The Political Event

Impossibilities of Repositioning Organisation Theory

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For my parents, Ingeborg and Matthias

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List of Illustrations

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Declaration

This thesis is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Abstract

In this thesis I outline a political problem of positioning organisation theory. I maintain that there are projects of positioning, depositioning and repositioning, which articulate organisation in different political ways. To dialectically critique the politics of these projects I discuss the way philosophers of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility conceptualise the political event. I argue that these speculative philosophies share a political belief in the need to question and show the limits of the ways social reality is positioned in the realms of modernity, capitalism and 'Empire', and explore possibilities of how the world might look different. I maintain that the politics of the positioning project is to turn organisation into the hegemony of management, which I show by engaging with the particular discourse of knowledge management. The politics of the depositioning project is to resist the hegemony of management in multiple ways; I discuss particularly how organisation theorists emphasise the precariousness, plurality and locality of processes of organising. Although the political resistances by the depositioning project are of great importance, I argue that there is a tendency to not link their politics to questions of hegemony, which I show to have certain depoliticising effects. In response to these failures, the politics of the repositioning project aims to repoliticise organisation theory by speculating about a new hegemony of social organisation. My engagement with the so-called 'anti-capitalist movement' and questions of its organisation and politics shows, however, that such an attempt of repositioning is itself an impossible or undecidable event. Nevertheless, I argue that it is precisely this political event of impossibility that calls for a speculative decision to be made; a decision, however, which will always fail to fully represent social organisation.
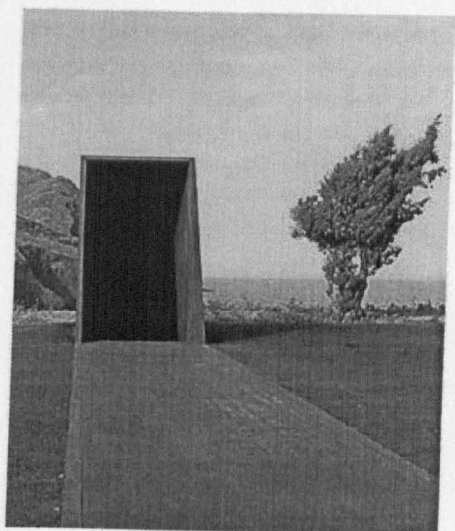
At the entrance to Dani Karavan's monument 'Passages', Portbou, Spain

Preface: The Passage Ahead

To set the scene for the task ahead, let us begin by travelling back in time, by embarking on a little journey into the history books of modernity and its urban architecture. When Walter Benjamin fled from the German Nazis in the 1930s he set up his camp in Paris, which, for him, was the capital of the nineteenth century, the capital of early modernity. In his eyes the spatial and architectural symbol of Paris was the arcade, or in German *Passage*:

> "In speaking of the inner boulevards", says the *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, a complete picture of the city on the Seine and its environs from the year 1852, "we have made mention again and again of the arcades which open onto them. These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, *a world in miniature*." (*AP*, 31, emphasis added)

Benjamin was fascinated by the arcade because it presented him with the 'world in miniature', a world that was characterised by the triumphal rise of the bourgeois class, technological industrialism and the commodity. Flanerie[1] or passing through the arcades in the 1930s was for him like a journey into the historical archives of capitalism, an encounter with the childhood years of modernity. He therefore embarked on a project, originally conceived as a fifty-

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[1]   The term 'flanerie' is derived from the French *'flâneur'*; see, for example, Gleber (1999).

page essay, that would preoccupy him until his death in 1940, when he committed suicide while fleeing from the Nazis. By that time the project had grown into a several hundred pages long, yet unfinished, collection of quotations from a vast array of historical and interdisciplinary material. Benjamin called this project *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*), which was thought to be a materialist philosophy of the history of modernity. It was, as Buck-Morss notes, "constructed with the 'utmost concreteness' out of the historical material itself, the outdated remains of those nineteenth-century buildings, technologies, and commodities that were the precursors of his own era" (1989: 3).

Benjamin distinguished three phases in the history of the arcades: their beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century when the arcade was a fairyland of trade with luxury goods; the phase after 1852, which was the year the first Parisian department store opened and in whose victorious path the arcade also transformed into a place where the commodity and its spectral other, the advert, ruled; and finally the period of the arcades' decline, which saw many arcades destroyed by Baron Haussmann, the moderniser of Paris, as he made way for grand boulevards by cutting through the traditional labyrinthine space of the city. By the time of Benjamin's writing the arcades had become the 'graveyard' of modernity, where everything from palm trees to photographs and feather dusters to pocketknives was on sale. In their decline the arcades had transformed into a 'flea-market' for the ruins of modernity, the material excesses of industrial and technological revolutions. Once glorious, pompous and triumphant palaces of wealth, by the 1930s the arcades had become an 'exhibition space' for the monstrous 'achievements' of humanity's 'progress', a space which displays ruins, a space in

which things collapse into each other and lose their traditional meanings. Although one could say that Benjamin was somewhat obsessed with the particularities of the Parisian arcades, for him their rise and fall was not an extraordinary phenomenon but an event that points to the ongoing crisis of modernity. For him, the arcade was a 'world in miniature': the fall of the arcade was but one example of the wider processes of decline and discontinuity that characterise modernity. For Benjamin, then, the point of analysing the Parisian arcades was not only to understand their particular architecture, their spatiality, but also to position the arcade as a particular historical event.

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: 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.

Thus, the *Arcades Project* has a special position in Benjamin's work; it is not only a close analysis of the passage to and from Parisian modernity but also symbolises Benjamin's own journey: the ambiguities of his life, his personal struggles, his passage from life to death. Benjamin was preoccupied with the *Arcades Project* for over fifteen years, years in which he lived in and travelled to numerous places, such as Berlin, Naples, Marseille, Ibiza, Denmark, London, Moscow and finally Paris. In these years he wrote some of his most important essays, such as 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', 'Charles Baudelaire', 'Franz Kafka', 'The Storyteller', 'Surrealism', 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', to name but a few. The *Arcades Project* can be seen as a collection of material from these journeys, these nomad-years; it is the product of a 'personal' passage for Benjamin. However, one needs to be careful not to simply see the *Arcades Project* as a personal endeavour; it is not an arbitrary, subjective selection of texts. Instead, it is an analysis of how, under modernity, the 'subjective' or 'personal' is produced by particular historical forces. This is to say that, as much as the *Arcades Project*, the *Passagen-Werk*, was perhaps a personal passage for Benjamin, its main contribution can be seen to lie in the careful analysis and critique of modern production processes of 'the personal' and offering possible routes, passages, beyond modern subjectivity.

What is important to recognise at the beginning of this investigation, this thesis, is that, for Benjamin, the arcade is not just an architectural feature of Parisian urban

space. It is not only a transparent technology, made out of iron and glass, which suddenly appeared or was put there by a 'higher' or 'exterior' force such as a genius constructor or governmental decree. No, for Benjamin the arcade must be located, or positioned, in the historical realms of modern technics (*Technik*) or, what Heidegger (1977a) calls, the immanent technical 'goings-on' of the modern *Gestell*, which could be translated as 'emplacement' (Weber, 1996: 71-72; see also my discussion in Chapter One). In the terminology of Foucault (1970), the arcade can be seen as a product of the modern *dispositif*, which is an apparatus or organised assemblage of forces (Deleuze, 1988). According to Foucault, the modern apparatus is a historical, technical regime that organises 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 that, on one hand, an apparatus is produced by inter-subjective relations of power and knowledge – it is a particular historical social construction – but, on the other hand, as much as it is a product of social relations it also reproduces them as an 'objective' force. This is to say that once the arcade made it onto the scene of modern reality it has played a defining role in the way the modern apparatus has been reproduced, organised and emplaced. One could say, then, that for Benjamin the arcade is a feature of the emplaced apparatus of modernity. On one hand, it is a specific product of modern power/knowledge relations, but, on the other, it also functions as a 'machinery' that continues to reproduce and emplace reality in specific ways.

One of Foucault's major concerns is to show that reality is not something that is constructed by active, conscious and intentional subjects but something that exists as power/knowledge regime outside the human body. In fact, for him the human

body, the subject, is a product of this modern apparatus – the subject is 'folded', or emerges, out of the regime of relations of power and knowledge, as Deleuze would have it (1988, 1993). For Benjamin, what emerges out of the Parisian arcade-apparatus is the *flâneur*, the bourgeois man[2] 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 characterised 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 (or Foucault for that matter), an analysis of modernity has to go beyond seeing the 'subjective' and 'objective' as mutually exclusive categories and, instead, analyse 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.

Sometimes Foucault's concept of *dispositif*, or power/knowledge regime, is seen as some sort of Orwellian superstructure that operates from a hidden position to control all aspects of modern life without leaving holes of resistance. In such a

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[2] The Parisian *flâneur* was indeed a *man*; a man in a full bourgeois wardrobe including a large hat, stick and cigar. To visualize the *flâneur*, see, for example, Parkurst Ferguson (1994). 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 thesis I will attempt not to reproduce this sexual bias. However, when I occasionally *do*

light the Benjaminian arcade, too, could be seen as the place where the modern subject is dominated, controlled and hence alienated by the emplaced structure of modern relations of power and knowledge. Whereas domination, control and alienation are clearly part of Benjamin's analysis of the 'miniature' world of the *flâneur*, things are not that easily defined within the arcades – with Benjamin one is never quite sure who and what is alienated and who and what is alienating, or who/what is resisted and who/what is resisting. One could say, perhaps, that for Benjamin the arcade is a place of the 'in-between'.

This 'in-betweeness' is architecturally manifested by the arcade's glass roof. One is not quite sure where the inside ends and the outside begins – the arcade is a mixture of the exteriority of the street and the interiority of the house. For Benjamin this 'in-betweeness' has a profound effect on the *flâneur* and his way of experiencing reality. According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* reads reality not as a symbolic whole, but as a series of allegorical holes, as fragments and parts, which cut into each other. In this sense, the *flâneur*'s walk through the arcade becomes a speculation, an experiment, in which things lose their function, meaning and definiteness. "The perception of space", says Benjamin, "that corresponds to this perception of time is the interpenetrating and superposed transparency of the world of the *flâneur*" (*AP*, 546). In other words, the world of the *flâneur* is characterised by a transparency that is not only created by the special architectural feature of the arcade, but also by the *destruction* of the symbolic space of traditional meanings. Thus, for Benjamin, the arcade is not only a particular

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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.

architectural construction but indeed a place of destruction, a place where there is no clear boundary between things and images, between inside and outside – it is a place beyond conventional organisational principles of reality. The arcade is a place where time and space are 'out of joint', where reality is not a 'whole' but has disintegrated into a collection of 'holes' or fragments.

Although Benjamin never used the concept of 'destruction' as extensively as, for example, Derrida has used his 'deconstruction', 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: xi). In this sense, then, 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 (*OGT*), 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 (*WoA*) 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 (e.g. *TT*) 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.

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, any signifier-signified relationship 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: 274-275)

What destruction seems to share with deconstruction – and I will explore this in more detail in Chapter Two – 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 destructs 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" (*DC*, 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.

This thesis will attempt to be such a movement of destruction, such a movement between negativity and positivity, between death and life. However, it should have become clear by now that it cannot be the task of this thesis, nor of any other text, to define destruction. Perhaps one should therefore refrain from saying anything more *about* destruction, as this 'about' already attempts to put destruction into a simple location from where it can be viewed and examined. Destruction is not something that *is*; instead, it is a movement. The vital task, then, becomes not one of defining destruction but of performing it. Benjamin's *Arcades Project* must be seen as such a performance. The *Arcades Project* is not an organised text that intends to provide a clear historical narrative of the Parisian

arcades. Instead, it is a montage, a disorganised collection of quotations from a vast array of interdisciplinary sources that does not attempt to integrate the presented fragments into a well-defined whole of meaning. The *Arcades Project* does not prescribe meaning; it writes meaning between the lines, as it were. In this sense, the project could never be finished – it is a movement that never ends.

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 organised; instead, they are positioned in such a way that a meaning springs out of them, so to say. Hence, the positioning of the quotations is of vital 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, 587; *AP*, 470). The point, then, is not to endlessly celebrate a movement of destruction but to find a passage through destruction that enables new 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.

When Theodor Adorno last visited Benjamin in his exile in Paris in the mid 1930s to persuade him to join him on the passage to America, Benjamin apparently responded by saying: 'There are positions to be defended in Europe' (Brodersen, 1996: 245). At that time, with European Fascism on the rise and World War Two just around the corner, going into exile to America must have seemed to Benjamin like a path not worth taking precisely because the 'moment of danger', the politically more important and intense constellation, was to be found in Europe and not in America. However, when his position in Paris, after several Nazi interrogations, finally became too precarious, he decided to embark on the journey down south to Spain and further on to Portugal, which would eventually take him to America. However, on his passage he was denied entry into Spain, which led to his suicide in the border-town Portbou in the night of the 25th of September 1940. About only a month afterwards Hannah Arendt passed through Portbou and tried to find Benjamin's grave, but without success; his name was not written anywhere; he was added to the millions of nameless dead buried by the war. She describes her visit to Gershom Scholem:

> The cemetery faces a small bay directly overlooking the Mediterranean; it is carved in stone in terraces; the coffins are also pushed into such stone walls. It is by far one of the most fantastic and most beautiful spots I have seen in my life. (cited in Brodersen, 1996: 261)

In 1994 the monument 'Passages' was inaugurated in Portbou. I was lucky to visit it when I travelled to Spain in 2002. Its centrepiece is a tunnel, with rusty iron walls and a flight of narrow steps, cut into the cliff at the seaward side of the cemetery. Entering the tunnel takes courage, as one cannot precisely see where this dark passage leads to. Once inside one becomes claustrophobic; one is overwhelmed by a stifling feeling of being in danger, of being crushed to death by

the brute force of the rusty iron walls all around. Slowly one can make out light at the end of the tunnel; but it is not the expected safe haven, paradise, but the wild sea crashing against the rocks. The same white image is presented when one turns around and looks up to the entrance of the tunnel: the unreachable heaven with fluffy clouds dancing in the air. One feels trapped and lost: between negativity and positivity. Is this a passage or a dead end? Then, suddenly, a glass screen appears where before there was only the image of the uninviting sea. The glass blocks the passage toward the sea, but, at the same time, it is a diversion, a passage toward an elsewhere. Engraved into the glass is a single quotation from notes Benjamin took for his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (*BGS* I.3, 1241), written in 1940, just a few months before his death:

> It is more arduous to honour the memory
> of the nameless than that of the
> renowned. Historical construction is
> devoted to the memory of the *nameless*.

This, then, gives us an image of the task ahead. It is yet nameless. It is a passage into the void, into the dangerous unknown. It is a passage that is full of death and destructed buildings, ruins. Yet, it is not for the sake of the ruins that this thesis 'destructs', it is for that of the passage leading through the debris, the rubble. This is the task of the critic: first, 'things' and 'beings' need to be destructed, this is the negative movement; second, the silence that is left behind by this destruction needs to be filled by an affirmative, constructive, speculative knowledge that can act as a political 'hammer' in a particular constellation of time and space. This composes the 'originality' of destruction, which, however, is not to be understood as a metaphysical beginning, but as an *Ursprung*, as the *Sprung* is a jump, a leap

into the future; like the knight jumps on a chessboard, it makes a *pass*, which might suddenly change the constellation of the game and enable a new experience. This originality is the passage from the past it springs from and the future it springs to. In this sense origin can never make sense; instead, it brings forth something, it is 'worlding', in the Heideggerian sense (1962). Yet this new world, this new whole still lacks a clear language of understanding, a language that makes sense. Therefore, let me warn here of the dangers of the passage ahead. Not everything might be immediately comprehensible. And, as this passage does not know a beginning, it also does not have an end. It is endless; it must remain unfinished, because destruction cannot be defined as a finite project. It is infinite, even impossible, but it is precisely this impossibility that constitutes the affirmative possibilities of destruction.
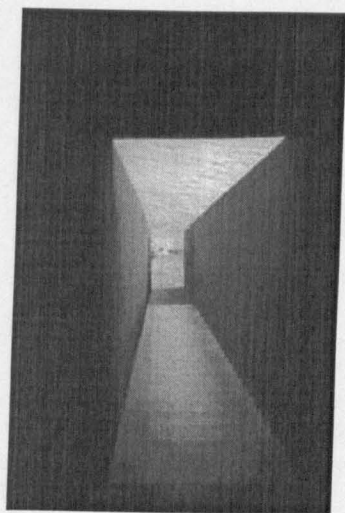
After entering the tunnel of 'Passages'

1. Images of Organisation Theory

I have started this thesis with a historical image of the Parisian arcade to tentatively indicate the passage that lies ahead of us. In this first, introductory chapter I will employ the above Benjaminian insights to broadly position this thesis in relation to the wider literature of organisation theory, which is the body of knowledge this thesis mainly aims to put into question. I will argue that there are three projects within the realms of organisation theory: positioning, depositioning and repositioning. The politics of the positioning project – which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three – is that it mainly serves the contemporary hegemony of capital and management. Although the concept of 'hegemony' will be introduced in the next section and discussed in detail in Chapter Two, we can note here that, based on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) understanding, hegemony points to a certain unity in a particular social formation and the dominance of a social discourse in a particular historical constellation. Yet, for Laclau and Mouffe, this dominance can never be complete or total; instead, "hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social" (1985: 134). Hegemony, then, is a concept that highlights the relative 'closure' of social formations, which, nevertheless, remain 'open' enabling a plethora of forms of dissent and resistance.

Within the realms of organisation theory the depositioning project – which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Four – has resisted the hegemony of the positioning project by generalising the concept of organisation and exposing the relations of power and knowledge that characterise processes of social organisation. This resistance has worked on many different registers, which is to say that the depositioning project is itself a multiplicity that cannot be located in a single place; it can thus not be represented and discussed in its entirety. Nevertheless, I will argue that there is a tendency in the depositioning project to conceptualise organisation as a local process, multiplicity and plurality which leads to the emphasis of 'micro-political' resistances. Although these resistances have been of great importance, I will critique such depositioning discourses for not linking politics to questions of hegemony, which, in my view, has certain depoliticising effects. In Chapter Five I will therefore speculate about the possibilities of a project of repositioning which enables a repoliticisation of the terrain of organisation. Let me, then, introduce the projects of positioning, depositioning and repositioning in more detail.

Positioning Organisation

To introduce the problematic of positioning, let us start by reflecting on the word 'position' itself. In my view this could not only help us to position 'organisation' itself but also position this thesis in relation to the wider organisation 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 organisation, let me briefly consider some aspects of Heidegger's philosophy, which is particularly concerned with the problematic 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 *subiectum*, a subject. For Heidegger, the world-image is not an individual, psychological imagination, but a structured image, a *Gebild*. This structured image secures, organises and articulates itself as a worldview, it emplaces (*stellen*) being into a centred subject-position. This *Gebild*, this world-as-image, is the structured perception of the *Gestell*, the emplacement of modernity in a definite place. In Heidegger's view, modernity is continuously emplaced by modern technics, or *Technik*, 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 (e.g. a power plant or an arcade) 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 organisation 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 image of this world. Thus, our seeing is based on the way the world is emplaced as the

particular regime of modern technics; modernity is characterised by the technics of imagining the world as an image which 'securely' places the human being in a subject position.

According to Sam Weber, this positioning, or emplacing, points to "the various ways in which everything, human beings included, is 'cornered' (*gestellt*) and set in place" (1996: 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: 71-72). An emplacement, then, 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: 72). What Weber names here 'goings-on' is the translation of the German word *Wesen*, which is popularly translated as 'essence'. For Weber (1996: 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 we have seen 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, then, positioning is inherently related to the question of organisation: 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 or house, *Heimat* and

family spring to mind here – they are all closely connected to this modern emplacement, this modern form of organising 'the social'. Another etymological insight might be of interest in this regard. The German *stellen* could be related to the Italian *stelle* or stars, which becomes significant if one remembers that the emergence of modernity is inherently related to the event of astronomy that enabled navigation at sea. At sea there is, of course, no 'worldly' point of fixity which one could take as point of reference, as guiding position. Stars were the only tools the explorers of the Middle Ages had to guide them to foreign lands and, more importantly, to guide them back home, when their ships were full of exotic spices, slaves and gold. The reading of stars thus became an important organisational tool that emplaced Europe as colonial world power – an emplacement that is inherently connected to the entire event of modernity.

