n38
- 'goings-on' of 54–6
 - hegemonic reality 96
 - knowledge of 91–2
 - objectivity of 60–5
 - social and political 193n5
 - social reality 3–4, 6, 9–13, 15–17,
19–20, 30–1, 67, 97, 100–37,
143, 145–9, 164, 174, 180,
182–8
- Reclaim the Streets 164
- Reed, M. 11, 20, 31, 109–12, 126, 131,
158–9
- Reedy, P. 158–9
- Regulation 123, *see also* Paradigms
- Relativism 20, 29
- Religion 63, 90, 98–9, 199n40
- Remembering/Membering/
Dismembering 47, 55
- Repositioning 41, 71, *see also*
- Depositioning; Positioning
and Benjamin's event 46
 - and depositioning 29, 31, 33, 55
 - events of 181–5
 - failures of 185–8
 - futures of 188–92
 - of organization theory 179–92
 - of organization 16–24, 138–76
- Representation 5, 8, 12, 61, 71, 88,
103, 105–6, 109, 115, 128, 140, 145,
153–4, 156, 166, 170, 172, 184,
196n26
- Reproduction 41, 43, 45, 50, 78,
87–91, 94, 96, 130–1, 139–42,
149–51, 173, 175, 181, 183,
195n17, 197n31, 200n47
- in Benjamin's view 34
 - in deconstruction 53
 - of hegemony 75–6, 102–4

Reproduction – *continued*

- in management 11
 - in method 52
 - of value system 7
- Resistance 10, 12, 15, 23, 39–40, 58, 65–8, 84, 103, 138–9, 143, 147, 156–61, 164, 166–7, 169–74, 184, 186–92, 200n47
- event of 134–7
 - politics of 104–37
 - of positioning projects 180
- Reterritorialization 14–15, 18, 40, 89, 121, 128, 134, 142–3, 159–60, *see also* Deleuze, G.; Deterritorialization; Guattari, F.
- Reyes, O. 174
- Rhizomatic movement 157, 160, 167
- Ritzer, G. 74, 196n24
- Roos, J. 82, 96
- Rose, E. 23
- Rose, G. 193n3, 195n13
- Rose, N. 10, 162
- Saad-Filho, A. 200n53
- Sabel, C.F. 74, 196n25
- Same/Sameness 39, 44, 47, 49, 52, 54, 57–8, 66, 74, 85, 89, 91, 97–9, 101, 104, 120, 125, 131, 158–9, 163, 172–3, 181, 184, 194n11, 197n32, 199nn41, 47
- Sandwich-man 93–4, 198n37, *see also* *Flâneur*
- Sassoon, A.S. 22
- Scherer, A.G. 127–8
- Schlosser, E. 164
- SchNEWS 164
- Schön, D. 31
- Science 7, 114, 117, 124, 157, 165
- Scott, A. 152–6
- Scott, J.C. 156
- Scribner, S. 115
- Seattle 162–3, 166, *see also* Anti-capitalist movement
- Sen, J. 166
- Senker, J. 81
- Sensemaking 15, 117–19, 121
- Sexual fetishism 99, *see also* Fetishism; fetish
- Sewell, G. 74
- Shareholder 65, 73, 75, 163, 196n26
- Shenhav, Y. 74, 77
- Shock 47, 50, 72, 94, 96, 102, 113, 181–2
- knowledge as 84–92
- Sievers, B. 91
- Sloterdijk, P. 88
- Smith, C. 131, 140, 200n47
- Social constructionism 33, 113–29, 130
- Social forum viii, 25, 165–8, 170–5, 187, 191, 200nn54, 55, 201nn56, 59
