



CHAPTER 9

BHASKAR AND CRITICAL REALISM

STEVE FLEETWOOD

INTRODUCTION

IN the late 1970s Roy Bhaskar initiated a meta-theoretical perspective, *critical realism* (CR)¹ that subsequently went on to influence sociology, social theory (ST), and organization studies (OS). Because the nature of this influence is complex, it is sensible to start with a (four-point) clarification.

- (i) CR is a meta-theory rooted explicitly in ontology—i.e. the study of being, existence, or more simply the study of *the way the world is*. CR ontology is characterized by stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, relations, and processes. As a meta-theory, CR did *not* influence sociology, ST, and OS *substantively*: there is, for example, no such thing as a ‘CR theory of worker resistance’.²
- (ii) CR influence went beyond ontology because one’s ontology influences one’s aetiology, epistemology, methodology, choice of research techniques, mode of inference, the objectives one seeks, and the concepts of explanation, prediction, and theory one adopts. I refer to this as a ‘*chain of meta-theoretical concepts*’.
- (iii) CR also highlighted the existence of two rival ontologies in sociology, ST, and OS: (i) an *empirical realist* ontology, characterized by observed, **atomic** events; and an *idealist* ontology, characterized by entities constituted entirely by discourse (etc.).
- (iv) CR offered an *interpretation*, and *critical evaluation*, of empirical realist and idealist ontologies, and their associated chains of meta-theoretical concepts.

This chapter has five parts.³ The first section shows how CR moved from philosophy to sociology and ST, and from there to OS. It also clears some ground for what is to



come later. The second and third sections are CR interpretations, and critical evaluations, of empirical realist and idealist ontologies and their associated chains of meta-theoretical concepts. The fourth section elaborates upon CR's ontology and its associated chain of meta-theoretical concepts. The conclusion shows that differing definitions of organizations are influenced by different ontologies and their associated chain of meta-theoretical concepts.

CRITICAL REALISM: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO SOCIOLOGY AND ST

While Bhaskar was instrumental in advocating a (re)turn to realism in the 1970s and 1980s he was not the only advocate. Indeed, he was one of several.⁴ Bhaskar's work was distinctive, however, because while others applied realism to particular issues (e.g. the environment),⁵ Bhaskar (intentionally or otherwise) applied it to the development of a *meta-theory for social science in general*. This made it groundbreaking. Many philosophers began to recognize the importance of Bhaskar's work for social science and Collier (1994) published an important simplification of Bhaskar's (often difficult) writing. Simultaneously, realist ideas, many extremely close to *critical* realism, were being developed by thinkers working on the terrain where philosophy and ST meet.⁶ All this helped to nudge CR from philosophy to sociology and ST where it found a small but highly receptive audience. There are three main reasons why the audience was so receptive.

- (i) Sociology and ST were dominated by structural functionalism. While CRs were not alone in criticizing functionalism, Bhaskar and STs like Archer were instrumental in developing a critique of, and an alternative to, its structural determinism.
- (ii) Sociology and ST were also dominated by a positivist philosophy of science. Bhaskar and STs like Sayer were instrumental in developing a sophisticated and thoroughgoing critique of positivism that was lacking in the alternatives that were beginning to emerge.
- (iii) The dominance of structural functionalism and positivism was challenged by the emergence of 'interpretivism' and later by 'postmodernism (etc.)'—both defined below. Unfortunately, interpretivism and postmodernism (etc.) had serious shortcomings, leaving many sociologists and STs facing *Hobson's Choice*. They could reject positivism and structural functionalism, but only by accepting interpretivism or postmodernism (etc.), with their shortcomings. CR offered an alternative to positivism, structural functionalism, interpretivism, and postmodernism (etc.)—although some caveats need to be added in the latter two cases.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism was sufficiently dominant in the 1970s and 1980s for Burrell and Morgan (1979) to include as one of the four main sociological paradigms. Structural functionalism conceived of society as a system, the parts of which (i.e. norms, customs and institutions, and the people) are structured, and function to maintain the system's overall ability and cohesion—with a degree of disequilibrium and conflict. It was a macro-social approach. While it recognized that agents have roles, as well as a degree of autonomy in executing the actions associated with these roles, agents were severely constrained, if not determined, by the structure of the system. Effectively, agency disappeared as agents became puppets, acting out a role determined by society's structure. One of the main problems facing structural functionalism, then, was its inability to reconcile agency and structure, resulting in structural determinism.