Today the reading of the positioning of stars has been taken over by machines, namely the Global Positioning System (GPS), which guides not only ships but also cars and weapons (of mass destruction).[3] Today's most important stars are satellites which have a fixed position in the sky to send GPS and mobile phone signals, TV and radio programmes – information and communication flows that in-form the modern subject:

> *Modern times*: half a century after Columbus' four journeys, the orbited, uncovered, represented, occupied and used earth presents itself as a body that is combined into a dense weave of traffic movements and telecommunication routines. Virtual shells have replaced the once-imagined ether sky. Through radio-electronic systems the forgetting of distance is technically implemented in literally all centres of power and consumption. In aeronautical terms the earth is reduced to a aeroplane route of no more than fifty hours; satellite orbiting

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[3] The so-called 'precision weapons' that have been used by US American forces in the recent wars against Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq, are guided by GPS to reach their targets more or less accurately, it is said (MoD, 2002).

> and *Mir*-circulation time units of ninety minutes and less are now standard practice; radio
> and light messages have pulled the earth together almost to a standing point – it rotates as a
> time-compacted globe in an electronic web that surrounds it like a second atmosphere.
> (Sloterdijk, 1999: 977, my translation)

The modern subject is a being that is in-formed and emplaced, some might say entrapped. It is emplaced in an endless number of different technical systems that make it subject to surveillance, disciplinary control and predictability. The mobile phone, for example, one of today's most widespread technologies (at least in the First World), might give people a sense of freedom, because one can make phone calls from literally anywhere. Yet, this freedom is always already compromised by the ability of the mobile phone system to emplace its users in a grid of geographical, financial and social control.

Taking Heidegger's philosophy of positioning as guideline, one could say that a lot of what is done in the name of 'organisation' in educational and academic fields such as Organisation Studies, Organisational Behaviour, Organisational Development, Organisational Psychology, Sociology of Organisation, and Management and Business Studies is restricted to notions of organisation as form or secure position. Chia, for example, speaks of organisation as 'simple location', that is, in his view, what we call 'organisation', is usually reified, simply located, or positioned, as it were, as a "discrete, bounded, economic-administrative" (1998b: 6) entity. In other words, "[t]he noun 'organization' is usually taken to refer to…some very specifically constituted *form*al organization*s*" (Parker, 2002a: 183-184, emphasis added). It is this *form*ality that characterises the discourse of organisation, or rather organisation*s*. Hence, organisation is restricted to the realm of formal entities and institutions where social organisation seems always already

formed, predetermined and given. In such a view organisation is about the administration and maintenance of an ordered world that is characterised by clear divisions of labour, professionalism, bureaucracy and rational bodies that can be placed, measured and represented. As Cooper notes, the 'normal' view of organisation is thus dominated "by a form of knowing that specifies the world in terms of increasingly particularized structures and grids" (1998: 137). It is guided by a "principle of simple location to 'place' knowledge in knowable (i.e. coherent, self-contained) spaces" (*ibid.*). In such a view, then, organisation is about the clear positioning of 'things' and 'subjects' into a simple, formal, hierarchical and well-bounded location. Thus, organisation 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, then, organisation is about the administration, or maintenance, of 'the order of things', to speak with Foucault (1970). Hence, the debate in much of what can be called organisation theory is centred on different models of how to organise formal organisations most effectively and efficiently. This is the realm of pragmatism and management, which, as Parker notes (2002a: 184), has become the dominant conception of organising nowadays. For him, out of a wide variety of potential organisational 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.*). He continues:

> The dominant conception of organizing nowadays rests on the application of three forms of management as a generalized technology of control. The increasing celebration of the managerial class, the application of managerial language to more and more 'informal' areas

of life, and the dissemination of particular forms of expertise by the B[usiness] School, are all combining to produce a hegemonic model of organization. (*ibid.*)

The 'market' provides the legitimacy for this hegemony of managerialism. As Parker argues further, this is not a national, regional or Western phenomenon. On the contrary, in his view, managerialism has become the universal organisational 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 organisational regime that 'rules' over the entire 'civilised' world (2000: xiv). Thus, the 'hegemonic model of organisation', as Parker calls it, is characterised by a view of organisation that cannot be disconnected from managerialism and global capital. One could say that management is the hegemony of organisation.

Now, as I mentioned above, when I here talk about 'hegemony' I broadly refer to Laclau and Mouffe's usage of the concept; for them, hegemony points to the "unity existing in a concrete social formation" (1985: 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 endure over time and space. In relation to the positioning project of organisation, for example, one could say that management describes the particular way organisation and organisation theory has been positioned or emplaced in relation to the hegemonic discourses of capital. Capital and management are hegemonic because they continuously 'corner' organisation, to use Weber's (1996: 72) expression; they set organisation into a particular place, a place which is continuously defended. However, according to Parker (2002a: 182ff), this particular positioning of

organisation does not take account of all the potentials of organising. One could, perhaps, say that, for him, the particular emplacement of organisation as management describes a 'restricted economy', to evoke Bataille's term (1991). This, then, points to the second aspect of 'hegemony': while 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: 65). That is, the apparent unity of dominant discourses, such as capital and management, is always already subverted by a multiplicity of alternative voices of organisation. Capital and management, then, are embattled phenomena that need to be continuously defended and emplaced in order to reproduce their position within society.

As I will show in Chapter Three, in organisation theory the hegemony of managerialism is particularly apparent in the field of knowledge management, which has become one of the most popular organisation and management discourses over the past decade. Knowledge management is predominantly concerned, one could argue, with positioning individual and organisational 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 (e.g. Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). 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 organisation is usually reserved for the description of what is going on inside and around managerial institutions, companies and workplaces. That is, organisation seems clearly positioned and defined as a formal entity within established structures of modernity and capitalism. As Cooper notes, the academic discipline of organisation studies can be seen to be "almost naturally disposed to expressing itself in structural terms, where structure becomes an end in itself" (1976: 1001). Thus, organisation 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 organisational scientists is to study the structures, forms and institutional processes, as well as the behaviour of people within these organisations, 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 organisation 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: 18, emphasis added). This is echoed by Dale (2001) who links the event of organisation to modern

disciplines such as medicine which have to anatomise 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.[4]

What I have argued in this section so far is that the event of modern organisation is inherently connected to the positioning of being in an anatomised, increasingly managerial grid, which literally kills the body in order to construct a structured image of the modern subject. In such a view, organisation is a positioning exercise – the military connotations of such a conception of organisation are obvious. *Pace* Bataille (1991), one could see such a theory of organisation to be dependent on a 'restricted economy'. This is to say, what is usually done in the name of organisation, in organisation 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 organisational 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 organisation

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[4] This is not to say, however, that a 'positive' recreation always has to follow the negative movement of 'killing the body'. The event of the Holocaust shows that modern organisation is fully capable of turning into a machine of absolute negativity; see, for example, Bauman's (1989) argument about the role of institutional bureaucracies in the organisation of the Holocaust.

theory. This ideology accepts that organisation 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: 26).

Today, the critique of positivism seems well established in certain circles of organisation 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: 19). In their view, then, 'positivism' and 'the mainstream' are often treated as imaginary signifiers used by 'critical' researchers to legitimise their work. Having said that, one should not nullify or downplay the danger of positivistic organisation theory, which continues to be a dominant orthodoxy. The way 'Donaldson', for example, has become the scapegoat for many 'critical' scholars and a signifier that one can pick out and rubbish characterises this danger. Just because Donaldson is one of the (last) few *explicit* defenders of positivism, one should not assume that the field of organisation theory at large has fundamentally gone beyond positivism. One could argue that Donaldson continues to be given space in organisation 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: 5). However, taking the philosophy of Heidegger into consideration, which I have discussed above, one could suggest that the project of positioning organisation, although very closely related to the specific intellectual discourse of positivism, points to something much broader than positivism. Positioning is not only an epistemological method 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 the epistemological method of 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 organisation theory within four paradigm boxes), but also as a product of the modern emplacement, the technics that organises life and aims to put everything into a formal, hierarchical position (e.g. 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 organisation does not only have implications on the level of epistemology; instead, positioning points to the ontological dimension of modern technics – it emplaces reality and thus life itself.

As already noted above, in the language of Foucault this modern technics of positioning is an apparatus, which must be seen as a particular power/knowledge regime that organises modern social relations from within. Foucault also refers to

this organisational regime as discourse (e.g. 1970, 1972), 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' carried out by institutions such as prisons, hospitals, schools and asylums. These positioning techniques can take various forms, for example, examining, evaluating, observing and recording. For Foucault, these techniques act as bio-power in the sense that they in-form our subjectivities and bodies: the modern apparatus is a 'machine' that produces specific subjects and bodies through a range of disciplinary 'micro-techniques'. Hardt and Negri (2000) take up Foucault's concept of bio-power to assert that today these disciplinary 'machines' are not confined to specific institutions anymore but, instead, organise 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). Hardt and Negri thus talk about the coming of a control society that positions all life within the organised networks of 'Empire'. This leads them to claim that 'there is no more outside' of the contemporary emplacement precisely because 'Empire's' bio-power positions life itself.

This bio-power should, however, not be seen as something that organises 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: 95). Similarly, Laclau and Mouffe argue that

"there is no single underlying principle fixing" mechanism through which 'the social' can be constituted (1985: 111). Instead, for them, society is something that is inherently open and characterised by a field of difference. This also implies that their term 'hegemony' does not point to totalitarianism; instead, hegemony describes the dominance of a discursive regime. Applying Foucault's term of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe argue that every discourse is characterised by, what they call, a 'field of discursivity' which is a 'surplus of meaning' that subverts the very discourse it is emplaced in (*ibid.*). 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. One could thus say, perhaps, that those forces that seek to fully position or emplace reality will always be accompanied by forces of subversion or depositioning.

Depositioning Organisation

Over the past two decades there have been important developments regarding the attempt to broaden the concept of organisation and formulate a critique of restricted economies of organisation that have been dominating organisation theory and other fields of enquiry. Authors, whose work, maybe problematically, has often been described as 'postmodern', have increasingly been arguing that social reality is not something that is fully organised and neatly locatable within structured grids (e.g. Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Chia, 1995; Hancock and Tyler, 2001a; as well as the contributions to Reed and Hughes, 1992; Hassard and

Parker, 1993; and Linstead, 2003). It has been their concern to go beyond restricted notions of organisation as a *form* and argue for the conception of organisation as a social *formation* process that is characterised 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: 6). These authors, then, have attempted to 'open the field' of and for organisation (Cooper, 1976), which might enable us to imagine what could be called, *pace* Bataille (1991), a 'general economy of organisation' that is not restricted to the management of organisation*s* but indeed more interested in organisation as a 'basic' social process. Instead of a noun, which points to the managerial and institutional aspects of organising, organisation has increasingly been seen as an ongoing process "that occurs within the wider 'body' of society" (Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 106), a process that is characterised by heterogeneous and contested forces of positioning and depositioning, organising and disorganising (Cooper, 1990).

What has thus been argued is that there is a need to go beyond restricted notions of the organisation of positioning, which include the organisation of economic production and prediction, and move towards a 'general economy of organisation' that would point to, what Cooper and Burrell (1988: 106) call, the 'production of organisation'. This notion of a 'production of organisation' could be seen as the questioning of the position of organisation – it is a dislocation, displacement or depositioning of traditional conceptions of organisation. However, what Cooper

and Burrell have in mind is not simply an invention of another (economic) logic of organisation; it is not another organised territory. Their depositioning of organisation does not only question organisation as an economic object but also the presence of words such as 'organisation' and 'position' themselves. Depositioning, then, can perhaps be understood as a movement which claims that "every position is *of itself confounded*" (Derrida, 1987: 95, 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', 'organisation' 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 'organisation'. *Différance* questions the basic presence of any position and organisation; it puts into doubt and resists the reality of organisation that is continuously produced by the 'goings-on' of the modern positioning project.

What has thus been under way in organisation 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 organisation. This questioning has not only been a critique of the restricted economic rationality of dominant forms of organising, but has indeed generally exposed the precarious and undecidable nature of positions of reality that are taken for granted.

> The old theatrical organization has become unjustifiable, [it] is no longer answerable to anyone; the old phantoms called the author, the reader, the director, the stage manager, the machinist, the actor, the characters, the spectator, etc., have no single, unique, fixed place (stage, wings, house, etc.) assigned to themselves by themselves, except in the representation they make of it to themselves, of which an account must be given. That is where the story (history) will have taken place, if it takes place, where something will have

> been seen, recounted, summed up as the meaning or presentable substance of the book...
> Any attempt to return toward the untouched, proper intimacy of some presence or some
> self-presence is played out in illusion. (Derrida, 1981: 296-297)

One could thus say, perhaps, that within the realms of the depositioning project established positions of organised reality have been exposed as being inherently theatrical; that is, they have been shown to not have a single, unique or fixed place (or stage) – their representational structures have been turned into liquid flows. The outright positivity of the organisation of reality has thus been put into doubt; the presence or position of organisation has been exposed to a negative movement of disorganisation. What has been questioned are common sense perceptions of organisation that seem to be "unable to recognise 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: 336, emphasis in original). Organisation has thus been depositioned; it has been exposed as "a process of undecidability that pervades all social organization" (Cooper, 1990: 182).

Cooper points here to Derrida's (e.g. 1987) concept of 'undecidability' – to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two – 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. It can thus not be the task of this thesis to discuss *all* approaches that have been challenging and subverting dominant conceptions of organisation – 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 organisation are always already accompanied by a multiplicity of forces of resistance. This is also highlighted by Cooper (1990) when he

maintains that processes of organisation always already depend on processes of disorganisation. Within such a view, then, organisation is an inherently undecidable process. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, the concept of undecidability is used by some organisation theorists to emphasise the plurality and relativity of organised reality (e.g. Hassard, 1991). 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. 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 society. As I will argue in Chapter Two, this decision involves a certain closure of the infinite possibilities that are opened up by, what Laclau (1995: 93) calls, the 'structural undecidability' of society.

Part of my critique will be that, although many discourses in organisation theory are very effective in depositioning established forces of positioning, by showing the undecidability of all organised phenomena, very little has been done to reassemble the remaining fragments in order to politically speculate about possibilities of decisions that could, perhaps, reorganise 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 Chapter Two. As I have already mentioned, the concept of hegemony points to the view that there are social discourses that dominate reality. That is, although society is

'structurally undecidable', Laclau and Mouffe maintain that there are hegemonic discourses that can be seen as social decisions about how to organise social reality. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 54), one could say that hegemony is possible because forces of deterritorialisation are reterritorialised on a level of an abstract signifier. This is to say, although reality might be described by a multiplicity of local forms of life and a host of depositioning discourses and deterritorialisations, there are forces, according to Deleuze and Guattari, which always already reterritorialise everything. As I will show in Chapter Three, capital is such a hegemonic 'machine', which – although it makes possible all sorts of deterritorialisations – always already reterritorialises these deterritorialisations on the level of the specific value system of commodity production.

In Chapter Four I will argue that there is a tendency for some depositioning discourses to not adequately deal with hegemonic forces such as capital. What is sometimes emphasised by organisation theorists, for example, is the social construction of reality within local communities. That is, rather than discussing and critiquing social discourses that endure over boundaries of time and space, social constructionists often highlight the multiplicity and plurality of local truths. Weick (1979, 1995), for example, emphasises, what he calls, 'sensemaking' processes through which people negotiate their social realities on 'the ground' of organisational communities. For him and other social constructionists, reality is constructed by 'muddling through' problems on the ground and renegotiating one's social place at every second. While such a view must generally be regarded as an important political resistance against those universalising discourses that always already position everything within predefined categories, I will critique

such a 'depositioning strategy' by arguing that there is a danger for local forces to be simply swallowed up and neutralised by established discourses of capital and management. In fact, I will show that capital can be seen as a hegemonic 'machine', whose production depends on local depositioning or deterritorialisation forces that ensure the plurality and multiplicity of social construction processes. Precisely because this hegemonic aspect of reality construction is not always fully recognised by depositioning discourses I will argue that the emphasis on local processes, plurality and undecidability can have certain depoliticising effects.

Repositioning Organisation

So far I have set up a dialectical constellation of projects of positioning and depositioning in organisation theory. I have argued that the positioning project embodies the hegemony of management, which emplaces organisation within the realms of capital. I then introduced the idea that many organisation theorists have resisted the dominance of the positioning discourse by engaging in a project of depositioning organisation, which often emphasises the plurality and multiplicity of local truths. While this depositioning of established positions and truths of organisation theory has been politically important, I pointed to the dangers of depoliticisation that are inherent to the depositioning project.

Before I introduce the project of repositioning organisation, let me briefly discuss the difficulties one might encounter by setting up a dialectical triad like that of positioning, depositioning and repositioning. 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 dialectical approaches in organisation theory, see, for example, Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Carr, 2000; Hancock and Tyler, 2001a,b; Reed, 1996; and Willmott, 1990). 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: 280-281). 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 or, what Hegel called, 'absolute knowledge'. 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: 213). Hegel's understanding of the dialectic has, of course, been read in many different ways. Without going into a discussion of the history of dialectical thought and the manifold interpretations of Hegel – for example, those by the so-called 'right Hegelians' and 'young Hegelians', who derive their legitimacy from different ways of reading his work – I would like to suggest that for Benjamin the dialectical process does not necessarily have to be linked to notions of historical progress. Instead, for him, the dialectical process – similarly, perhaps, to 'destruction' or 'deconstruction' – is better understood as a kind of open-ended movement between negativity and positivity, something which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two.

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' (e.g. *BGS* I.3, 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, 576-577). 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 his *Arcades Project* so unique. Benjamin thinks that this halting of the progressive continuity of history is needed to politically intervene in a specific situation. What I would like to 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 thesis 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, as I will explore in Chapters Two and Three, this should not be misunderstood as the resurrection of the agency of a fully intentional and voluntaristic subject. 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. And Benjamin is quite clear about the political ends of such an event: it is aimed at the destruction of the 'eternal image' of history, the destruction of the continuous

history of those in ruling power (*TPH*, 254). This destruction thus challenges those images and discourses of history which are taken for granted and 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 marginalised (*BGS* I.3, 1236). This is to say, the political event of destruction seeks to halt the continuities of history in order to make visible marginalised 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 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. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), such a disruption of the 'normal' course of history is possible because society itself is impossible; that is, society 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 society and history. Disruptions, resistances, discontinuities or depositionings are therefore possible. As I argued above, the depositioning project in organisation theory is characterised by a multiplicity of political resistances against the positioning project of organisation. According to Laclau and Mouffe, these resistances are the 'field of discursivity', which is a

constitutive, yet subversive, part of every discursive formation (1985: 111).
Within this view, one could say that the depositioning resistances in organisation
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.

In the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), one could maintain that the
depositioning discourses, or deterritorialisations, are immediately reterritorialised
by dominant forces of reality. For them, capital is a 'successful' social
'machinery' precisely because it makes possible a multiplicity of resistances and
deterritorialisations, which, however, are immediately subsumed, or
reterritorialised, by dominant signification systems. Hardt and Negri (2000) use
this insight to conceptualise, what they call, 'Empire', or today's globally
integrated capitalism, as 'non-place', a term 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: 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 deterritorialised openness of 'Empire' is always already
reterritorialised along the lines of the stratifications of capital. In such a view,
then, capital is a deterritorialisation force that reterritorialises all deterritorialised
fragments along the particular lines of its value system.