- European Social Forum (ESF) 166–7, 170–5, 201nn57, 59, 64
 - World Social Forum (WSF) 165–6, 170–3, 200nn54, 55, 201nn56, 66–7, *see also* World Economic Forum (WEF)
- Social movement(s) 23–4, 64, 138, 151–9, 160–2, 166, 169, 174–5, 180, 191–2, 200n54, 201n60
- New social movements 64, 151–61, 166, 174
 - Old social movements 153, 156, 161
- Socialist/Socialism 63, 153, 157, 165
- Society, the social 24, 45, 49, 58–66, 78, 85–8, 93, 97, 99, 102–3, 110, 113–14, 116–21, 124, 129–31, 136–7, 142–55, 164–70, 173–4, 176, 181, 183, 186–8, 197n31, 199n47, 200n52
- Soskice, D. 196n26
- Space 4–6, 21, 34, 46, 48, 51, 55, 57, 62–5, 73–7, 85, 139, 144, 153, 158, 163–4, 166–8, 171–5, 182, 195n16, 196n25, 198n34, 36
- for dialectics 30, 38
 - of management 128
 - in organization theory 8
 - and time 3, 12, 50, 81–2, 93, 105–6, 109–10, 118–19, 121, 129–30, 132, 136, 187
- Spectacle 92
- Speculation 47, 68, 72, 90–4, 102, 111–12, 126, 193n4
- dialectical speculation 35–42
 - and Heidegger's thinking 45
 - and impossibility 29–30
 - out of historical image 19
 - about political events 32, 34–5
 - about society reposition 14
- Speed 85, 89, 93
- Spender, J.-C. 197n30
- Spicer, A. 23, 156, 174, 196n20, 201n68
- Spinoza 191

- Spoelstra, S. 21
 Squires, J. 41, 175
 Standstill 19, 32, 47–8
 Starbuck, W.H. 73, 76, 163, 196n23
Stasis 7, 47, 49, 105, 107, *see also*
 Dynamis
 State 9, 16–17, 45, 64, 85, 111, 148,
 151–9, 167–8, 170–1, 190–2,
 195n15, 200n51, 201n67, *see also*
 Government
 Stavrakakis, Y. 60, 196n22
Stellen 4, *see also* Heidegger, M.
 Stewart, T.A. 82
 Stiglitz, J. 164
 Storyteller 90
 Strategy 51, 55, 59, 72–3, 76, 78,
 166–71, 181, 183, 188–92, 199n44
 in depositioning 15–16, 107–8
 incommensurability as 124
 for organizational capability 83–4,
 160–4
 of ‘personal empowerment’ 125
 political strategy 22–4, 29, 31–2,
 62–4, 139, 174
 of ‘total opposition’ 37
 Strati, A. 196n25
 Styhre, A. 105, 109
 Sub-conscious 84
 Subject
 Subjectification 5
 Subjective 33, 48, 50–1, 59, 97–8,
 100–1, 116, 118, 130–1, 182,
 197n30
 Subjectivity 50–1, 56, 88, 92–4, 96,
 103, 120–1, 131, 141–5, 181,
 195n17, 198n38
 Suchman, L. 115
 Sullivan, S. 201nn61, 62
 Surrealism 90
 Sweatshop 78
 Symbolic 46, 59–61, 93, 96–7, 99–100,
 114, 116, 198n36
 Synthesis 31–2, 35, 38–42, 45, 103,
 113, 126, 135, 188–9, *see also*
 Dialectics; Non-synthesis
 and continuity 67
 and new knowledge 34
 of repositioning 180, 185
 Technology 4, 46, 50, 79–87, 92, 103,
 115, 197n31
 Technics 4–5, 9, 44, 79, 85, 87, 95,
 120, *see also* Heidegger, M.