Positivism

For much of the twentieth century, philosophy of science was dominated by positivism and its associated methods and research techniques. Popper's influential work did not so much overturn positivism as shift the focus from confirmation to falsification, without significantly altering the basic approach to doing science. In social science, objective, true, and scientific knowledge could (allegedly) be gained by studying social behaviour from the 'outside'—i.e. 'outside' of the thoughts and beliefs of people. It did not so much matter what people thought or believed, but what they did—or could be measured doing. If, for example, productivity increased following the introduction of performance management (PM), then knowledge of this could be obtained by developing a theory, using it to make a prediction in the form of a hypothesis, and then testing the hypothesis. If the hypothesis was not falsified, the theory (or part of it) was objective and true. Dissenting voices were, however, emerging.

Interpretivism

From the 1960s onwards, some sociologists and STs had begun to advocate interpretive, *verstehen*, subjectivist, interactionist, hermeneutic, and ethnomethodological approaches—hereafter referred to as *interpretivist*. Interpretivists rejected the idea that knowledge could be gained from the 'outside', arguing that knowledge could only be obtained by studying behaviour from the 'inside'—i.e. via the thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and interpretations of people. The basic idea was that human beings act in a *social* world that they must first interpret—something not necessary for gases and atoms. This in turn meant that the objective of social science was to *uncover the subjective meanings held by those under investigation*. This knowledge was believed to be subjective.⁷ It was,

therefore, via interpretivism that relativism, in the guise of *epistemic relativism* (Bhaskar, 1998 [1979]: 5 *passim*), entered into sociology and ST. Epistemic relativism holds that one's social position (e.g. class, gender, race, being a researcher, being researched) influences the way one interprets the world, formulates concepts, and made claims about it. While epistemic relativism became widely accepted in social science, it opened the door to debilitating forms of relativism, which are better discussed in a later section.

Postmodernism (etc.)

From the 1980s onwards, a set of (ambiguously related) ideas took sociology and ST by storm, ideas known via terminology like 'postmodernism', 'post-structuralism', 'social constructionism', 'relativism', 'continental philosophy', 'pragmatism', or the 'linguistic', 'cultural', or 'relativistic' turn. For convenience, these ideas will be referred to as *postmodernism (etc.)*. These ideas had several (often overlapping) origins. In Anglo-Saxon literature they came from Wittgenstein, via STs like Winch (1959). In continental literature they came from Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida. They also had origins in the philosophy of science (Kuhn, 1970; Feyerabend, 1993), and in the sociology of science (Latour, 1987).

It is vital to understand two things about postmodernism (etc.). First, the version of postmodernism (etc.) that took sociology, ST (and OS) by storm, was sometimes implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, rooted in an ontology of *idealism*. Idealism comes in several guises, but the guise that entered sociology, ST (and OS) held that the (social and/or natural) world could not exist *independently of its identification*. That is, the world could not exist without someone observing it, knowing about it (tacitly or non-tacitly), or socially constructing it. The world was made, fabricated, or constructed, *entirely* from discourse, language, signs, or texts. 'Reality' (now with scare quotes) could not exist independently of discourse, language, signs, or texts. The term 'entirely' is crucial: it implies that there are *no* extra-discursive, extra-linguistic, extra-semiotic, or extra-textual entities. I will abbreviate all this and write, variously, of the world, reality, or entities, being 'constructed *entirely* via discourse (etc.)'. Knowledge could not, *qua* positivism, be objective. Indeed, knowledge now had little or nothing to do with entities existing independently of agents and became entirely *dependent upon* them (Fleetwood, 2005). Second, postmodernism (etc.) is not necessarily synonymous with idealism and one can be a postmodernist (etc.) *without* being an idealist.