Applying the above insights to the problematic of this thesis, one could thus suggest that the depositioning discourses of organisation theory do not stand in opposition to the positioning project; instead, they are an immanent part of it. When, for example, some depositioning authors celebrate the processual and plural character of organising, one could claim that they describe the way capital works today. In this sense, the resistances of the depositioning project can be seen as being a constitutive part of the positioning project. This, then, 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 regime of power and knowledge, how is it possible to imagine a different, repositioned regime of social organisation? In this thesis I will argue that a project of repositioning organisation should be understood as an impossibility. For Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of impossibility does not point to a nihilistic or relativistic understanding of social organisation. Instead, they maintain that the impossibility of society 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 organise a different hegemony of society. Now, such a project of reconstitution or repositioning is also immanent to society. The difference to the depositioning discourses is, however, that the repositioning project is not only about resisting realities of social organisation that are taken for granted; instead, it aims at exploring some new 'principled positions' (Squires, 1993) along which 'the social' can be constituted.

Within the realms of organisation theory, attempts have been made recently to critique the depoliticising effects, which are sometimes produced by depositioning

discourses and explore possibilities of repoliticising the terrain of organisation theory. For example, it has been Parker's (e.g. 1995, 2002a, 2000b) consistent attempt to point to, what he calls, the "dangers of postmodernism" (1995: 553) and offer ways to engage with organisation 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: 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 is deeply suspicious of the depoliticised nature of, what I have named here, the depositioning project (see particularly 1995, 1999, 2002a, 2003).

Other writers, too, have, as Fournier and Grey (2000: 21) 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" (e.g. Armbrüster and Gebert, 2002; du Gay, 2000a; Grey, 1996; Jones, 2003c; Reed, 1997; Thompson and Smith, 2001; Willmott, 1994, 1998; Wray-Bliss, 2002, 2003). There are many differences in the way these authors conceptualise the 'degree of political engagement' possible today, and their political commitments do indeed vary considerably. Yet, what these authors share is a general suspicion of the relativistic nature of some depositioning discourses. While I value these contributions and build on them, I am concerned that little has been done by way

of connecting questions of 'the political' to the level of hegemony and exploring alternative hegemonies of social organisation. One valuable contribution in this direction, however, has been made by Contu:

> [T]o assert the contingency of any objectivity (the social) should not be taken as 'everything becomes contingent' where we find ourselves living in a fluid and dispersed and fragmented reality. This would seize contingency as mere 'absence of necessity', and negativity as the opposite of full positivity, which would be re-posing the same metaphysical argument it is contesting but with an opposite sign, so to speak. (2002: 168-169)

Her critique of the depositioning project in organisation theory is that "the point is not the 'replacement' of a totally united, positive universe with a totally fragmented, negative one" (2002: 169). For her, this replacement of a full positivity with a full negativity amounts to the reposing of the hegemonic position of organisation theory – just this time under an opposite sign. While, as I have discussed above, I would not subscribe to the idea that the depositioning project stands in opposition to the positioning project, Contu's valuable critique is that because depositioning discourses are often negative – in the sense that they are mostly concerned with the depositioning of those positions of reality which are taken for granted – and oriented towards 'micro-political' resistances, the political imaginary of these discourses often exclude the question of hegemony.

Yet, when Contu asserts that the "situation is not OK! It is actually bad and deteriorating" (2002: 173), she does not seem to only have a particular, 'micro-political situation' in mind but indeed the hegemony of 'neo-liberal' capitalism itself. In what is a powerful plea for 'us' to wake up and repoliticise the terrain of social organisation, she 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" (*ibid.*). Contu's words, then, remind us of the fact that society needs to be organised and instituted. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) it is precisely this organisation or positioning of 'the social' that describes the terrain of 'the political'. In their view, politics is about engendering the question of hegemony, the question of how to organise society as such. As I will argue in Chapter Five, the terrain of politics rarely seems to be connected to the radical questioning of the contemporary hegemony of capital. However, there are discourses that have done just that. For the past four years, and perhaps for longer, the so-called 'anti-capitalist movement' has been protesting against the way today's global capitalism is organised. In Chapter Five I will engage with and analyse the history, politics and organisation of this social movement and explore its possibilities for repositioning society. This analysis, then, will serve as an empirical exploration of the possibilities of hegemonic, democratic politics and the implications for a project of repositioning organisation.

2. The Political Event

In the previous chapter I set up a 'dialectical image', a constellation, which presented three organisation theory projects. First, there is, what I have labelled, the *positioning* project, which puts organisation into predefined locations of representationalism, institutionalism and managerialism. Then there is, what I have called, the *depositioning* project, which has reacted against the dominance of the restricted discourse of positioning. This reaction has been multifaceted, but has particularly emphasised the precarious, processual, local and plural nature of processes of organising. Although I argued that the depositioning project has been of great importance for generalising the concept of organisation and resisting the dominant hegemony of managerialist organisation, I expressed deep concerns over its political relevance in relation to today's struggles of social organisation. This led me, therefore, to call for an event that would *reposition* organisation theory. I have introduced this event as an impossibility, which, nevertheless, opens up possibilities for the staging of a new hegemonic content of social organisation. Before I engage more closely with the positioning, depositioning and repositioning projects in Chapters Three, Four and Five respectively, it is necessary to outline the theoretical approach of this thesis in more detail.

For me, the problem of positioning is a political one. As I argued in the previous chapter, positioning is about the emplacing of 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. Equally, depositioning involves 'the political' because it resists the 'goings-on' of the positioning project by politically disagreeing with its specific ways of organising social reality. Positioning is political because, *pace* Laclau (1995), it can be seen as a social decision about how society is to be organised. Questioning established positions is, I will argue in this chapter, a speculative-political event. It is this event in which established positions are negated and different positions are affirmed; for me, this speculative movement between negativity and positivity generally describes the event of politics.

In this chapter I will discuss a range of philosophies that can all be seen to be speculative in nature in the sense that they are negating, or discontinuing, established positions and exploring possibilities of affirmatively creating new positions. In my view, these philosophies are all concerned with conceptualising the political event. Part of what I am trying to do in this thesis 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 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 (*TT*). One could also say that reading is a movement of positivity that has to go through a moment of negativity. The aim of this chapter 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 conceptualising the event of politics, which is of importance for formulating a political project of repositioning organisation.

One particular type of translation I will attempt in this chapter is between, what we could call, a German inter-war and a French post-World-War-Two tradition of theory – or what has, perhaps problematically, been referred to as critical theory and post-structuralism/postmodernism. In organisation theory and other fields of enquiry there are sometimes artificial demarcating barriers seen between these traditions (see, for example, Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 81-111). On one hand, critical theory is sometimes regarded as rationalistic, elitist and something that is aiming at 'grand' emancipatory and political narratives. On the other hand, post-structuralism, 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 'postmodernism', 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 discontinuing, 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, on one hand, never ends, but, on the other, still makes possible a particular event of politics, in which new positions of social

organisation may be claimed. Before I engage with these philosophical traditions in detail, let me generally outline my view of speculative thought and the reasoning behind a privileging of discontinuity over continuity.

The Politics of Discontinuity

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 argues (1969: vii-ix), would be characterised by four major discontinuities: (1) new technologies will create new major industries and brand-new major 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-organise 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. Thus, in his view, at the end of the 1960s the world faced

> an Age of Discontinuity in world economy and technology. We might succeed in making it an age of great economic growth... But the one thing that is certain so far is that it will be a period of change – in technology and in economic policy, in industry structures and in economic theory, in the knowledge needed to govern and to manage, and in economic issues. While we have been busy finishing the great nineteenth-century economic edifice, the foundations have shifted under our feet. (Drucker, 1969: 9)

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 characterised 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, decentralised 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* (*sic*). 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: 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: 46).

Here, then, we have two related images of discontinuity. 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 deterritorialising, or depositioning, powers of capital; it questions and discontinues established territories of its rule in order to search for new territories to be colonised. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 54) make quite clear, these deterritorialisations are

immediately reterritorialised, 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 organising social relations. Similarly, Fukuyama's discontinuity of history – because all 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 organised. Drucker's and Fukuyama's rhetoric of discontinuity can thus be seen as the continuation of a particular history. Yet, not everyone seems to be happy to join in with the celebrations of that history.

'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: 50). "The time is out of joint. The world is going badly" (1994: 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: 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 realises that deconstruction is not some relativistic, idealist method of reading and writing. Instead, and this is what Derrida practices with *Spectres of Marx*, it is an intervention, which does not shy away from analysing 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: 81-84) could be summarised 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. So far, then, Derrida's 'telegram'.

This list can, of course, be continued and it should also be clear that many of Derrida's assertions and judgements can be contested. 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 characterises the language of the 'end of history' cannot be the final word. Derrida's 'telegram' 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: 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: 63). In Derrida's view, then, 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', etc. 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:

> It would be a question of putting into question again, in certain of its essential predicates, the very concept of the said ideal. This would extend, for example, to the economic analysis of the market, the laws of capital, of types of capital (financial or symbolic, therefore

> spectral), liberal parliamentary democracy, modes of representation and suffrage, the determining content of human rights, women's and children's rights, the current concepts of equality, liberty, especially fraternity (the most problematic of all), dignity, the relations between man and citizen. It would also extend, in the quasi-totality of these concepts, to the concept of the human (therefore of the divine and the animal) and to a determined concept of the democratic that supposes it (let us not say of all democracy or, precisely, of democracy to come). (Derrida, 1994: 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' (e.g. the end of history, or the age of discontinuity).

There are thus two types of discontinuities. The first type is a 'major' discourse of discontinuity, 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 continuity of the 'eternal image' of capitalism and the liberal-democratic order. This 'major' discourse immediately positions all language (of discontinuity) in relation to the hegemonic content, that is, capital and democratic liberalism. One could also say that every discontinuity or deterritorialisation is immediately reterritorialised on the strata of an established continuum of history. Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 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: 111). The openness of the 'major' discourse thus enables the second type of discontinuity, 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 discontinuity continuously engenders the gaps left by the 'major' in order to produce new figurations of struggle. A statement like 'the world is going badly' is such a 'minor' discourse. It comes from within the very world that 'is going badly'; yet it resists the way the 'majority' organises 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 recognise '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, 550). 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, 576-577). For Benjamin, it is this halting of continuous history which is needed to politically intervene in a specific moment of opportunity.

> In reality, there is not one moment that does not carry its own revolutionary opportunity in itself...The particular revolutionary opportunity of each historical moment is confirmed for the revolutionary thinker by the political situation. But it is no less confirmed...by the power this moment has to open a very particular, heretofore closed chamber of the past. Entry into this chamber coincides exactly with political action. (*BGS* I.3, 1231)

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 dialectical speculation about a different time that emerges out of seeing historical images differently.

Derrida's deconstructive questioning of the ideals of our time can be seen as such 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: 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: 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 (e.g. 1987: 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: 25). For Derrida, Hegel's engagement and closeness to the state, although it needs to be problematised 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: 25).

Although Derrida does not mention or directly relate to Deleuze and Guattari's work, he 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 problematisation 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 (e.g. 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: 378) claim. There are several points to be made in relation to such a reading of the dialectic and history in general.

Hardt (1993: 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: 183-184). 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 discussed above 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, then, 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.

> 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: 35, emphasis in original)

Perhaps one could suggest that the above passage is Derrida's 'translation' of the problematic of the dialectical process as a two-fold movement: first, it exposes a given homogeneous history as an impossibility by interrupting its continuous

flow, by showing that history, including that of 'the dialectic', is not a unity (thesis) but a heterogeneity (antithesis); the second movement is an affirmation (synthesis), a speculative filling of the gap that is left behind by rendering the continuity of history impossible. For me, these two movements describe the political event. This event is political because established positions are questioned and resisted and new positions are sought to be put into place. This political event is about contesting the 'principled positions' of history and society. As I have argued above, however, this event cannot simply be about the total opposition to, or discontinuation of, history; this would simply replace the continuity of history with the continuity of discontinuity, which would imply the end of all history. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), such an end or total discontinuity of history and society is impossible.

Now, according to Žižek (1989: 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'. 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" (ibid.). 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 anti-thesis (*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 finalised 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: 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 of history, because it continuously leaves open a gap for 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: 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 conceptualisation 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.

What I have tried to problematise in this section, then, is the relationship between continuity and discontinuity, which, for me, is at the heart of speculative thought.

I have discussed the tradition of speculation in relation to dialectics, which, in my view, is not a specific 'method' but a general movement between negativity and positivity. 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 will try to show 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 discontinued, and possibilities of new positions and experiences are explored. This, then, brings us back to Derrida's 'telegram', which aims to indicate ten reasons as to why 'the world is going badly'. Part of what I am trying to suggest in this chapter is that Derrida's 'telegram' and his notion of 'deconstruction', in general, can be seen in relation to a wider tradition of politico-speculative philosophies. When I say 'political' here, I am not only referring 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 thought itself, because speculation is about putting into question established positions of society and imagining different positions along which society could be organised.

As this section 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 conceptualised the political event. As I mentioned before, the aim is not to integrate the philosophies of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility discussed in this chapter. 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 conceptualised. As I argued above, such a conceptualisation is of importance if one is concerned with exploring possibilities of repositioning social organisation.

The Politics of Destruction

The concept of 'destruction' features in the writings of all three German writers that I am concerned with in this section: Benjamin, Adorno and Heidegger. This 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 characterises destruction. What I aim to show in this section 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.

Throughout his career Adorno was engaged in the development of, what he and others have called, 'critical theory', which he practiced with a host of colleagues at the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, commonly known as the Frankfurt School.[5] 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

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[5]   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).

lively exchange of letters between Adorno and Benjamin (C).[6] For both writers, the purpose of research, of critical thought, is not to ask how a particular social phenomenon functions, but how it stands in relation to the underlying 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 analyse in detail the particular subjectivities, ideologies and architectural emplacements formed by the wider 'goings-on' of capitalist modernity; Benjamin and Adorno called such an analysis 'immanent critique' (e.g. Adorno, 1967: 32). Benjamin's 'immanent critique' of the arcades exposed the inherent antagonisms of Parisian modernity; it analysed how 'early' capitalism produced specific subjectivities, for example, that of the *flâneur* 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*.

Now, the purpose of 'immanent critique' is to awaken the *flâneur* and the whole modern 'sleeping collectivity', as Benjamin calls it (*AP*, 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

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[6]   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*

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, these fragments are presented as precisely that: antagonistic, non-integrated particulars which cannot be synthesised. 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, 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 an affirmation in itself.

Drama (OGT) was not accepted by the University of Frankfurt as habilitation thesis, which in the German context means that one cannot become a university professor.

Let me make this point clearer by discussing Adorno's conception of philosophy,[7] which, in his view, always 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, 331). 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, 40), and which, in his view, has attained a monopoly position in Anglo-American countries (*AGS* 10/2, 462). Such a philosophy assumes reality to be a chronological historical order that can be positively measured and analysed. 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 eternalise 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

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[7]   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.

capable of thinking the whole in its untruth" (*AGS* 10/2, 470). Adorno, then, is deeply troubled by the fact that contemporary philosophy seems merely another scientific discipline, whose knowledge production is institutionalised 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 institutional[8] 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 and Benjamin's philosophies look similar to what Heidegger poses to us in *Being and Time*, which he describes as the destruction[9]

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[8] 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).

[9] The original translation of *Being and Time* by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (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 'destructuring', 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.

of Western metaphysics[10]. 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: 66-67, 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: 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, as I have shown, some of its concerns – he also subjected it to some fierce criticism.[11] What Heidegger attempts to show in *Being and Time* is that time

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[10] 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).

[11] Adorno's fierce and unapologetic criticism of Heidegger can be found, for example, in his already mentioned essays on philosophy (see earlier footnote). Additionally, see his essays

shapes and produces being, being is temporal (1993b: 62). As I briefly discussed in Chapter One, 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 analyse 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, the subject. Instead, Heidegger tries to develop an understanding of Being, which is a more 'general' or 'basic' conception of being.[12] 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 popularly consumed notion of being and come to an understanding of Being itself, that which lies behind being. In other

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'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).

[12] Heidegger distinguishes between 'being', which is 'all there *is*', and 'Being', 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: 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 spatialised 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: 44). What Heidegger, thus, points out is that we cannot conceptualise '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 ontologises 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, 191-192). Being thus becomes a notion of essence; Being is beyond being, it stands outside and above being.

words, he is in search for Being as an original being, the 'pure I' (*AGS* 5, 191-192). 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, 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, 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.[13] According to Adorno, then, 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

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[13] 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: 34). So, when he asks with one of this 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.

'pure Time' (*AGS* 1, 330). According to Adorno (*AGS* 6, 19-20), the philosophy of Heidegger, although at first sight related to a project of destruction as conceptualised by Adorno and Benjamin, amounts to idealism. What is celebrated and fetishised by idealism is the principle of a positive infinity or continuity of history which stands outside any concrete social relations. For Adorno, it is precisely the task of philosophy to halt any apparent continuum of history in order to question its 'goings-on' and, perhaps, redirect it towards new ends. So, 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, then, negative thinking involves a critique of society, which is affirmative in itself as it aims to present knowledge of society. 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 section, a complete discontinuity is not possible as this would suggest 'the end of history'. One thus needs to emphasise 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 society, 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 would like to 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'.

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,*[14] as a concept, signifies a time when conditions are right for the

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[14] *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.

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 idealised and eternalised 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, 701, 704; *TPH*, 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, 704; *TPH*, 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 characterised 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 idealised, fetishised, 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, 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, 700; *TPH*, 254). The second movement is that of remembering, which for Benjamin does not mean to recognise '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, 704; *TPH*, 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, 576; *AP*, 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, 577; *AP*, 463). Thus, for Benjamin history needs to be recognised, it needs to be worked on, it needs to be read, as it were. History is a contingent and contested phenomenon that is constructed through the speculative power of thought. 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, 703; *TPH*, 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, 490-491; *AP*, 388-389, 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 organisation 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, 587; *AP*, 470). The 'dialectical image', then, is an event of destruction which engenders the opportunity to construct something new.

One should note that Benjamin's destructive dialectics cannot be synthesised 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, 1238, my translation). However, to let there be no misunderstanding, "what is essential is not in the passage to infinity itself…but rather what this passage blossoms into" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 285). Or, to put it differently, 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, 573; *AP*, 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 brings us back, then, 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, then, 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 being reliant on a conception of a voluntaristic 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, for example, did so privately in a letter sent to Benjamin on the 18th of March 1936; see *C* and Adorno, 1995: 168), one should not underestimate his lifelong concern to conceptualise subjectivity as something that is produced by specific historical constellations of time and space. The *Arcades Project*, for example, 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' (*WoA*), 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. This, then, 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 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 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.

The Politics of 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: 270-271).

Besides Heidegger's philosophy, Derrida has also been a prolific reader of Benjamin. One could, for example, mention Derrida's work on justice and violence (e.g. 1991b), which offers a reading of Benjamin's essay 'Critique of Violence' (*CoV*). Derrida (e.g. 1985, 2001) has also drawn on Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' (*TT*) 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 already in the Preface,

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 conceptualisations 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 thesis to fully engage with Derrida's philosophy and its possibilities for such a project of transformation – this has been done elsewhere[15] – 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 post-structuralism. 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: 81, emphasis in original). Hence, deconstruction can be seen as a movement of depositioning, a

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[15] Although thorough and detailed engagements with Derrida's work have been rare within organisation theory, Jones (2003a,c) delivers an example of how Derrida can be productively

movement that displaces[16] 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 destructs 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 (e.g. Lehman, 1991; Smith, 1988; 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: 94).