 Teivainen, T. 166, 171–3, 200n55
 Television 86
 Tester, K. 93
 Teuteburg battle 157
 Thanem, T. 106
 Thatcher 64, 162
 Theory and practice 7, 19, 71, 76, 79,
 95, 192
 Thompson, P. 78, 131, 140–1, 144–5,
 199n47, 200nn47, 48
 Time 16–19, 32, 39, 42–50, 57, 73–4,
 79, 89, 93, 98, 105, 151, 153, 162,
 181–2, 187, 194n11, 195nn14, 16,
 196nn25, 26, 198n34, 199n47,
 200n52, 201n63
 and space 3–4, 6, 12, 50, 65, 81–2, 109,
 110, 118, 121, 129, 132, 136, 187
 Tinker, T. 199n46
 Torfing, J. 65–6
 Tormey, S. 175, 200n53
 Total opposition 37, 40, 66
 Totality 10, 32, 34, 38–41, 47, 52, 60,
 62, 65, 67, 77–8, 90, 101, 143
 Townley, B. 130–1
 Trade unions 166
 Translation 4–5, 29–30, 37–8, 46–53,
 61, 87–8, 93–4, 101, 114, 119–20,
 133–4, 164, 184, 194nn5, 8, 11,
 198nn34, 36, 199nn41, 47, 201n64
 Transparency/Transparent 37, 104,
 111, 123, 127, 129–36, 172–3, 180,
 186, 188
 Trauma 88, 99
 Treanor, P. 172–3
 Truth 3, 13, 15, 43, 54–5, 102, 113, 116,
 119, 130–2, 134, 180, 188, 193n5
 Tsoukas, H. 81, 106, 108, 113
 Tyler, M. 11, 31, 110
 Undecidability 12–15, 59, 61–7, 101–4,
 108, 113, 124, 180, 184, *see also*
 Decision
 concept of 187, 189
 of emplacement 54
 of objects of reality 12, 126, 132,
 135–7
 and politics 57, 138, 151, 168
 of society 58, 149

- Unemployment 16
- Unity 34, 39, 90–1, 105–6, 161–2,
 see also Contingency; Equivalence
 and dialectics 38
 and hegemony 6, 10, 185
 and the movement 160
 of reality 102
 and society 64, 175
- Universality 13, 49, 73, 99, 101–3,
 109, 152, 161, 176
- University 191, 193n4, 199n44
 anti-capitalist movement in 169
 and knowledge 95
- Ure, A. 73
- Value 7, 14–15, 40, 75–82, 84–5, 94,
 96, 98, 101, 114, 128, 154, 196n26,
 198n37
 of capital 89
 and hegemonic events 176
 and jazz metaphor 120–1
 from labour power 139–43
 of negation 49
 by objects and subjects 74
- Varela, F. 115
- Verticals 174
- Violence 53, 55–6, 150–1, 158, 167,
 201n62
- Virgin 95, 198n39, *see also* Branson, R.
- Virno, P. 77
- Von Krogh, G. 96
- War 22, 25, 30, 42, 85, 137, 150, 153,
 165, 175–6, 183–4
 War-machine 137, 150, *see also*
 Deleuze, G.; Guattari, F.
- Warwick Business School 95
- Waterman, R.H. 147
- Weber, M. 149–50, 156
- Weber, S. 4–6, 65, 92, 198
- Weick, K.E. 15, 116–19, 121, 147
- Wenger, E. 115–16, 119
- Wesen 5, *see also* Heidegger, M.
- Whitaker, F. 166
- Whitley, R. 196n26
- Whyte, W. 73
- Wilkinson, B. 74
- Willmott, H. 20, 23, 31, 75, 109, 126,
 130–1, 140, 143–5, 154, 190,
 199nn42, 45, 46
- Wilson, E. 195n17
- Winograd, T. 197n32
- Wittgenstein, L. 115
- Working class 63–4, 154, 165, *see also*
 Class struggle
- Workplace 6–7, 22, 63–4, 77, 118–19,
 139–46, 151, 191, 199n47
- Wolff, J. 195n17, 198n39
- Wood, M. 167
- World Bank 148, 163
- World Economic Forum (WEF) 165–6,
 200n55
- World Social Forum (WSF) 165, 170–3,
 175, 200nn54, 55, 201nn56, 66, 67,
 see also Social forum
- World Trade Organization (WTO)
 162
- World-image 4, 87, *see also* Image
- Wray-Bliss, E. 20–1
- Youth Camp 172, *see also* World Social
 Forum (WSF)
- Zald, M.N. 191
- Zapatistas 170
- Zeleny, M. 82
- Znet 164
- Žižek, S. 38–9, 54, 98, 101–2, 111, 128,
 133–5, 175, 188–9, 191
- Zuboff, S. 197n27