Derrida, then, 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

read in relation to a project of resisting and transforming organisation theory.

deconstruction is never just a negative organisational principle, in the sense that it only discontinues or dismembers. For him, deconstruction is both a dismembering *and* membering (Derrida, 1978: 234); that is, deconstruction not only disperses, displaces or depositions; it also re-members, re-places and re-positions. The negative of dismembering is thus always already complemented by an organised movement of membering – depositioning is accompanied by repositioning. To explicate this double-movement in more detail, it is worth quoting Derrida at some length:

> Therefore we must proceed using a double gesture, according to a unity that is both systematic and in and of itself divided, a double writing, that is, a writing that is in and of itself multiple... On the one hand, we must traverse a phase of *overturning*. To do justice to this necessity 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. We know what always have been the *practical* (particularly *political*) effects of *immediately* jumping *beyond* oppositions, and of protests in the simple form of *neither* this *nor* that. When I say that this *phase* is necessary, the word phase is perhaps not the most rigorous one. It is not a question of a chronological phase, a given moment, or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things. The necessity of this phase is structural; it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself....That being said – and on the other hand – to remain in this phase is still to operate on the terrain of and from within the deconstructed system. By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging, writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept', a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime. If this interval, this biface or biphase, can be inscribed only in a bifurcated writing (and this hold first of all for a new concept of writing, that *simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy

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[16] In fact, Derrida explicitly describes his books as a displacement, and as the displacement of a question (1987: 3).

> 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), then it can only be marked in what I would call a *grouped* textual field: in the last analysis it is impossible to point it out, for a unilinear text, or punctual *position*, an operation signed by a single author, are all by definition incapable of practicing this interval. (Derrida, 1987: 41-42, emphases in original)

What Derrida could be seen to describe in this passage is the deconstructive moment, the event of deconstruction, which, as I would argue, is closely connected to Benjamin's conception of the 'event'. Derrida characterises this moment 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 is keen to emphasise, this event cannot simply be a subjective experience. 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.

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 neutralise a given field of subjects and objects. On the contrary, it aims to directly intervene in this field politically, *that is, it* recognises 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 in 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: 83-84)

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, organised 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 organise 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 organised 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 organise 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 organised 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 recognise 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 organisation.

The Politics of Impossibility

So far in this chapter I have discussed two philosophical traditions and the way they can be seen to conceptualise the political event. In my view, the philosophies of destruction and deconstruction share an understanding of the political event as a dialectical movement between negativity and positivity. The movement of negativity is described by putting established historical orders into question. In the

first section of this chapter I discussed the political reasoning behind such a privileging of discontinuity. I argued that an act of discontinuity is a political questioning of the continuity of history, which is always already reproduced by 'those in power'. Discontinuity is political because it questions, challenges and resists the 'principled positions' along which society is organised. What, however, I have been keen to show throughout this chapter is that the political event, as conceptualised 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; or, put differently, it is an affirmation of discontinuity by establishing new continuities.

What my discussion of the philosophies of destruction and deconstruction 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 characterised by an undecidability. 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, deterritorialisations, are always already inherent to the way capital works. That is, in their view capitalism is not simply a fully territorialised or totalitarian system. Instead, it is characterised by a plethora of deterritorialisation forces that continuously leave the regime of capital open for intervention and change. As Hardt and Negri (2000) make clear throughout *Empire*, capital is a 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 always already 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. This, then, I would suggest, is the dialectics of possibility and impossibility that describes the political event. As I have shown in the above sections, speculative thought engenders this dialectical movement by searching for political possibilities within the realm of the impossible.

So far I have been concerned with the conceptualisation of the political event, but it is not quite clear yet how this event relates to the constitution of social organisation or, indeed, society. To make this link between the political event and 'the social' clearer I will now turn to the political theory of Laclau and Mouffe, who have made productive use of the philosophies discussed in this chapter. 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 society. For Laclau

and Mouffe, who explicitly claim to write in a deconstructionist tradition of thought (1985: 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 society 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 finalising the dialectical process. For Laclau and Mouffe, this impossibility or undecidability of society is structural (Laclau, 1995: 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: 109-111), highlights that society can never be fixed in an all-encompassing, centralised place. Instead, society should be seen as a social interaction that occurs within a discursive context. For them, this discourse can never be total; instead, it is characterised by resistance and difference. This coincides with Foucault's understanding of the interrelationship between power and resistance, mentioned in Chapter One. In their view, then, 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: 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, society 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 society 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: 54-55)

For Laclau, then, the event of decision is not a decision one takes *as* subject. Instead, it is a decision out of which the subject emerges. 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 of society rather than the individual subject. Laclau bases such an understanding on the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan. These I will

now briefly summarise because they seem to be important for understanding Laclau and Mouffe's conception of the politics of impossibility.

For Lacan, "the subject as such is uncertain" (1998: 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 'overdetermined' 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, perhaps Foucault's discursive regime or apparatus. 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: 203). For Lacan, "the subject depends on the signifier", which has to be located "in the field of the Other" (*ibid.*: 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 depositioned. 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 (1988: 94ff).

The implications of such a Lacanian theorisation 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: 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: 203ff). That is, because the subject is not 'free' of any ties, because it is produced by the Other, is 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 symbolisation can never capture the totality of the subject's Real. For Lacan the Real (with a capital 'R') is not simply reality. In fact, it is that which escapes the 'normal' symbolisation 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 symbolised. 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 depositioned. Because of this lack, Lacan does not speak of the subject's identity but of identification (e.g. 1977: 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: 29). The Lacanian subject, then, 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 characterised 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: 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: 184); it is located in the Real, that which is not symbolisable. *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 symbolise, there will always be a gap in the Other.

We have obviously gone over Lacan's work far too quickly here. Yet, the above summary can, perhaps, help us to understand the psychoanalytical background to the notion of the impossibility of society. 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: 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 characterised 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 characterised 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 society is not a totality but, instead, characterised by antagonisms.[17] What these antagonisms point to is an inherent fragility of social organisation; it can only be something partial and precarious (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125). This is to say, because society is inherently characterised by

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[17] 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: 125).

antagonisms, it is impossible for 'the social' to ever fully organise 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: 127).

However, precisely because of this fragile nature of 'the social', Laclau and Mouffe insist that there is a need to organise 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 organisation 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: 130).[18] Whereas the 'logic of antagonisms' points to the fundamental impossibility of society – 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 organisation of reality. This dialectic between antagonisms and equivalence, then, points again to the dialectic between the impossible and the possible, which is characterised by a double movement. The first movement is one that embraces

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[18] 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, i.e. that is defined by difference. They base their conceptualisation 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: 74ff); see also Lacan's discussion of metaphor and metonymy (e.g. 1977: 156, 164).

difference; it shows the limits of any fixed reality and exposes the antagonisms of social organisation. 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: 90-91, emphasis in original)

What Laclau emphasises here again is that there is a need to move from the level of undecidability to that of a decision. 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'.

In their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 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 can be seen as 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 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: 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: 70). Yet, according to Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci still restricted his understanding of political struggle to the realm of the working class. As I mentioned above, they applied Foucault's (1970, 1972) notion of 'discursive formation' to argue (1985: 105-114) that political struggle is articulated through a whole range of different discursive practices, which cannot be located in an essentialist category like the working class. Laclau and Mouffe's argument was, of course, embedded in a specific historical juncture which, in the mid-1980s, was characterised by the crisis of 'the left' (the crisis of social democracy and the communist project), the rise of 'neo-liberalism' (e.g. Thatcher, 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 Five). Laclau and Mouffe's concern was to open up the questions of 'the political' and hegemony to these specific social developments that are

characterised, 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 places and involves a great variety of discourses. As I have already noted, for Laclau and Mouffe, "hegemony supposes the incomplete and open character of the social" (1985: 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, then, that, for Laclau and Mouffe, society is contingent; it is characterised 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 organise 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: 7). That is, there are concrete social formations that are characterised by the specific ordering and positioning of forces of power and knowledge. Linking back to my discussion of Heidegger in Chapter One we could, perhaps, 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: 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 One, 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: 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 organisation and privileging market entrepreneurship and shareholder value (Torfing, 1999: 102; see also my discussion in Chapter Five). Now, 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 society. 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 characterised 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', with which I will engage in Chapter Five, has emerged precisely because of the way 'neo-liberalist' discourses have been articulated.

Now, Torfing (1999: 118-122) critiques Laclau and Mouffe's conception of politics for not being able to account for the day-to-day politics, which are not always characterised by social antagonisms. For him, politics does not always have to involve hegemonic struggles, such as those that involve 'neo-liberalism' and capitalism. Although Torfing 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. While it might be the case that Laclau and Mouffe do not pay enough attention to the politics of the everyday, they would insist on the multiplicity of articulatory

practices of resistance (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 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: 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 organisation.

'Anti-capitalism', for example, is made possible because of an articulatory practice of opposition against the particular ways 'neo-liberalist' capitalism is currently organised. 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 above discussion of Hardt and Negri's opposition against Hegel and dialectics, 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, then, that resistance against something can only be

articulated from within the discursive formation of which it is a product. There is not 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.

The point to make, then, is that, although the hegemony of 'neo-liberalism' and capitalism emplaces and organises 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: 293, emphasis in original)

Hegemony is thus a discursive structure that is inherently open and precarious. It enables resistances and oppositions: discourses of 'anti'. 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. This closure, or decision, can, however, never be final, precisely because hegemony points to the contingency and impossibility of society.

3. Positioning Organisation: The Hegemony of Management Knowledge

In the previous chapter I discussed a range of different philosophies in order to conceptualise the political event. In my view, what the philosophies of destruction, deconstruction and impossibility share is an understanding of politics as a dialectical movement between negativity and positivity. That is, the political event is seen as a positivity that *has to* go through negativity. More colloquially one could say that, in order to change 'something', that is, to act politically, one has to negate and discontinue that 'something', one has to put that 'something' into question and expose its limits and boundaries. I argued that such a negation becomes possible because history and society are impossible or undecidable, which means that they can never be full positivities. To say that society is impossible does, however, also mean that it is possible; that is, what the philosophies discussed above seem to generally share is the understanding that political decisions are possible, and indeed necessary, to organise society. The concept of hegemony points to the notion that society is characterised by decisions, which position and emplace 'the social' in particular discursive formations that endure over time and space. Hegemonic formations are, however,

never all-encompassing; instead, they are open and precarious, that is, contested, which enables the dialectical process in the first place.

In Chapter One I followed Parker's claim that management can be seen as the 'hegemonic model of organisation' (2002a: 184). That is, in his view, the theory and practice of organisation is described by the hegemony of the management discourse. I argued that the hegemony of management is part of a project that positions social organisation 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 organisation theory. While it cannot be the task of this chapter to comprehensively outline, discuss and critique the hegemony of management discourses within contemporary organisation 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, then, I will engage with the field of knowledge management, which can be seen to have become one of the most popular organisation and management discourses over the past decade. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, Peter Drucker, the famous management guru, 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: 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: 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 organisation theory: information management, individual and organisational 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 conceptualised and practiced by knowledge management, can be seen as, what Benjamin calls, a paralysing '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, then, 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 organisation. 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* into 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 organisation.

Organisation, Management and the Knowledge Society

What is the *Zeitgeist* of organisation? If one would go into a contemporary organisation and ask the seemingly obvious question 'What is organisation?', one would probably be met by either ignorance or lack of understanding. It seems so obvious. What else do organisations do than to organise? – organise processes of production, organise human resources, organise marketing activities, organise accounting and finances, organise strategy, organise research, organise culture, organise change, organise time, organise space…*everything in a modern* organisation needs to be organised. Yet, what seems so normal and natural to us today is, in fact, a very recent phenomenon. Although the concept of organisation

might have been around since ancient Greek times,[19] it is first and foremost linked to the emergence of capitalism and modern forms of divisions of labour, specialisation and mass production in the 18th and 19th century, which gave rise to 'organisation man' (*sic*) (Whyte, 1956). For Parker, the rise of modern organisation is inherently linked to 'management', which, in his view, has become the 'hegemonic model of organisation' (2002a: 184). For him (2002a: 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 organisations, 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 organisation. In his view, management is a specific form of organisation that has claimed universality under the conditions of capitalist modernity.

The task of management is not simply to organise but to manage organisational operations more efficiently and effectively in the name of the owner or shareholder of a firm. As early as in 1835 Ure, who could, perhaps, be seen as one of the first management gurus, 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

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[19] Starbuck (2003) argues that pre-modern forms of organising 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.

> seeks to sustain the firm through financial management and marketing. Harmonizing these three systems, said Ure, was the responsibility of managers. (2003: 150)

Management, then, is about the efficient and effective organisation 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 thus say that management is about the positioning of resources, i.e. objects and subjects, within the wider organised realm of a firm in order to produce surplus value.

To stay with the example of time management for a second; the task of the manager is to qualify and quantify time in such a way that the systems of organisation can work efficiently and effectively hand in hand. In such a view, time is always already spatialised. That is, time is seen as a Newtonian objective, measurable, quantitative dimension of space; it characterises the linear, chronological, evolutionary and progressive development of existing spatial relations. The management of time has a long tradition in work organisations. Marx (1976: 350), for example, analyses in detail how time, besides labour power, is the most important commodity that characterises the organisation 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 organisation. 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 been often announced (e.g. Piore and Sabel, 1984), can still be seen as one of the main principles of managerial organising. 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*[20]); one could also use the example of the just-in-time manufacturing system (see, for example, Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992). An important aspect of management, then, is to manage the time aspects of work and production processes.[21]

However, beyond the concrete processes of managing time in work organisations, 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 Two, 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, perhaps, 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

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[20] 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: 1).

[21] For a further discussion of how, in modern times, time is managed, see Adam (1990, 1995), Giddens (1990), Gurvitch (1964) and Nowotny (1994). For an overview of the literature on organisation in relation to questions of time (and space) see, for example, Butler (1995),

capital; its task is to produce and expand surplus value and ensure 'higher' returns. 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, which, according to Willmott, 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: 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. 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

Burrell (1992), Clark (1985, 1990), Gherardi and Strati (1988), Lee and Liebenau (1999), Hassard (1996) and Holmer-Nadesan (1997).

> labour. The general objective of these techniques is to enable units of labour to be more productive – that is, to work harder. (1998: 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: 152). What Jackson and Carter name here, *pace* Derrida (1994), 'techno-mediatic' relates to the Heideggerian understanding, discussed in Chapter One, 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 Chapter Two 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 organises 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. 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' (e.g. Alvesson, 1995; Starbuck, 1992) or 'knowledge-based' (e.g. Grant, 1996). Special issues of organisation and management journals dedicated to knowledge management (e.g. *Strategic Management Journal*, 1996; *Organization Science*, 2002), new journals (e.g. *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 organisation 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 organisations.

Consultancies are often used as example for the practice of knowledge management (e.g. Alvesson, 1995; Moore and Birkinshaw, 1998; Robertson and Swan, 1998; Weiss 1998; Starbuck, 1992): they are described as being at the forefront of organisational learning (e.g. Levitt and March, 1988; Huber, 1991), knowledge creation and innovation (e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and the management of 'knowledge workers',[22] 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 organise

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[22] 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).

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.[23] 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

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[23] 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

organise existing capitalist relations more effectively and efficiently. Recently, however, some writers have called for the abandonment of Marx's labour theory of value and its replacement with a 'knowledge theory of value' (e.g. Jacques, 2000). The argument is that today value is not predominantly created by exploiting labour as commodity but by managing immaterial processes of learning and knowing. I do not want to altogether dismiss the new importance of knowledge for today's management of corporations. However, it seems that immaterial forms of labour are often overemphasised today – especially in the face of Third World sweatshops, immigrant labour in the First World, and masses of 'knowledge workers' labouring in call centres, supermarkets and on shopfloors. Even if knowledge plays a bigger role in the creation of value today, this value is always already associated with the First World and its worldwide interests. This, however, 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, 6-7 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, which can even be traced in works, such as Hardt and Negri's (2000) *Empire*, which claim to be critical of today's 'goings-on' of global capitalism, sometimes remain blind towards the continuous importance of traditional exploitative labour relations in the First World and especially in many parts of the Third World – an argument which has also been put forward by labour process theorists (e.g. Thompson and Smith, 2001; see also Chapter Five).

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for novelty) and techno-economic factors (economic, political and organisational) that shape management fashion demand.

What I have argued in this section, then, 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 organisation', he implies that management knowledge is today's defining type of organisational 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 organisation of genocide (see, for example, 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. (Parker, 2002a: 9)

For Parker, then, management is the 'hegemonic model of organisation' because it 'alters our language'. One could say, management emplaces and positions language in specific ways. The politics of this managerial project is that it is always already positively positioned in relation to capital. What I am trying 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 analysed in more detail.

'Techknowledgy'

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 information technology related research and management consultancy work, assert that "knowledge management is much more than technology, but 'techknowledgy' is clearly a part of knowledge management" (1998: 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: 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 organisations, 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: 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: 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 uncodified and informal knowledge across boundaries of time and space more effectively. This threatens the functioning of traditional economic markets and organisational 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: 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 knowledge[24] that cannot be easily captured. But what exactly is tacit knowledge? In knowledge management the term has been popularised 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 analysed by their different degrees of transferability, i.e. 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

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[24] 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, e.g. *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: 49). Referring to studies of organisational 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 organisational knowledge), automatic (preconscious individual knowledge) and collective (practical, context-dependent organisational knowledge).

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 organisational 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 criticised for a number of reasons. Firstly, it analyses knowledge from a positivistic perspective, i.e. we are able to access knowledge and measure it. Secondly, it assumes knowledge to be a specific entity that resides in people's cognising minds (Blackler, 1995), i.e. 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: 14) and "explicit knowledge is always grounded on a tacit component" (Polanyi, 1975: 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: 20)

Today, it is argued that company assets not only include material artefacts, properties and financial assets, but also employees' and organisational

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, for example, Brooking, 1996; Edvinsson and Malone, 1998; Lynn, 1998; Nahaphiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Roos et al., 1998; Stewart, 1998; Zeleny, 1989). Such discourses, then, 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: 230-231, 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, formalise the unknown into understandable language positions. In other words, according to Nonaka and Takeuchi, economic value can only be produced by codifying individuals' and organisations' tacit knowledge and transmitting it via technological networks of language. Especially in complex organisations,

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: 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: 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 organisation', 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: 234)

For Nonaka and Takeuchi, knowledge-creation is therefore not separable from technology; organisations become a computer; organisation 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 'techknowledgy' 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: 227-228)

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 organisation. 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: 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 organise 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, for example, 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 analyse* the hegemonic functioning of its political setup. As I argued in Chapter Two, a hegemony can never be all-encompassing, which means that there will always be holes and gaps in a hegemonic discourse that can be engendered by resistances. I will discuss some of these resistances in the following sections and also in Chapter Four. 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 organisation and management; let us just remember, for example, Taylor's scientific management 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: 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 assembly line has meant since the 1920s, 'the train' meant, perhaps, to Benjamin. For Benjamin, the train 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: 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: 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,[25] but 'techknowledgies' such as (moving) images, news stories, information and knowledge. "The noise is so great", writes Karl Kraus (cited in *KK*, 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

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[25] 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

> news'...Full of betrayal, earthquakes, poison, and fire from the *mundus intelligibilis*. *(KK,* 239)

During Benjamin's lifetime it was mainly the newspaper that served as 'techknowledgy' 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 fetishised. 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, then, 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: x)

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a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today's economy" *(AGS* 3: 142; 1979: 121).

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.[26] In such a view, then, 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: 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

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[26] 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: 5).

technologies, such as intranets and knowledge maps, to construct precisely such a 'universal knowledge machine'.

What I would like to suggest, then, 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, 477-478; *WoA*, 221, translation modified)

In Benjamin's words, then, 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 to their objects.

This, then, brings us back to Heidegger's philosophy of positioning and emplacement, which I discussed in Chapter One. In Heidegger's words[27] one could see Benjamin's event of modern technical reproduction as a new technical world-image of social organisation. This world-image emplaces being in particular ways. In Chapter Two 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 organised through the gaze of remote control, "which reduces what is distant and resistant to what is near, clear and controllable" (Cooper, 1992: 268). One could say that knowledge management is at the heart of today's economy of controllability.

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[27] See Weber (1996) as well as Benjamin and Osborne (2000) for extensive discussions on how and where Heidegger's and Benjamin's philosophies meet.

For Benjamin, technical reproduction displaces traditional social relations; it destructs a historical experience of the world, or, what he calls, *Erfahrung*, and, instead, 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, 608; *CB*, 110; *I*, 153-154, 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 characterised 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, 615; *CB*, 117; *I*, 159, 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 characterised 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'[28] 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: 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. This can be connected to what in Chapter Two I described as capital's powers of discontinuity or Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion that capital is a 'machine' that continuously seeks to deterritorialise existing social relations. Similarly to Benjamin, they see capital as continuously being on a hunt for the 'new'. However, this 'newness' is always already reterritorialised 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, 169; *AP*, 112)

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[28] 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, 492-493; *AP*, 389).

What Benjamin spells out, then, 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 Two, 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: 444-455; *KK*, 89)

What does Benjamin mean by 'triumph over the dead'? In his essay 'The Storyteller' (*ST*) 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, 165)

I would argue that Benjamin's religious experience is a historical experience that lies beyond 'official' history. In Chapter Two 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 Two), 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 re-produced 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, for example, his 'Surrealism' essay), offer glimpses of a new type of religious or historical experience – Benjamin also calls these glimpses 'profane illuminations' (*S*). These illuminations 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, then, is an experience of death that enables a new cognition, a new experience of the object, because the object's unity is destructed, 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 destructed 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*" (*TPH*, 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 organisation, 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, disorganises and produces 'shocks' of information in order to reproduce capital. Just like Drucker's *Age of Discontinuity*, which I referred to in Chapter Two, knowledge management discontinues, or deterritorialises, 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 theorised 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 *CB, AP*). This section, then, argues that knowledge management is not simply a technology or a managerial tool used in companies or organisations. 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*, for example, is an upper middle class, bourgeois man[29] 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 (*AP*). Benjamin

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[29] Let me point out again that one can criticise Benjamin for his gender stereotyping. As I noted above, some writers have emphasised that the *flâneur* can indeed be a woman. However, to

sees the *flâneur* as a subject whose experience is characterised 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, 558; *CB*, 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, then, 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, 245; *AP*, 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 objectivity 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: 164-165)

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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.

The *flâneur*, Benjamin's modern subject *par excellence*, is in the midst of these 'things', these commodities. The *flâneur* translates the commodity into allegorical 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: 329-330).

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 destructed and transformed into other 'modern heroes', such as Benjamin's 'sandwich-man'.[30] 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, urbanisation. With the accelerated commodification of life in the 20th century the *flâneur*'s subjectivity is transformed – from the strolling *flâneur* to the 'entrepreneurial' sandwich-man. What the transformation of the *flâneur* 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

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[30] 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, 562; *AP*, 448). The Parisian 'sandwich-man' walks through the city while wearing a board full of sandwiches, which he sells to the 'passer-by'.

somewhere else; it is divided. Hence, Lacan speaks of the 'barred subject', or $, a subject that does not seem to be constructed but destructed (1977: 292ff). The 'barred' or 'destructed subject' is not 'full' of human life but, instead, an empty space, perhaps a 'non-place', which is filled by the Other, particularly the commodity (perhaps it is not a coincidence that '$' 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 organises 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 both subjects the commodity is not only an object that exists 'out there' but one that characterises 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 prostitute[31] 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, 1151, my translation). One might therefore 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, sub-conscious 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: 184, n147). The knowledge worker has to offer his or her knowledge, whether explicit or tacit, to

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[31] 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, i.e. mid-19th century Parisian modernity, was probably characterised by the stereotypical gender roles described here.

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: 84). In other words, the 'hero' of the academic (student) is often 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 books[32] 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. The university, then, seems to be firmly embedded in the hegemonic discourse of management and 'neo-liberalism' which calls for all knowledge production to be geared towards entrepreneurship in private and public sectors (see also du Gay, 2000a).

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 characterised 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: 68). The authors are quite explicit in whose name this apparently 'holistic' approach, this transdisciplinarity, should be exercised: "Another important precondition is to have access to such knowledge and expertise, being able to reconfigure it in novel

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[32] Part of the Virgin/WBS book series are: Barrow (2001), Barry (2002), Craven (2001), Cumming (2001), Dickinson (2001), Wolff (2001).

ways and offer it for sale" (*ibid.*: 111). For Gibbons *et al.*, then, 'mode 2' knowledge should be produced for a *specific* purpose: for sale. Theoretical knowledge is here always already a pragmatic 'techknowledgy', 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 realised 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 can be seen to be '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 organisation is emplaced and technically reproduced. In this sense, knowledge management is not simply an epistemological tool, as is sometimes thought (e.g. von Krogh and Roos, 1995), but indeed an ontological practice. 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 organisations. Instead, it involves the production of subjectivities and therefore life itself. In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, one could say that management has set up an enormous 'chain of equivalence' among social and also material actors in order to produce a hegemonic discourse. 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 other words, exactly how is the hegemony of management knowledge produced? 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: 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* aestheticised. As the commodity conceals social relations of production to make them appear as relations between things, the commodity is aestheticised, it acquires a sublime aura of objectivity. The table makes 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: 165)

For Marx, then, '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 fetishise 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 (e.g. 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, i.e. 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.[33] 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, a 'positive' 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: 140-141). Capital's specific 'libidinal economy' finds its expression in the general form of the commodity.

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[33] Anthropologically the term 'fetish' was first applied by the Portuguese in the 16th century – as *feitiço* – 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... 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: 39).

Marx argues that the formation of the 'commodity fetish' takes place with the general form becoming a *universal* form, i.e. 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: 385; 1977: 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 (e.g. 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 characterised by a lack. This is to say that social reality can never be fully organised. 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 recognized as labor'. (*BGS* V, 822-823; *AP*, 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 Two, 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: 132, translation modified)[34]

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

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[34] 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?

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 sub-conscious 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: 31), the collectivity is asleep because it does not realise that the Other is failing. This is to say that society 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 organises 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: 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 Two, that society is structurally undecidable or impossible. What this structural necessity of the exception points to is that the rules of reality will always be characterised by exceptions. Social organisation 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 subspecies 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: 13), the symptom aims to destruct the normal 'goings-on' of the fetish by exposing a particular exception *as* universality.

What we have here, then, 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: 34-35), but only one that is provided by a particularity. This, then, points to the notion that society, as universality, is impossible. As I discussed in Chapter Two, for Laclau and Mouffe, society is impossible precisely because hegemony can never be all-encompassing. One could say, it is impossible for the universal to only have one totalising content. What is possible, however, is that

society 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 society that can never be fully represented.

This filling of the impossible gap of society is inherently political. It is political because it can be seen as a social 'decision' about how to position and order 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, that 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 society, 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 is claiming to be the hegemonic universality.

As I pointed out in Chapter Two, 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 'the social', 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 Two. This concept implies that a synthesis can never be fully accomplished; a synthesis is continuously subverted and challenged by discourses of resistance. 'The social', then, can 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.

Before we move onto the next chapter, however, let us pause for a moment.

I began this thesis by way of introducing Benjamin's life-project, the *Passagen-Werk*, or *Arcades Project*. In the Preface I discussed the importance of this work

for Benjamin's personal passage and, generally, for an understanding of the emergence of modern society and the way it has been positioned and emplaced. Now that we have come to the half-way point of this thesis – perhaps we can say that we are now inside Benjamin's arcade – let us halt for a moment and have a look around the place we have arrived at.

The arcade is a street-like passageway, along which there are shops selling 'things' – commodities of all kinds. People, like the *flâneur*, wander along these shops and gaze at the commodities, which are on display in big shopping windows and advertised by flashing lights. The *flâneur* 'meets' fellow Parisian city folk inside the arcade, but it is an anonymous meeting. One only exchanges some glances with the other before continuing to wander from shop to shop. The arcade-street is a protected place. An iron-glass construction shields off the elements while still letting plenty of light into the arcade. The light gives the impression of being 'outside' on a 'normal' Parisian street. However, one is really 'inside' a 'controlled' place that has been 'manufactured' for the needs of commodity exchange.

For Benjamin, the arcade was as 'a world in miniature' (*AP*, 31); that is, the emergence of the arcade signified the passage into modernity itself. One could say, Benjamin saw the arcade pointing to the way modern society is emplaced, and the purpose of the *Arcades Project* was to study this particular emplacement in great detail. What I have tried to achieve in this chapter is to use some of Benjamin's themes of the arcade's analysis and 'apply' them to today's positioning of modern society. Today, the Parisian arcade might have vanished or

lost in importance. Yet, its 'organisational principles' are still very much with us. Perhaps, today's arcade is a global one. Its imaginary glass-roof spans the entire globe giving us the illusion of being 'outside', but we are really 'inside' a particular place, a particular emplacement that positions and 'corners' society and life itself in specific ways. What I have tried to show in this chapter is that knowledge management is a discourse that is part of this particular way of emplacing and positioning 'the social'.

Inside an arcade, Paris, 19th century

4. Depositioning Organisation: The Politics of Resistance

In the previous chapter I outlined, discussed and critiqued the particularities of the knowledge management discourse in organisation 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'.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, 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 organisation theory. In this chapter I will discuss some of these discourses of resistance that have been articulated against the positioning project of organisation. However, what could be called the depositioning project in organisation 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 organisation 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 organisation has been a politically important project, which shows the precarious and undecidable nature of organising, this chapter aims to expose some of the limits of this project. Based on the theoretical conceptions developed in Chapter Two, I will argue that the depositioning discourses of resistance discussed in this chapter can be seen to have certain depoliticising effects, precisely because the political event is not seen as something that is related to wider questions of the hegemonic structuring and ordering of society.

Organisation as Multiple Process

In the previous chapter I showed how organisation is often restricted to the hegemonic practices of management and capital; that is, organisation is positioned in such a way that it is geared towards the production of fetish commodities and the specific value system of capital. This restriction of organisation, I argued in Chapter One, can be linked to, what I called, the positioning project of modernity,

which always already emplaces subjects and objects within grids of simple, formal, hierarchical and well-bounded locations. Within such a view, organisation is a 'simple location', as Chia (1998b: 6) puts it; organisation is a unit(y), a definite place that can be administrated, represented and economically managed.

As a response or resistance to these restricted notions, authors have increasingly called for a more processual understanding of organisation: "We need to see organization as a process", Cooper and Burrell, for example, proclaim (1988: 106). For Chia, a processual understanding of organisation

> 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: 581)

The 'process-view' aims to go beyond an understanding of organisation as entity or unity and, instead, emphasise that every reality is produced within a complex web of multiple relations. Cooper and Burrell (1988: 106) refer to this as the 'production of organisation'. That is, for them organisation 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, then, organisation is a verb, a continuous process of becoming, which has been described as the Deleuzoguattarian algorithm of 'and...and...and' (Styhre, 2002: 464). This expresses the view that organisation is not seen as being real, or, what Chia calls, 'being-realism' (1996: 33) but, instead, as a 'becoming-realism' (*ibid.*) which always connects and transforms. The 'process-view' of organisation thus contrasts the continuity of *stasis* with the continuity of *dynamis*. It replaces the continuity of organisation as a stable entity with the notion of a "continuous

production of multiplicities and assemblages" (Styhre, 2002: 465), or, as Kavanagh and Araujo put it, a "multiplicity...constructed in a loose, dynamic network of tangles, mangles, ensembles and assemblages" (1995: 110).

This processual understanding of the concept of organisation is seen by Chia as a resistance to modern technologies of organisation 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: 4). Rather than being restricted to the management of modern forms of positioning and organising, organisation 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: 6). To see organisation as a process, then, is a realisation that organised reality is produced within complex webs of social relations. That is, organisation 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 organisation 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: 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 in-formation (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: 119); that is, for him wholes, unities and organisations are only ephemeral collections that disperse again into holes, parts and disorganisations. 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: 24). One could say that Cooper is the thinker of depositioning *par excellence* because he was one of the first within the realms of organisation theory to engage with 'post-structural' philosophies and critique established conceptions of organisation as formal entities and positive unities. For him, traditional conceptions of organisation seem to be "unable to recognise 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: 336, emphasis in original). His quintessential point is that the seemingly positive form of organisation depends on a negative supplement, that of disorganisation (Cooper, 1990).

The importance of his contribution lies in the fact that, for him, the concept of organisation 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 organisation is

well developed in his work. In his view, over the past decades "the concept of organisation has lost its more general meaning of social organisation and has been increasingly narrowed down to the specific, instrumental meaning of an industrial or administrative work system" (2001a: 326). He goes on to say that

> the idea of a specific organisation 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 organisation or even a human individual is no more than a provisional placement or transient impression (2001a: 327, emphasis added).

What he describes here is a view of the positioning project of organisation as the attempt to place social reality, which is fundamentally complex, mobile and transient, into a provisional order. For him, organisation is a temporary node in what is otherwise a disorganised mass of reality; organisation 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 generalisation of the concept of organisation. He resists the hegemonic understanding of organisation, 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 organisation 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, then, shows that any emplacement, position or organisation is precarious and thus dependent on a negative movement of depositioning and disorganisation. We could say, perhaps, that Cooper points to the impossibility of fixing organisation in a permanent place.

Other process philosophers in organisation theory, too, see organisation 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: 105). Linstead calls organisation 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: 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: 106)

What Linstead describes here is a certain dialectic between order and change. Organisation 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: 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, then, 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: 366). What seems to be the essential point of the depositioning 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, disorganised 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: 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 organised stabilities emerge as an exception rather than the rule. These temporary organised 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: 577, emphasis added).

This, then, is an ontology that sees organised reality not as a universal 'being-realism' but as a locally enacted 'becoming-realism' (Chia, 1996: 33) implying

that reality is something which is continuously changing rather than being fixed. One could also say that for process philosophers of organisation "there is no society as such" (Styhre, 2002: 470). At first sight this comes close to Laclau and Mouffe's characterisation of society as impossibility, discussed in Chapter Two. Laclau and Mouffe, too, see social organisation 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 organisational regimes. In this sense, management is only a temporary, perhaps local, fixation of wider, more basic organisational forces that are continuously changing. Such a view opens up tremendous possibilities for seeing alternative organisational futures; it is an inherently positive way of engaging with the world. In relation to Benjamin's philosophy discussed in Chapter Two, one could say that process philosophers aim to deposition dominant histories and show that history can be read differently. 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: 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 thesis is based on the understanding that social reality is not only constructed on a local basis and organisations 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 organisational 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 organisation discourses. As a number of organisation theorists have pointed out recently (e.g. Parker, 1995; Reed, 1997; Willmott, 1998; Hancock and Tyler, 2001a), process philosophies of organisation seem ill-equipped to analyse those structural forces that form social reality on a universal level.

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

> 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: 26)

Reed's concern is that a 'process-view' of organisation denies us the ability to analyse and critique those concrete structures, "such as capitalist corporations and bureaucratic control regimes" (1997: 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 organisational 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: 29). In his view, process philosophers of organisation 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: 29)

Although Reed's critique is generally well targeted, one could accuse him of somewhat caricaturing the 'process-view' of organisation. 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 organisation is a general resistance 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' (i.e. 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 organising. While he rightly critiques process philosophers for not analysing 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 organisation, organisations that are not yet nameable within the existing structures of consciousness. In my view, the main contribution of process

philosophers of organisation 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 organisation precisely because his critique importantly points to some of its limitations and restrictions. In my view, the generalisations of the concept of organisation 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 idealised 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 organisation, 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 Two as that which cannot be made explicit, represented or symbolised (Žižek, 1997a: 93-95). This is to say, with process philosophers of organisation we are often in the odd position that, while they are keen to speculate about the organisational Real (that which is currently not part of 'normal' organisational reality), very real organisational 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 organisation 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 Two 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 organisation 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 Three, describe the hegemony of organisation as management.

One could thus say that, today, most process philosophies of organisation are very effective in describing the movement from the real to the Real; this movement is one of questioning unified positions of organised reality and showing that these are dependent on a multiplicity of forces of the Real, which are not currently symbolised by the real. In other words, what seems to be very well argued nowadays is that organisation, as a general concept of social organising, is not only an entity, a noun, but indeed a process of differentiation, a process of disorganisation, which cannot be fixed or symbolised in a single place. As Cooper (1990) argues, organisation is always dependent on a negative movement of disorganisation; perhaps one could say, the real of organisation is always complemented by a Real, that which is not or cannot be named or made visible. To show generally that organisation is dependent on forces of disorganisation has been, in my view, an important project of resistance against those modern forces of organisation, 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, disorganising and depositioning, very little has been done to reassemble the remaining fragments in order to gain "a broader understanding of...the structural mechanisms" of organised reality (Reed, 1997: 29).

This coincides with Hardt who maintains that it is not enough to conceptualise the production of difference in a generalised manner. One should also see how these

potential processes intersect again and form a passage that is a new critical actuality (1993: 45). In my view, then, what would be necessary is not only the creation of multiplicities, differentiations and disorganisations, but also a movement oriented towards the production of new unities and organisations. In Chapter Two I discussed a range of philosophies which see politics as something that, not only disorganises established realities, but is indeed able to collect forces in such a way that a new organisational 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" (*AP*, 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 Chapter Two, however, is that despite the impossibility of a synthesis, and the impossibility of society, there is still a need for a political decision about how to organise 'the social'. This aspect seems to be largely missing in the depositioning discourses in organisation theory.

The 'Psychologism' of Social Constructionism

As discussed in the previous section, one of the main contributions of the 'process-view' of organisation has been to show that organisations are only temporary nodes in what is otherwise a disorganised matter of becoming. This implies that organisation 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 Two, 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: 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 organisation 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 characterised by a multiplicity of disciplinary languages as well as epistemological, ontological and political positions (see, for example, 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 organisation 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: 20)

Precisely because social constructionism is characterised 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 emphasising 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 'techknowledgy', discourse, that I discussed and critiqued in the previous chapter. What has been increasingly emphasised are 'people-centred' knowledge management approaches, that is, approaches that understand knowledge as something situational, local and socially distributed. Instead of knowledge as 'techknowledgy', authors argue that knowledge must be conceptualised 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 pregiven; it is, rather, enacted through our history of structural coupling" (1992: 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 emphasised 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: 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 'languaging' (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 'languaging' (see, for example, 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: 353). Thus,

"language is essentially a consensual domain of agreement" (Mingers, 1995: 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: 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: 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: 273)

For the social constructionists discussed here, then, knowledge is constructed within organisational communities. It is said that this construction process is based on dialogue, consensus, shared understandings and a 'culture of practice'. What is thus strongly emphasised 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 organisation theory Karl Weick has been one of the most prominent proponents of social constructionist approaches that emphasise 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: 44). In a passage, which reminds us of the 'process-view' of organisation, 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: 187-188)

For Weick, then, organisation is not a structure in any sense. Instead, organisation is a sensemaking process that is "grounded in both individual and social activity" (Weick, 1995: 6). In his view, "the organization makes sense, literally and figuratively, at the bottom" (1995: 117). He thus strongly emphasises the notion of the ground at which reality is constructed decentrally by social actors, as opposed to organisational reality being pre-given or imposed by a central place, for example, a top-management team (*ibid.*). In his view, organisations might be rational, hierarchical and structural on the surface, but deep down on the ground things are loosely coupled, even messy (Weick, 1995: 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 organisation 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: 106-132) 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: 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, then, turn to a critique 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 30s 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 organisation 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 characterised 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: 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: 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 sensemaking 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', then, "remains in the spell of the disaster without a theory being capable of thinking the whole in its untruth"

(*AGS* 10/2, 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 organisation 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: 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: 74; see also 1967) Adorno attempts to decode the ideological significance of jazz as art form by analysing 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:[35] "Jazz is a commodity in a strict sense" (*AGS* 17: 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 improvisional 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: 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

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[35] Adorno must have specifically referred here to the extreme commercial success of Swing Jazz in the 1920s and 30s.

ideology of 'commodity fetishism' the jazz-subject only ends up being entangled in the commodity world even more.

In Adorno's view, then, 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 Two, 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 'techknowledgy'-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 criticised 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, etc. are on top of the agenda for many organisation and management scholars (see also Jones and Böhm, 2003). Adorno's critique, then, 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 emphasising '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 discourses 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 emphasise 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 organisational 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 Three.

Within the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) one could say that the social constructionist discourses discussed here, which aim to deposition centralised, bureaucratic and rational understandings of reality construction, are always already reterritorialised 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 organisation 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.

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. (1995)

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: 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: 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, 1995).

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, antagonise or escalate. Instead of fuelling antagonistic languages, his 'relational politics' calls for the creation of "a new range of poetics" (Gergen, 1995), 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 organisations:

> 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, 1995)

Gergen's 'relational politics' thus attempts to overcome organisational conflicts by mediating and establishing dialogue between opposed parties. This is based on an understanding that the organisation 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 organisational relations transparent, by establishing shared understandings, and enabling the acceptance and respect of difference. 'Relational politics', then, is indebted to a pluralistic understanding of organisation, which

maintains that conflicts can be overcome by way of an open and transparent dialogue between oppositional parties.

Such pluralism can also be observed in other organisation theory discourses (see also De Cock and Böhm, 2003). 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 organisational 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 emphasises antagonistic difference 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: 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 organisation 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 organisational theories according to their philosophical assumptions, the original political significance, which lies in the resistance against established functionalist theories of organisation 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 emphasised 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: 19). And it certainly is, given the recent 'success' of political discourses of 'The Third Way' (e.g. 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: 38). For Aldrich, then, incommensurability needs to be overcome because today's multicultural world requires strategies of mediation, dialogic communication and consensus building. In organisation theory such a call for diversity and pluralism has been a popular response to the notion of incommensurability; see, for example, McKinley and Mone (1998), Kaghan and Phillips (1998) and Weaver and Gioia (1995) 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 paradigms) 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 organisation can be related to Morgan's metaphoric view developed in his bestseller *Images of Organization*. In there he describes his particular way of seeing organisational 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: 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 organisation. 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: xxi). Thus, as Morgan claims, images are relativistic tools (1986: 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, then, 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: 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: 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: 275) and, instead, emphasise the practical realm of organisational 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: 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, then, 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: 307), Mike Reed to be careful to not "rush to judge" (*ibid.*: 310), and David Knights to not wanting to have "too great of an ambition" (*ibid.*: 309). In a way this carefulness and undecidability is, of course, part of any critical inquiry into a phenomenon. As I argued in Chapter Two, 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 Two 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 Chapter Two 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 organisation 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: 110). They maintain 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: 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: 721)

They go on to suggest that "each paradigm can be seen as representing an ideology" (*ibid.*). For Jackson and Carter, then, reality is fundamentally characterised 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, then, 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: 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 jeopardised and fundamental values not questioned.

This is partly what Banerjee and Linstead (2001) point to in their critique of today's globalisation 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: 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: 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 Two and Three, this diversity – this assemblage of diverse forces of deterritorialisation – is always already reterritorialised to serve particular hegemonic aims of global, managerial organisation. 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. 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 emphasise 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 organisations. Within such a view, politics is the attempt to reconcile possible differences and conflicts between

communities. It is important to realise that, for the social constructionists discussed above, politics is always happening on the local level. That is, if there is conflict occurring between 'communities of practice', it is a conflict which can be resolved by dialogue, 'languaging' and conflict management techniques. What should have become clear in Chapter Two, as well as in my discussion above, is that such a belief in a certain transparent harmony of society is illusionary. 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 Chapter Two, Benjamin's concept of 'non-synthesis' and Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of the concept of impossibility highlight the fact that society can never be forged into a final place; there will always be a certain gap and openness. This does not imply, however, that society is not possible. What the philosophies explored in Chapter Two seem to suggest is that the political event is precisely when a certain synthesis of social actors 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 societal level.

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: 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, then, subjects do not construct their own world by way of 'languaging', 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 'languaging', which is often emphasised by social constructionists, and 'discourse' is important here. While 'languaging' 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 Preface, as well as Chapters One and Two, this understanding of 'discourse' is largely based on Foucault's work (e.g. 1970, 1972), which has had a great influence on many organisation theorists in the past two decades (e.g. 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 organise 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, then, 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 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 organisation 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 seems to be seen merely as being the same as the abovementioned notion of 'languaging', 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: 28). Similarly, Thompson and Smith (2001; see also Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999) suggest that 'Foucauldians' tend to overemphasise 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 Five). On one hand, such critiques of 'Foucauldians' seem somewhat over-generalising, especially if one considers that some 'Foucauldian' organisation theorists have specifically tried to show how dominant capitalist discursive regimes produce management techniques (e.g. 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 (e.g. 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: 17). This is to say, not all 'Foucauldians' merely fetishise '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 has consistently argued for a permanent deconstruction of, what he calls, dualistic relationships (e.g. 1992, 1997, 2001). For him (1992: 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: 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: 12) is, in his view, the task of, what he and others call, a 'postmodern' organisation theory. This, then, reminds us of the 'process-view' of organisation whose main contribution is to show that organised 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 Two, 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 organised 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: 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 to structure and order 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 conceptualise in Chapter Two. It is guided by the realisation that society 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 society, while fundamentally impossible and undecidable, is historically structured through particular discursive formations that endure over time and space.

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: 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: 6, emphasis in original)

With Knights, then, discourse assumes the character of something that can be chosen; it can either be imposed or translated into something meaningful for local

levels, by way of debate and dialogue. Here we seem to be in the realm of 'languaging' again. Knights' 'post-dualistic' politics assumes that dualistic structures can be resolved on the local level by being dialogic, reflexive and deconstructive. Following Parker (1999: 37ff), one can 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 organisation, 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 society are not eternal and ultimate. However, the concern is that such a view loses sight of the fact that society only becomes possible by way of politically ordering and structuring reality, which ultimately also involves certain dualisms. It seems to me that Knights' deconstructive movements are ill-equipped to think the political event as something that makes such structures possible.

Pace Žižek (1997b, 1998), 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 depoliticising effects because is it 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, then, of Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis, briefly discussed in Chapter Two, which states that since the fall of the 'communist project' the world is no longer held hostage by competing ideologies but, instead, is characterised 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, society can be fully represented and thus finalised. I am not suggesting here that Knights' 'post-dualism' is as naïve as suggesting that society and history can be finalised 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: 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 (*AP*, 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 does 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, then, opened up the dark houses of traditional Paris; traditional architecture was deterritorialised 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 deterritorialises. Part of what I have attempted to suggest in this chapter is that today's depositioning project of organisation, which is characterised by 'post-dualism', 'processualism' and 'pluralism', can be seen, in a way, as the continuation of this deterritorialisation 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 reterritorialises 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 organisation 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 characterise depositioning as a movement that claims that "every position is of itself confounded" (1987: 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: 8).

Différance thus points·to a certain undecidability towards the presence of objects of reality, such as 'position' or 'organisation'. *Différance* questions the basic presence of any position and organisation; it puts into doubt the apparent synthesis of the reality of organisation 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 organisation.

As every position is generally seen as being contingent, the depositioning discourses discussed above emphasise the local and processual nature of reality construction. That is, the point of depositioning organisation is to see the fallibility of every organised position. For Cooper, for example, "concepts such as *différance*, undecidability and supplement 'decompose' or 'decon-struct' the ordered and organized character of social systems to reveal their essentially precarious foundation which founders on the process of differentiation" (1990: 181). Cooper calls this 'precarious foundation' 'disorganisation', which, for him, always already resists order and organisation (1990: 182). This is what in Chapter

Two I have discussed as the Lacanian Real, that which cannot be organised or symbolised. For Laclau and Mouffe as well as Žižek, organised 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 organisation 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 organisation can never be forged into a final synthesis. Cooper calls this the "zero degree of organization" (1990: 182), which, for him, is the "finite, limited nature of the signified which is seen as a lack that must be filled in" (1990: 183). This, then, I would describe as the main contribution of the depositioning project: to show the precarious nature of any organisation 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 organised reality into question. When social constructionists emphasise the local and plural nature of reality their point is to show that there is more than one way of organising the world; there is a multiplicity of possible worlds. The politics of the depositioning project, then, 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: 397).

My concern has been, however, to argue that, despite the precariousness of any order and the processual nature of organisation, structure is always being found (R. Munro, 2002). That is, social organisation is not simply a never-ending process that is characterised by multiple, local realities; instead, there are, as

Meier Sørensen puts it, "machines that *do* define, *do* cut off, *do* signify" (2001: 371, emphasis in original) – not only on the local level but, in fact, on the level of 'the social' as such. This is to say, there are structural forces of power and knowledge that do shape society. In Chapter Two I discussed a range of philosophies that conceptualise politics as something that not only continuously depositions reality and shows the precariousness of any order, but indeed shapes reality and gives social organisation an order. In Chapter Three I discussed the powerful hegemonic politics of management and capital; a hegemony that not only works on a local level but, in fact, on 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 deterritorialisation 'machine' that produces 'the local'. As we have seen in Chapter Three, 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: 188); "organization is the appropriation of order out of disorder" (1990: 193). Capital and management can be seen as this social power that always already decides for us, how society is to be organised. 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 'languaging' 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 disorganisation will find it hard to engender those political struggles that seek to challenge hegemonic relations as such. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the political event of organisation is to enable a decision about a different social order, an order that produces different localities, subjectivities and organisations.

In sum, then, one could argue that the depositioning project has been important because it has exposed the undecidability of organisation. What has been missing, however, is the will to expose the ground on which a decision is made possible, a decision that can reposition 'the social'. 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: 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 Chapter Two, when I conceptualised 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 Two 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.

5. Repositioning Organisation:

Impossibilities of 'The Movement'

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

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 organised phenomena, the repositioning project is based on

an understanding that the notion of undecidability, as I discussed it in Chapter Two, enables and even makes necessary political decisions about how to organise and position society itself. To discuss the various aspects of the repositioning project I will, first, engage with two organisation theory discourses, namely labour process theory and liberalist institutional theory, and, second, analyse the organisation and politics of the so-called 'anti-capitalist movement'.

What these discourses have in common is the understanding that politics is not only a displacing or depositioning of taken-for-granted realities, but also an emplacing or positioning of concrete alternatives to the order and constitution of 'the social'. While labour process theory is largely indebted to Marxian discourses of social and organisational change, liberalist theories of bureaucracy are predominantly based on Weberian discourses. Following the historical analysis of organisation theory put forward by Burrell and Morgan (1979), one could argue that both Marxian and Weberian discourses have played an important part in the radical theoretical exploration of alternative organisational regimes. It is for this reason that I have chosen to engage with some aspects of these two bodies of organisation literature in this chapter. As will become clear, however, there are important theoretical and political limitations and contradictions embedded within these organisation theory discourses. These will be discussed and critiqued by way of engaging with the 'anti-capitalist' discourse, which explicitly challenges today's hegemonic positioning of society and seeks to explore alternative, repositioned regimes of social organisation.

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: 3), there are, indeed, multiple labour process perspectives (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). 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 political critique of capital therefore has to be concentrated on the analysis of the 'goings-on' of the capitalist workplace. 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' organisation 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* (1976), particularly volume one. Without going into a detailed discussion of Marx, one

could generally say that his conception of the labour process shows how capital produces surplus value 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 own 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 organisational principle but something that is structurally inherent to capitalism, brings about two main antagonistic classes, labour and capital.

I am aware that I am entering this debate at speed. All the same, one could say, perhaps, that for some labour process theorists the antagonisms between capital and labour are primarily expressed in 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: 61). For them, it is management's daily struggle to make the labour process more effective and efficient. According to Thompson and Smith (2001: 62) and other labour process theorists (e.g. Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Rowlinson and Hassard, 2001; and Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), a critical understanding of this daily struggle and its social 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. What one can thus suggest is that for these labour process theorists the workplace is the prime location of 'the political'.

As a point of critique one could say that, while there can be no question that the labour process of the workplace is one of the most important sites of capitalist accumulation, it is by no means the only one. As I argued in Chapter Three, capital produces a host of different subjectivities; for example, I showed how 'commodity fetishism' produces 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, perhaps, 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 Three 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 realise 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 society in a single place. In their view, society 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: xii)

In Hardt and Negri's view, 'Empire' is a place that is depositioned or deterritorialised, a term they adopt from Deleuze and Guattari (1987). It is a 'non-place' (Augé, 1995) which is characterised 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 always already reterritorialises all deterritorialised fragments on the stratified plane of an abstract signifier. Yet, in Hardt and Negri's view, this reterritorialisation 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: 60-61), a language which reminds us of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conceptualisation 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 organisational apparatuses, which opens up possibilities for the production of new figures of resistance. This is what I showed in Chapter Four: the depositioning project in organisation theory is characterised 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 organisation theory at large, one of the most valuable contributions has been the 'Foucauldian' realisation 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 Four, 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: 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: 553). Their concern is to show that social reality is the constitutive product of a plurality of disciplinary techniques of power and knowledge (1989: 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: 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: 550). They coin the term 'identity fetishism' to point to the process of self-identification "solidifying meaning through the objectification of self in fetishised identities" (1989: 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 'identify 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: 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: 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.*).

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: 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: 347). In Hard 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). 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, then, 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 Two, hegemony highlights the plurality of discursive fields and the impossibility of fixing social discourses into a final place of representation. However, the concept also emphasises the possibility and even necessity of emplacing 'the social' into particular social structures. Chapter Three 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 Three 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-emphasises 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, then, 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-emphasise 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' emphasises 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 emphasises plurality and difference, and a 'closed' one, which does, despite its plurality, organise, 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: xii), 'Empire' is an open, communication-driven regime which continuously deterritorialises 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 organisation and management, which, in their view, are at the forefront of the mobilisation and flexibilisation 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: 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 organisations in so-called 'post-bureaucratic' times. These 'new' times are said to be characterised 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 organisations. In Chapter Four I also discussed various organisation theories that hope to deposition established bureaucratic structures of organisation. The 'process-view' of organisation, 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 organisation 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 deterritorialising established hierarchies; it thus incorporates and, in fact, welcomes the type of resistances discussed in Chapter Four. It is for this reason that I expressed doubts over the political effectiveness of the depositioning project.

Following du Gay (2000a,b), the depositioning discourses of organisation can be seen, perhaps, as part of a wider attack on bureaucratic ways of organising. "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: 80). Naming an organisation '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. In the past two decades a burgeoning management and organisation literature has emerged that is explicitly 'anti-bureaucratic'. Du Gay (2000a: 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: 61). Du Gay argues that this 'hatred of bureaucracy' is characterised 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: 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, characterised by teamwork, dialogue, company visions and 'bottom-up' management, ensure more 'freedom' than the bureaucracy. In fact, as Parker (2002a: 79-80) notes, communities are often as normative and coercive as bureaucracies. Du Gay (2000a: 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 emphasise continuous change (e.g. Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997), complexity (e.g. Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001) and chaos (e.g. Peters, 1987). Such terms highlight the view that organised reality is seen as indeterminate, which, it is argued, unlocks the creative potentials of individuals (e.g. Biggart, 1977; Morgan, 1997). In the view of these writers, the

bureaucracy is regarded as something which hinders the creative development of organisational members and thus the economic performance of the company.

Du Gay (2000a: 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-realisation (Grugulis and Knights, 2001: 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 organisations more like entrepreneurial corporations, which are characterised 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 privatisation 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 globalisation show (e.g. Frank, 2000; Hertz, 2001; Klein, 2000), '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 organisations controlled by Western governments and business interests. One can thus speak of 'neo-liberalism' as a hegemonic discourse that has emplaced 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) and other so-called 'liberalists' (e.g. Armbrüster, 2002, 2003; Armbrüster and Gebert, 2002; and Adler and Borys, 1996) 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 emphasise the need to organise 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: 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: 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 characterised 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: 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 organising and institutionalising society. In contrast to the depositioning discourses discussed in Chapter Four, liberalists are very critical of conceptions of society that emphasise local, community-based processes of social organising and of accounts that simply celebrate the indeterminacy and disorganised nature of organisation. Within a liberalist viewpoint, society only becomes possible through an institutional organisation of the various antagonistic forces that characterise social reality. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) language, one could say that liberalists point to the need to establish 'chains of equivalence' between antagonistic forces, in order to politically enact the 'structural undecidability' of society. This equivalence thus fills the inherent lack of 'the social' and enables identification with a particular organisation of social reality. The bureaucracy can be seen within this 'logic of equivalence'; it is a particular social decision about how to make society 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: 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 organisation of the Holocaust only became possible because of modern ways of organising 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 emphasising 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 organising 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' (*CoV*) in which he associates the state's power with a reproduction of violence (the German word *Gewalt* means both 'violence' and 'power'). Benjamin (*CoV*, 288) argues that it is necessary for the state, after it has been brought violently into power, to institutionalise 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: 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.

Although this might stretch the point too much, my critique could be illustrated by considering the cover photograph of du Gay's *In Praise of Bureaucracy*, which shows a woman going through some files in a document cabinet in a vast

Pentagon office. Du Gay does not make reference to this image in the text nor does he mention the Pentagon; so, it is difficult to judge whether he has been involved in selecting it. Whether intentional or not, the Pentagon picture points, perhaps, to du Gay's politics. 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: 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 organising he seems to have very little time for alternative institutional setups other than governments and modern public bureaucracies.

In my view, then, du Gay and other 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 I discussed in Chapter Two, 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 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 organisation theory both liberalists and labour process theorists have been somewhat quiet about the politics of new social movements. 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 organisation theory. However, as I will show in the remaining part of this chapter, the analysis of the organisation and politics of these new social movements is of vital importance, precisely because they can be seen to engender those spaces of politics that are not normally considered by liberalists and labour process theorists.

The Political Organisation of New Social Movements

In the previous two sections I have considered two organisation theory discourses that are not concerned with simply repeating the depositioning of organised reality, as practiced by the authors discussed in Chapter Four. If the depositioning project is primarily about exposing the precariousness and undecidability of all organised phenomena, labour process theorists and liberalists emphasise the need for particular political decisions about how to order and constitute 'the social'.

These discourses can be associated with, what I term, the repositioning project because they are explicitly concerned with exploring new political positions along which society might be organised. While the politics of both labour process theorists and liberalists have been important contributions, I have pointed to some of the limitations of these repositioning discourses.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will explore possibilities of how one might go beyond these limitations by engaging with what can be called one of today's most radical movements for social change, namely the 'anti-capitalist movement', which has gained increasing momentum over the past four years. I will contextualise this social movement historically, consider its political aims and discuss the organisational 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 organisational and political aims, and, in my view, organisation theory has a lot to offer in this regard. Second, this empirical engagement will illustrate the theoretical argument of this thesis, which has been concerned with the exploration of possibilities of a political repositioning of social organisation. I will argue that the 'anti-capitalist movement' can be seen as a political event, which is not only aimed at changing social organisation on a local level – the main purpose of the depositioning project – but indeed at the level of hegemony or universality. Third, this engagement can be seen as an event itself, which aims to explore possibilities for a repositioning of organisation 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 organisation 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 theorising social movements.

According to 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. (Scott, 1990: 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 (e.g. Crossley, 2002; Farrell, 1997; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995; Larana *et al.*, 1994; Melucci, 1989, 1996; 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 Scott (1990: 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 Scott (1990), Melucci (1989) and others have argued, NSMs embrace struggles in a variety of different cultural and everyday spaces. According to Crossley (2003: 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: 8-9)

In Melucci's view, then, 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 a political level, 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 the so-called 'Foucauldian' organisation 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. The point of the identity struggles of new social movements, one could argue, is that 'the political' is displaced and its terrain 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 Scott's (1990) view, numerous problems with such a crude categorisation. 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. I might add that this party is currently governing in Germany in coalition with the Social Democrats who have originally emerged out of the early labour movements of the 19th century. So, the point Scott makes is that, rather than debating how 'new' certain social movements are, it might be more productive to engage with the concrete organisational and political challenges they face. Now, according to Scott (1990), one of the main organisational issues of social movements is the question of institutionalisation. As I have already discussed in the previous section, this is not simply an organisational question but indeed a political one. Let me, then, turn to a discussion of the problematic of institutionalisation, which

will be of importance when we analyse the challenges faced by the 'anti-capitalist movement'.

NSMs are said to be marked by 'grassroots'-type network structures (Scott, 1990: 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 organised in formal hierarchies, 'new' social movements organise on local levels and often mobilise their resources on an 'ad hoc' basis. More specifically, in Scott's view the social movement literature has characterised the organisational 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: 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 organised 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" (Scott, 1990: 31). Germany, for example, has a long tradition of so-called 'citizens' initiatives'

(*Bürgerinitiativen*), which organise themselves on a local basis around single issues, such as those just mentioned. According to 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 organised around grand signifiers, such as 'left' and 'right', labour versus conservative, people have increasingly defected from parliamentary democracy to invent their own local politics that traverse traditional political categories.

Generally, then, one can see 'grassroots' politics as being embedded in a wider process of decline of traditional institutional spheres. As Blaug maintains, "In the places of our everyday lives, a new anti-institutional orientation is in evidence" (Blaug, 1998: 34). While liberalists bemoan this development and seek to return to the bureaucratic ethos of institutional politics, Blaug embraces decentralised, fluid networks of 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: 34). He goes on to affirm this question by engaging with the battle in the Teuteburg forest, in which seemingly 'disorganised', anarchic German hordes defeated a hopelessly outnumbered, well-organised 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

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change. What he provides is a theory of a social movement that challenges established orders precisely because it organises differently: it is not a hierarchical order but a 'disorganised', rhizomatic order that is perceived as disorder. In his view, it is because of this organisational otherness, so to say, that any seemingly 'disorganised' or anarchic movement is seen as a 'problem' that needs to be dealt with by the ordered and organised 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: 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 movements because they do not work along the same lines of organisation. The state thus often confronts 'grassroots' movements with hostility.

In what is a powerful plea for organisation theory to refocus its attention – away from global corporations, state bureaucracies and managerialist discourses towards local movements of resistance for radical social change – Fournier (2002) uses some of Blaug's insights to praise the disorganised, anarchist and rhizomatic nature of the organisation 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: 209)

Similarly to Blaug, Fournier provides a powerful critique of hierarchism and established modes of organising, 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 organisational regimes. Fournier's argument has much in common with anarchist organisational principles, which have a long tradition but only recently seem to have seen renewed attention due to the 'success' of post-structural theories of organisation. Reedy (2002), for example, is keen to 'hoist the black flag' to argue for anarchist modes of organising that always resist hegemonies, hierarchies and other dominant organisational 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 organisation; instead, it renders static forms fluid by permanently subverting the agendas of hegemonic discourses. This, then, reminds us of some of the depositioning discourses discussed in Chapter Four, which highlighted the processual, fluid and precarious nature of organisation.

Reedy, and also Blaug and Fournier, seem to argue that 'grassroots' movements of resistance are about a permanent disruption and subversion of state institutions and established political spheres. They see these movements as something disorganised, ephemeral, rhizomatic, uncontrollable and ungovernable; in their

view, these movements aim to "challenge the machine of the state with viral micro-operations" (Blaug, 1998: 45). Blaug, in particular, 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: 51). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make quite clear, however, every movement of deterritorialisation, of change, should not simply end in chaos or complete nothingness – such nothingness could all too easily be reterritorialised on the plane of already established signifiers, such as capital. This was one of my points of critique I levelled at the depositioning project in Chapter Four. In response to Blaug's reading of Deleuze and Guattari one could say that in *Thousand Plateaus* they do not simply talk of rhizomatic movements but of *strategies*. For them, the question is not simply one of deterritorialisation, especially given that capital is always already characterised by forces of deterritorialisation. Instead, movement, in order to have strategic effects, needs to be able to create specific events. Events are not only about deterritorialising and moving, but also about 'invading a territory'. While Blaug's 'rhizomatic hordes' are successful in enacting a specific situation, the military defeat of the Romans in the Teuteburg forest, they are not fully 'invading a territory' in the sense that they stop the rule of the Romans and set up their own governing structures. While rhizomatic movements might not be interested in running the state, this disinterest might incorporate the danger of only causing a temporary setback for the Roman Empire.

As I discussed above, Hardt and Negri conceptualise 'Empire' as a 'non-place'. In their view, 'Empire' cannot simply be resisted within the realms of deterritorialisation, 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: 216-217). In other words, a resistance on the level of hybridity, multiplicity or Blaug's 'rhizomatic hordes' might not be effective precisely because it always risks being reterritorialised 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: 206). This implies that it would be necessary to organise an "enlarging, inclusive movement oriented toward the future capable of producing a new unity" (Hardt, 1993: 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: 110).

The concept of the 'multitude', which Hardt first used in his book on Deleuze (1993), also features in *Empire*. In Hardt and Negri's (2000) view, the 'multitude' is a force of resistance against 'Empire', which does not simply work on the level of rhizomatic action but is indeed able to challenge 'Empire' on its own 'level of generality'. The 'multitude' can be seen as a multiplicity that has gained in power by being forged into an 'organised mass' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 348). *Pace*

Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the 'multitude' can be seen, perhaps, as an event that enables a new hegemony of social organisation. As I discussed in Chapter Two, for Laclau and Mouffe, the political event is when an established, hegemonic emplacement of society is questioned and a new hegemony is made possible. The conceptualisation 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. Similarly, for Hardt and Negri, 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: 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: 217). 'A new place' needs to be built, constructed – Hardt and Negri seem to see the 'multitude's' task in repositioning 'the social' and emplacing it along different lines to the contemporary hegemony of 'Empire'. One could argue that this 'emplacing' necessarily involves certain institutionalisation processes. That is, 'a new place' can only be built on some sort of fundaments, which effectively provide the positions about which a society is organised. This, then, is the valuable contribution of liberalist thought, discussed in the previous section. While some liberalists, like du Gay for example, seem to somewhat fetishise a certain 'original' bureaucratic ethos, what can be taken from their position is the insight that society only becomes possible through certain institutionalisations.

What I have discussed above can be described, perhaps, as the political necessity of institutionalisation. Related to this is what can be called the organisational necessity of institutionalisation. This is to say, social movements face the question of institutionalisation because they usually involve the mobilisation of a large amount of people. In order to be effective, these masses need to be organised. According to Scott (1990: 129), social movements often look for possibilities of lowering the cost of collective action, which pulls them towards a more formal organisation 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 institutionalisation. For him, the development from social movement to a fully institutionalised political party is a conservative move because, in his view (1962: 338), organisation 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: 337)

Michels, then, warns of the dangers of institutionalisation: 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.

However, despite these dangers of institutionalisation, Michels admits that "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: 347). Now, what I highlighted above was the idea that there is no such thing as *the* 'bureaucracy', or *the* 'bureaucratic ethos', as some 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 organise 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 bring about a social decision about how to institutionalise society and, thus, to make it 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 institutionalising political action and society at large. Yet, what seems to be important to recognise is that institutionalisation is generally possible and even necessary.

The 'Anti-Capitalist Movement'

Now that I have discussed some perspectives of the political organisation of social movements, I will turn to the specificities of the 'anti-capitalist movement', which

is a social movement that has gained momentum over about the past four years. While in this section my main aim is a general introduction to the 'anti-capitalist' discourse and some of its organisational and political themes, the next section will engage with the organisational and political challenges of the 'anti-capitalist movement' in much more detail. One of its significant 'founding' dates 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 liberalisation talks was supposed to be launched. Although the WTO was used to dealing with frequent opposition from individual non-governmental organisations and pressure groups, it was not prepared for the massive protests on the streets outside the Seattle hotel hosting the meeting:

> 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: 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 organise 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 organising 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 eighties, 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 globalisation 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: 3, emphasis added)

What has followed Seattle are numerous protests that have coincided with meetings regularly staged by various inter- and extra-governmental organisations; 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 characterised 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 Two, 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: 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, that 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. One could, perhaps, claim that 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, firstly, an awareness of and sensibility towards issues such as unequal globalisation processes, *the disappearance of public spaces and the social costs of* 'neo-liberal' socio-economic policies, and, secondly, a sense of the possibility of resistance against today's hegemony of capital.

There has been a plethora of other writings that have described, conceptualised 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 (e.g. 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 (e.g. 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* privatisation of all aspects of public life (e.g. Bové, 2001; Frank, 2000; Hertz,

2001; Monbiot, 2000, 2003; Schlosser, 2002; and Stiglitz, 2002). More explicitly concerned with the dynamics and organisation 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 movement' is organised in terms of its different actors and the social issues that are enacted, Callinicos (2003: 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 (i.e. the best) system, which, however, has gone too far in many respects; (3) localist 'anti-capitalism' – the supporters of a radical reorganisation of trade and the economy in order to redirect power towards small-scale communities – this movement often organises 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 organisations; (5) autonomist 'anti-capitalism' – which organises decentrally and anarchically – it aims to obey and actively fight against any central or hierarchical control; and (6) socialist 'anti-capitalism' – which organises itself around some traditional Marxist (or even Stalinist or Maoist) conceptions of struggle to bring about change by revolutionising the working class. While Callinicos' categorisation 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 fora 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) 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.[36] The explicit aim of the WSF organisers was to establish a counter-forum that would give voice to those social groups and organisations that are not represented by the hegemonic discourse of the WEF. Yet, the general aim of that forum was not only to oppose the WEF, but to generally launch a new stage of global resistance and "offer specific proposals, to seek concrete responses to the challenges of building 'another world'" (Whitaker, 2002). In other words, 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 twice more, both times also in Brazil. In order to further internationalise 'the movement' and represent its global multiplicity, the fourth WSF will take place in Mumbai, India, in January 2004.

One of the main outcomes of the second WSF was the call for the setup of local social fora around the world. Since then social fora 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. 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' globalisation agendas and a European order based on corporate power. However, they were also at the ESF to explore alternative ways of

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[36] 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).

organising 'the social'. Rather than a traditional representative space, the ESF sees itself as a dialogical space for a great variety of movements. Social fora, 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 organisers, social fora "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".[37] In other words, social fora are not thought of as political spaces which legitimise themselves through a series of traditional representative and organisational criteria. Instead, their organisers stress the openness and multiplicity of aims: social fora 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 fora, 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 organisational 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 organisers 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 organisations, organisations working against social exclusion, human

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[37] Quoted from www.londonsocialforum.org/about-why.htm.

rights organisations, organisations of environmentalists and ecologists, farmers' organisations, economic networks offering social solidarity, youth organisations, migrant organisations, cultural networks, feminist networks, networks of researchers and lecturers.[38] The Florence ESF, for example, specifically highlighted its "respect for diversity"[39] and indeed the different, often opposing agendas of the groups present at the ESF were clearly felt.[40] The image of the ESF was one of a melting pot of multiple, rhizomatic 'grassroots' movements that temporarily come together for an ephemeral event. This fits, then, the rhetoric of 'grassroots' movements discussed in the previous section. Indeed, the 'anti-capitalist movement' is sometimes described as a rhizomatic and nomadic network (e.g. 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. 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 protest actions are designed to disrupt, disobey and express anger, which

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[38] These are the type of organisations and groups that the organising committee of the second European Social Forum in Paris plans to address (see the French Mobilisation Committee's 'Proposal to create a European organisational structure' posted to http://lists.mobilise.org.uk/old-archives/esf-uk-info).

[39] Quoted from the Call of the European Social Movements, 12 November 2002, http://www.fse-esf.org.

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. 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, then, whether the 'anti-capitalist movement' needs to institutionalise itself more in order to be effective in its resistance against the contemporary hegemony of global capital. 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 Two, for Laclau and Mouffe, society is an inherently open space (1985: 95); they refer to society as an impossibility (1985: 114). This inherent openness of society makes it possible to align 'the political' not only with what is usually regarded as politics, i.e. parliamentary democracy or party politics, but indeed with a wide range of multiple or plural 'identity politics' that occur on many different levels and in many different places of society. In such a view, then,

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[40] I participated in the first European Social Forum, which took place in Florence, Italy, between

politics is inherently undecidable as it faces a multiplicity of possibilities. For Laclau and Mouffe, however, this undecidability requires a decision to establish links, or, what they call, 'chains of equivalence', between a range of different social actors in order to represent 'the social'. It is this decision that describes their event of hegemonic politics; this can be related to Hardt and Negri's call for the construction of a place in the 'non-place' of 'Empire'. In my view, it is this decision, this event, which describes the possibility of the 'anti-capitalist movement'. 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 hierarchic 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: 176, emphasis removed)

Following Laclau and Mouffe, one could say that the question the 'anti-capitalist movement' faces is not whether to institutionalise itself or not. Instead, the question is *how to* institutionalise 'the movement' in order to work towards a different institutionalisation of society itself. According to them, this is the radicalisation of the liberal-democratic view which maintains that society needs to be institutionally organised and represented on a political level. The difference between this position and the views of liberalists in organisation 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 organisation. This is to say that they do not base their hopes on a bureaucratic ethos that has produced the

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the 6th and 10th of November 2002.

current political system, but indeed strive for the possibility of organising 'the social' differently, for institutionalising modern life in a different way. In their view, institutionalisation has to go through, what they call, the 'logic of difference' (1985: 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, then, 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 organisation and not all resistances are equally effective.

One of the tasks of 'theory', in my view, is to analyse how resistance is organised 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 (e.g. Parker, 2002c). What 'theory' can contribute is not only an analysis of the effectiveness of resistance strategies and an evaluation of the organisational means and political ends of social movements but also a questioning of the concepts and assumptions that underpin the practices of resistance movements (Böhm, 2002). 'What is politics?'; 'What is a political event?'; 'What is society?' – These and other broad questions were at the heart of my theoretical explorations of Chapter Two. 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 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 an homogeneity; instead, it works along the 'logic of difference'. As Callincos (2003) and others have shown, there are many 'anti-capitalisms'. This coincides with Laclau and Mouffe's view that society is not a fixed entity but an impossibility that is characterised by multiple sites of antagonistic struggles. The struggle against capitalism can thus not be reduced to *one* politics; instead, there are many political struggles that are immanent to the 'anti-capitalist movement'. This multiplicity or articulation of difference is of importance to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 179), as it moves us away from the traditional view that politics *is only about, for example, workers' emancipation or political programmes of the 'left' or the 'right'. According to them, there is no unity of the 'left' or the 'right'. Instead, Laclau and Mouffe maintain that social struggles are inherently multiple, diverse and plural and cannot, therefore, be represented by singular programmes. This insight is of importance here, as it lets us understand 'the movement' as something that is not unified or something that follows a strict programme. It is, rather, a multiplicity, which coincides with Hardt and Negri's (2000) understanding of the network character of the 'multitude'. In their view, the potential strength of the 'multitude' – which we have to remember to be a

concept rather than an empirical category – 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: 245). For Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 179), this understanding of the multiplicity of struggle is of importance as it enables the embracing of the 'logic of difference', which maintains that the traditional places of political representation – such as the Houses of Parliament – should be decentred and that politics should be seen as being inherently open and undecidable. 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: 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 in Mexico or the movement of landless peasants 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 fora are still mainly comprised of Western-white-middle-class-type activists and social critics. The first European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence, for example, was clearly dominated by Italian movements, and Italian national politics featured strongly. 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 and France. What about Eastern Europe, for

example? In Florence 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. This is also what Khalfa (2002) notes: "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 World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in January 2002. In his view 'the movement' is not yet global enough. For example, there were very few faces from Asia and Africa in Porto Alegre. Furthermore, Hardt maintains that the voices who dominated large aspects of the WSF's agenda (e.g. The French leadership of ATTAC, for example) were actually arguing for the strengthening of *national* institutions which would be, in their view, a viable response to globalisation 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 (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 on the level of 'grassroots' networks. In his view, 'old-style' party and

national 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 (led by the PT party, which has recently won the national elections in Brazil). Equally, one could add that the Florence ESF would not have been possible without the generous financial and organisational support of the mayor of Florence and the regional government. Thus, the fact that the ESF was as well organised as it was, must be mainly attributed to the efforts of local party politics,[41] which Hardt and Negri often seem to dismiss when they talk about the 'multitude'.

In this light, one could see the exclusion of political parties from social fora as also being a 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 organisation and finance of social fora. Yet, this policy also raises some important theoretical 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: 180)

What they paint, then, is a picture of the state which is, just as civil society, ridden with antagonisms. That is, the state is not a homogeneity but something that is

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[41] The city of Florence provided, for example, the forum's conference locations for free, helped with translations as well as provided free temporary accommodation.

comprised of multiple politics. The simple exclusion of political parties, which are seen to be too close to established hegemonic agendas of the state, could therefore be a limitation of the political possibilities of social fora and 'the movement' in general. This is particularly true if one takes into account that it is often traditional labour parties that are being excluded. The lack of presence of labour movements and the non-representation of their agendas was clearly felt at the Florence ESF. This inability of social fora to become truly inclusive, and go beyond their history of being gathering spaces for 'grassroots' movements, could again be seen as a serious limitation of their politics. Although Crossley (2003: 300) argues that the 'anti-capitalist movement' could be seen as going beyond the traditional split between so-called 'old' and 'new' social movements – that is, it finds itself between socialist/labour movements and new 'grassroots' movements – one also needs to acknowledge that 'the movement' has so far failed to truly connect to more traditional labour resistances (Watson, 2003).

This lack of inclusivity, which was clearly apparent at the 2002 ESF in Florence, can partly be explained by the fact that the seminars and conferences held at the ESF were dominated by relatively few organisations. First, there was ATTAC (although one should note that ATTAC is not a homogeneous organisation but, rather, a network of relatively independent regional groups which often have much more radical views and agendas than the French leadership, which seems to have much more traditional political ambitions). Second, there was the 'hidden' Italian organisational committee, which seemed to dominate the agenda of the forum without any sense of transparency in their decisions. This leads Treanor (2002) to name the organisation of the Florence ESF 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 claims that "the 'organising meetings' for the ESF in other countries were unreal, they had nothing to say about its structure. The organising 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" (2002). 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.

Currently there are efforts under way to organise the second ESF, which will take place in Paris/Saint-Denis in November 2003. To prepare this event several meetings have taken place in Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Genoa. These meetings have been advertised on various email lists and could be attended by anyone. There is clearly an attempt to be open about the organisation of these preparatory meetings and the ESF in general. What has been discussed at these meetings is, for example, the 'Proposal to Create a European Organisational Structure'. As a result, one could say that there are efforts on the way to broaden the reach of 'the movement' and to build its organisational structure on a more democratic and inclusive fundament. Yet, so far – and here I would agree with the points made by Treanor discussed above – little has actually been achieved in that direction. The ESF organisation currently lacks an open, democratic and transparent process that is fully inclusive and encourages participation from all spheres of society. I am currently involved in organising a workshop for the 2003 ESF in Paris. It has been an uphill struggle to find out exactly how one can get involved. The whole

question of how the ESF is organised and who is in charge of anything remains largely mysterious. This is especially embarrassing if one considers that the ESF is meant to reopen the question of 'the political' and make the democratic process more transparent and relevant to the pressing issues of our times. There is an urgent need to make the organisation of the ESF more inclusive and invite a diverse range of groups, movements and organisations to take part in it. At the moment it seems that the ESF is organised by a somewhat hidden network of individuals and groups; one can only speculate about who the powerful voices that seem to decide on the main organisational issues and the strategic and political directions are. Having said that, one does not have to be as pessimistic as Treanor and call for the abolition of the ESF; 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 practice with this chapter, the task is to positively influence this process of mobilisation and organisation of the ESF and 'the movement' in general.

However, the call for an ever increasing multiplicity and inclusivity of the ESF and 'the movement' should not be an end in itself. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the 'logic of difference', that is, the realisation that 'the social' is an inherent multiplicity or impossibility, can only be one aspect of the political event (see also Laclau, 1990: 90-91). As I discussed in the previous sections, Laclau and Mouffe also highlight that a politics that aims to challenge a hegemonic positioning or emplacement of society needs to simplify the field of difference and establish a 'logic of equivalence' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 130), a logic of 'us' against 'them'. Whereas the 'logic of difference' points to the

fundamentally antagonistic reality of society, the 'logic of equivalence' gives presence to some of these antagonisms in order to politically 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: 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 institutionalise 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. Instead, "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" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 182). This logic of a 'hegemonic construction' between different struggles implies a process of institutionalisation that can forge some of the multiple demands of social movements into a political agenda.

Translated to the problematic of 'the movement', one could therefore say that its task cannot only be seen in becoming more multiple and including ever more social actors but also in turning 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 institutionalisation 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 the 15th of 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: 145). It had become a constitutive space able to engage in concrete political actions: "The ESF was the driving force behind the largest ever mobilisation 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: 141). One could say that it was this specific event which provided a glimpse of the organisational 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 institutionalise this newly found unity. According to Watson (2003: 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, organisations and movements present at the anti-war demonstration. Yet, this event of opportunity to broaden 'the movement' and somewhat institutionalise 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, which would have worked towards a hegemonic event of politics, enabling the constitution of a different social organisation. 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: 5)

The event in which a new universal value becomes possible cannot, according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 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 organisation 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 organisation. To be clear, such a constitution of a new social hegemony can never finalise society; 'the social' will always be an organisational and political impossibility, as Laclau and Mouffe highlight. Yet, what I have tried to argue throughout this thesis is that it is indeed precisely this notion of impossibility that makes different organisational and political positions possible.
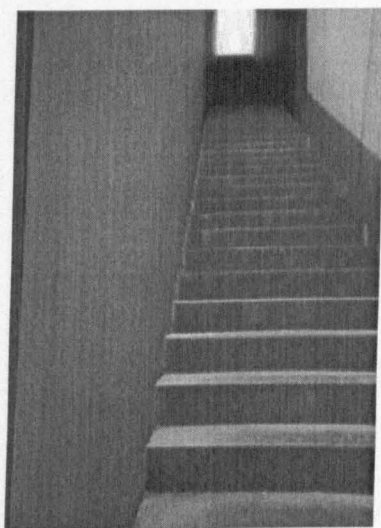
Stairs towards the exit of the monument 'Passages'

6. In-Conclusions: Hopeful Failures

I began this thesis by painting an image of a passage, a passage that was inspired by Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, or *Arcades Project*. To bring this thesis to a close, let us return to this image of a passage. As I discussed in the Preface, the *Arcades Project* was Benjamin's life project; it assumes a special place in his life as well as in his intellectual work. It was not only a close engagement with the Parisian arcade, or in German *Passage*, but also symbolises Benjamin's own life journey. For over fifteen years Benjamin worked on this project. Originally conceived as a fifty-page essay, it turned into a 'monstrous' collection of thousands of quotations that aimed for nothing less than presenting a history of modernity. However, Benjamin failed to finish the *Arcades Project*. It was cut short by his death. He committed suicide while fleeing from the Nazis in 1940. On his passage to America he is said to have carried with him a manuscript of the *Arcades Project*, presumably to save it from the Nazis and have it published by the Frankfurt School, based in New York at the time of war. Yet, the *Passagen-Werk* never made it to New York. Its passage was interrupted by the events in Portbou on the night of the 25th of September 1940; it accompanied Benjamin on his passage from life to death. While the *Arcades Project* might symbolise Benjamin's death, it has outlived its author and inspired many readers and writers, like myself, since

it became available in German in the mid-1980s and in English in 1999. I first came across Benjamin while reading John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* in 1998. Benjamin's thought, particularly his *Arcades Project*, has accompanied the 'passage' of this thesis ever since that first encounter.

As I discussed in the Preface as well as in Chapters Two and Three, the *Arcades Project* is significant not only because of its interest in the architecture, or space, of the arcade. Rather, Benjamin was fascinated by the arcade because its specific spatiality signified a particular time, a new time. For him, the emergence of the arcade marked the passage into modernity, a passage that was particularly characterised by the rise of the commodity. Benjamin saw the arcade as 'a world in miniature' (*AP*, 31) and the commodity, which was on display in the arcade, was becoming an increasingly important feature of that world. For Benjamin, one could say, the Parisian arcade was a historical event that changed the way time and space are ordered. In Heidegger's language, the arcade was a particular technical apparatus that changed the way the world is emplaced or positioned; it was a 'worlding' event in the sense that it marked a passage into a new emplacement of society. Part of that emplacement was the production of particular subjectivities, like those of the *flâneur* and the prostitute. As I discussed in Chapter Three, these subjectivities can only be thought of in relation to the particular 'goings-on' of the commodity, which 'intoxicates' the subject. The commodity-world of the arcade puts the subject to sleep, as Benjamin would have it (*AP*, 389). For Benjamin, capitalist modernity is a 'dream-time', a 'phantasmagoria'.

Now, Benjamin hoped that his *Arcades Project* would help to awaken the 'sleeping collectivity' of modernity. To achieve this he did not write a narrative, or even a manifesto, which would instruct the reader. Instead, he collected thousands of quotations and arranged them in such a way that meaning could spring out between the lines of text. He referred to this 'method' as 'montage'. As I discussed in the Preface and Chapter Two, a montage has to be understood as 'destruction'. A destructive montage is not a 'method' in the traditional sense; the point is not to 'positively' reproduce an outcome in a predictable manner. Instead, it is a *movement* that aims to be constructive by way of destructing established traditions, histories and meanings. The montage of the *Arcades Project* aims to discontinue established historical narratives by way of destructing text: passages of text are taken out of their original context. Instead of providing a textual narrative, Benjamin says that he 'merely shows' quotations and 'makes use of them':

> 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. (*BGS* V.1, 574; *AP*, 460, emphasis in original)

To quote means to separate the 'con' from the 'text'. This is the death of the text as context, as a homogeneous and organised whole. To quote means to anatomise the body of text – it depositions or cuts a passage of text from its original context. As Benjamin says: "Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out, armed, and relieve the idle stroller of his [sic] conviction" (*OWS*, 481). Yet, according to Benjamin, this killing of text is the only way to redeem it, to save it from the linearity of history and make it available, as a dead fragment, to a project of re-reading and repositioning time.

A montage, then, is a response to the history that is always already positively constructed and positioned by 'those in power' (*TPH*, 254). Benjamin refers to this history as an 'eternal image', because it is an image that 'eternally returns' to the same point, again and again. This history works like a merry-go-round, which gives its passengers the *illusion* of going on a journey, a passage, but it simply spins around its own axis. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the *Arcades Project* portrays the commodity as the motor of this merry-go-round: it continuously announces change and searches for 'newness', but in the end it always returns to itself. This is essentially what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have in mind when they refer to capital as a deterritorialisation 'machine' that always already reterritorialises everything along the well-established lines of commodity production. The point of Chapter Three was to explore the particular 'goings-on' of this continuous process of de- and reterritorialisation, a process which reproduces the hegemonic positioning of capital. The *Arcades Project* aims to interrupt this 'eternal image' of history; it hopes to bring the merry-go-round to a standstill and discontinue its phantasmagorical 'machinery'. Its destructive montage presents fragments of history that do not amount to a coherent, homogenous narrative. Montage is an anti-narrative movement that challenges *those images of history that are continuously emplaced by dominant forces of* positioning. It dissects the homogenous body of history and therefore depositions it. Yet, what I have emphasised throughout the thesis is that such a destructive *movement is not simply negative.* Instead, it aims to be affirmative by seeing those historical images that have been forgotten or marginalised (*BGS* I.3, 1236). Benjamin hopes that the fragments of historical images presented in the *Arcades*

Project will illuminate the reader and enable certain re-cognitions and new experiences of reality. He refers to these illuminations as 'flashes of knowledge' (*AP*, 462). As I discussed in Chapter Two, such a flash must be understood as a 'dialectical image', an event, an *Augenblick*, which discontinues and destructs the continuity of the 'eternal image' of history and enables new histories to emerge.

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* or *Passagen-Werk*, then, aims to unsettle taken-for-granted emplacements of history. He questions the seemingly secure positioning of the Parisian arcades by constructing a montage of text that points to a passage beyond the architectural reality of the 19th century. One could say, Benjamin depositions the emplacement of modern society to reveal its precariousness, temporariness and its contested nature. In this thesis I have been inspired by the *Arcades Project* and tried to put today's positioning of organised reality into question. This questioning has aimed to show the limits of the contemporary emplacement of social organisation and offer ways to imagine passages to a 'beyond', a different and, perhaps, repositioned social order. This repositioning is not a reproduction of the well-established positions of society. Instead, it is an exploration of how 'the social' can be organised and positioned differently. This exploration, however, will always fail to provide final answers – it can never be 'concluded'. Just like Benjamin could never have finished his life project – in a way, he could have continued forever to collect quotations for the *Arcades Project* – one can never stop questioning and exploring possibilities of passages to a 'beyond'. It is like being a *flâneur* in Benjamin's text: one passes through the quotations and Benjamin's short commentaries and every visit to his textual arcade holds the promise of new glimpses. These glimpses are temporary

illuminations that provide new experiences, passages to an elsewhere. This thesis, then, is, perhaps, nothing more than a temporary illumination that stems from my reading of texts such as the *Arcades Project*.

This experience of a temporary illumination reminds me of Baudelaire's sonnet 'A une passante', cited and discussed by Benjamin in 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (*BGS*, I.2: 622; *CB*, 124), one of the few essays that emerged out of his work on the *Arcades Project*:

> Amid the deafening traffic of the town,
> Tall, slender, in deep mourning, with majesty,
> A woman passed, raising, with dignity
> In her poised hand, the flounces of her gown;
>
> Graceful, noble, with a statue's form.
> And I drank, trembling as a madman thrills,
> From her eyes, ashen sky where brooded storm,
> The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills.
>
> A flash...then night! – O lovely fugitive,
> I am suddenly reborn from your swift glance;
> Shall I never see you till eternity?
> Somewhere, far off! too late! never, perchance!
> Neither knows where the other goes or lives;
> We might have loved, and you knew this might be!

Charles Baudelaire was a French poet who lived in 19th century Paris. His poem collections, *The Flowers of Evil* and *Spleen Paris*, were an inspirational source for Benjamin's study of the emergence of Parisian modernity and its city-life. For Benjamin, Baudelaire is a poet-*flâneur* who has to come to terms with the destruction of traditional poetry and the rise of modernity, which is characterised by non-poetic 'shocks' of mass city-life: anonymity, commodities, advertising images and prostitution. As I discussed in Chapter Three, the *flâneur* is a modern subject that is fully exposed to these 'shocks' of modern mass-society. In the above poem Baudelaire provides a snapshot of the *flâneur's* city-life. While walking through the streets of Paris, Baudelaire passes by thousands of other

people every day. He only 'meets' these people for a second: a short glimpse, a sudden flash. In this flash of a second everything can happen; this is the hope. When passing by a fellow female *flâneur*, for example, Baudelaire thinks 'We might have loved'. For one second only, love between two 'passer-bys', two passengers of modern mass-society, is a real possibility. Yet, the kairotic opportunity provided by this short moment, this event, is missed and Baudelaire is subsumed again by 'the deafening traffic of the town'.

For Benjamin, Parisian modernity is characterised by these kairotic moments that are, however, continuously missed. The commodity, for example, can be seen as a 'machine' that continuously produces encounters: products on display in the arcade seek customers' attention; advertisements flashing in colourful light; and prostitutes offering their bodies for 'love'. The *flâneur*, embodied by Baudelaire, is in the midst of these 'shock' encounters. 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, 561; *CB*, 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 characterised 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. In Chapters Two and Three 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. This is to say, 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 fetishises the commodity precisely because the commodity is the Other that provides pleasure and enjoyment. In Benjamin's eyes, Baudelaire's poetry is an attempt to enjoy the pleasures of modernity: Baudelaire tries to perceive charm 'even in damaged and decaying goods', as Benjamin writes in the above passage. For Benjamin, Baudelaire succeeded 'beautifully' in enjoying this 'damaged and decaying' society, but only "as someone who had already half withdrawn from it" (*BGS* I.2, 561; *CB*, 59). Benjamin maintains that Baudelaire 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.*).

Baudelaire, then, is a poet who has been '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. In Chapter Three I aimed to show that it is this structural fantasy that produces and reproduces the hegemony of capital. *Pace* Laclau and Mouffe (1985), 'hegemony' points to a certain unity in a specific social discourse. That is, the concept of

hegemony highlights the fact that there is something like 'society' because it is possible to position, emplace and organise 'the social' in particular ways. In relation to the positioning project of organisation, I argued that management describes the particular way organisation and organisation theory has been positioned or emplaced in relation to the hegemonic discourses of capital. Capital and management are hegemonic because they continuously set organisation into a particular place; they 'corner' organisation, so to say. What I tried to show in Chapter Three is that this 'cornering' restricts organisation theory to discourses like knowledge management, which are always already positively positioned in relation to the particular 'pleasure principles' of capital. What I suggested in Chapter Three is that the knowledge manager can be seen, perhaps, as today's reincarnation of the *flâneur*. One could argue that, as the subjectivity of the *flâneur* was 'cornered' by the specific 'goings-on' of 19th century capital, today's knowledge manager is set into the specific emplacement of global knowledge capitalism.

What I aimed to suggest in Chapter Three is that the *flâneur* and the knowledge manager are somewhat intoxicated by the commodity, which perhaps conceals the 'true' power relations that produce the contemporary hegemony of capital. As Benjamin (*BGS* I.2, 561; *CB*, 59) 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 organisational regimes of society that might be able emplace 'the social' differently. What this thesis has hoped to contribute is the discussion of ways of exploring possibilities of a political critique of the hegemony of capital and suggesting alternative organisational emplacements of society.

This 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: 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 organisation. Capital and management cannot be the final answer to the question of social organisation precisely because society will always fail to fully constitute itself. 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: 5, emphasis added)

For Laclau, then, social organisation is a 'succession of failed attempts' at reaching 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 organised – 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'. What I would like to suggest here is that this structural failure of society to ever fully position itself can, perhaps, be related to Benjamin's failure in finishing the *Arcades Project*. Both, the positioning project and the *Arcades Project*, seem to be characterised by a certain lack. While the positioning project lacks the ability to fully represent society, Benjamin cannot finish the *Arcades Project* because it is impossible to ever achieve a full representation of modern society. The 'method' of a montage of quotations seems to point to this impossibility. As I mentioned earlier, not only was it impossible for Benjamin to finish his collection of quotations, it is also impossible to finish reading it. The *Arcades Project*, then, is always transforming; one will always fail to fix its meaning in a definite place. What is important to realise is the political significance of this lack, this failure to finish the *Arcades Project* and society itself. This failure points to the inherent openness of 'the social' and enables multiple ways of reading 'the social' differently.

The depositioning project of organisation, discussed in Chapter Four, engenders these possibilities of reading organisation 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: 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 relics of the past, we need to insist on the impossibility of such a 'happy end'. Such an 'end' is an illusion; all attempts to finalise 'the social' will fail from the outset. According to Laclau and Mouffe, however, precisely this failure to finalise 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.

This is perhaps what Benjamin's quotations in the *Arcades Project* try to achieve. By cutting up texts, Benjamin subverts the established order of existing narratives and discourses of reality. What becomes important, however, is how the quotations are positioned in relation to each other; as Benjamin writes, "What is decisive is knowing the art of setting them" (*AP*, 473). This positioning of quotations, then, becomes a 'minor' art form, to use a DeleuzoGuattarian (1986)

expression. Benjamin creates a different language by cutting up 'major' languages and enabling the reader to read between the lines. This can be illustrated by showing how *'Passage'*, a short essay on the Parisian arcades, 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" (*AP*, 871). What Benjamin does here is 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 destructs 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. (*AP*, 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, 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 'the major' and the powerful: the king, the academy, the property owner. 'Cunning' is practiced by 'minorities', by those who live on 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.

"Knowledge comes only in lightening flashes" (*AP*, 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 Four, 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 organisation theory questions the basic presence of any positions of organisation; it puts into doubt and resists the reality of organisation that is continuously produced by 'major languages' or hegemonic discourses of society. To point to the undecidability of organised 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 organisation and points to the fact that any positively positioned object of organisation is dependent on a negative process of disorganisation. 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 Two, 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 organised 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 analysing specific modes of production and domination, "in order to maintain a grasp on the...organization, which is to be transformed effectively" (Derrida, 1987: 71). There is thus a question of the effectiveness of depositioning established realities of organisation. 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 (*AP*, 473). The concern I expressed in Chapter Four was that many depositioning discourses, within the realms of organisation theory, fail to maintain a grasp on the concrete modes of production of organisation which they seek to transform. For example, the failure of many depositioning *discourses to* engage with the 'goings-on' of capital prevents them from analysing, critiquing and resisting those hegemonic discourses that always already shape today's organisational realities. Capital and the commodity, it seems, have been relegated to the back seat of many depositioning discourses in organisation theory. My concern in Chapter Four 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 depoliticising effects.

A project of repositioning organisation aims to go beyond the restrictions of the depositioning discourses. While the depositioning project is primarily about showing the undecidability of all organised phenomena, the repositioning project is based on the understanding that the notion of undecidability also enables decisions to be made about how to organise society. *Pace* Derrida, Laclau argues that society is characterised by a certain 'structural undecidability' (1995: 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 Two is that it is this decision about how to limit society which describes the political event. Laclau's understanding of the concept of undecidability, then, can be seen as a call for political decisions about how to constitute and order society. The point of Chapter Four was to suggest that many depositioning discourses in organisation theory seem ill-prepared to conceptualise the political event as something that is able to position society itself. Rather than connecting the concept of undecidability to questions of societal organisation, 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 organising, they have failed to engage effectively with those positions and emplacements of society that traverse local boundaries of space and time.

In Chapter Five 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 organising multiple forms of protest actions and social fora. This necessitates a critical engagement with the 'goings-on' of today's global capitalism and the 'neo-liberal' consensus that seems to characterise many political fronts. The 'anti-capitalist movement', then, does not only organise 'micro-political' resistances in local communities, but explicitly resists today's hegemonic forces, which seem to 'corner' and emplace social organisation on a global basis. As I argued in Chapter Five, 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: 87-88)

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: 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.

This, then, brings us to the 'end' of this thesis, which set out to explore political possibilities of repositioning organisation 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 organise 'the social'. As I have highlighted throughout the thesis, society must be understood as an impossibility. It is, however, precisely this notion of impossibility that opens up possibilities of political intervention and resistance that might be able to reposition and reorganise society. This thesis 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 organisation of society. This hope must be enacted. It does not materialise 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, 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. I hope that this thesis has been able to illuminate its readers to some extent – however temporary, marginal and 'minor' such illuminations might have been.

A view of Portbou Bay and 'Passages'

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Works Cited by Walter Benjamin

AP   *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

BGS *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I-VII, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (with Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem). Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp; 1974-1985.

C   *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994.

CB   *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn. London: Verso.

CoV 'Critique of Violence', in *R*.

DC   'The Destructive Character', in *R*.

I   *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn. London: Pimlico, 1999.

KK   'Karl Kraus', in *R*.

OGT *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne. London: Verso.

OWS 'One-way Street', in *Selected Writings, Vol. 2, 1927-1940*. ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott *et al*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

R   *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott in, ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken, 1978.

S   'Surrealism', in *R*.

ST   'The Storyteller', in *I*.

TPH 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *I*.

TT   'The Task of the Translator', in *R*.

WoA 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *I*.

Other Abbreviations of Works cited:

AGS Theodor W. Adorno (1970-1977) *Gesammelte Schriften*, in 10 Volumes, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz). Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.

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