Idealism, Postmodernism (etc.), and Interpretivism

At this point, it becomes easier to understand the particular shortcomings facing interpretivism and postmodernism (etc.) introduced by idealism. If, as idealism implies, knowledge has little or nothing to do with entities existing independently of agents, but

is entirely *dependent upon* them, this has implications for ontology and epistemology. The implication is the disappearance of the distinction between entities and our knowledge of entities and the collapse of ontology into epistemology. What there is to know, collapses into what can be known, a position Bhaskar (1998 [1979]: 16 *passim*) refers to as the ‘epistemic fallacy’. Moreover, *epistemic* relativism often collapses into *judgemental* relativism (Bhaskar, 1998 [1979]: 57–8)—i.e. the belief that it is *impossible to judge* between competing claims. If the social world is constructed *entirely* via discourse (etc.), i.e. constructed out of agents’ meanings and interpretations, then there is no independent entity with which to compare agents’ meanings and interpretations. Claims about ‘objective’ knowledge and ‘truth’ became unsustainable.

Many of those sociologists and STs eager to reject positivism and structural functionalism, and embrace interpretivism or postmodernism (etc.), ended up being blown off-course by idealism. They could not accept interpretivism or postmodernism (etc.) because idealist inroads had made it appear that a commitment to interpretivism or postmodernism (etc.) demanded a commitment to idealism. Many were not committed to idealism, and some even had a loose commitment to some kind of realism. But the versions of realism available to them in the 1970s and 1980s were often forms of crude materialism and, therefore, not much of an alternative. How could a sociologist or social theorist interested in (say) discourse, ideology, or culture, accept realism when realism appeared to accommodate only ‘hard bits of stuff’, or worse still, when realism was taken as synonymous with empirical realism—the ontology underpinning positivism? CR allowed sociologists and STs to reject positivism and ~~structural~~ functionalism, and embrace aspects of interpretivism or postmodernism (etc.), without being blown off-course by idealism.

A Closer Look at Ontology

Ontology is crucial to sociology and ST for two (main) reasons. First, everyone has an ontology—a set of beliefs about the way the world is—and if it is not explicit then an implicit ontology will necessarily be ‘smuggled in’ as a presupposition. CR and Idealists are explicit ontologists, while empirical realists presuppose their ontology—deriving it from epistemology.

Second, to say that one’s ontology influences one’s chain of meta-theoretical concepts, is not to say there is no room for variation between ontology and aetiology, epistemology, methodology, research techniques, objectives, modes of inference, and conceptions of explanation, prediction, and theory. Knight (2002: 33) writes of an association (or ‘congregation’) between ontology and other meta-theoretical concepts, while recognizing that the latter are not ‘bonded to ontologies’.

To exemplify ontology’s influencing role, consider the case of methodology, and the (retroductive) question: what ontology *must* be presupposed for a deconstructive method to be employed? The term ‘must’ carries no empirical force and the question means something like: what ontological presupposition is *sustainable, defensible,*



sensible, plausible, logical, consistent, or intelligible with the use of a deconstructive method? Consider two claims:

- (1) 'because I believe it is raining outside I will take an umbrella'
- (2) 'because I believe organizations are socially constructed via discourse (etc.)
I will employ a method that deconstructs this discourse'

One does not believe it is raining *because* one takes an umbrella; and one does not believe organizations are socially constructed *because* one employs a deconstructive method. One takes an umbrella and one employs a deconstructive method because these are consistent and intelligible things to do *given one's ontology*. Furthermore, reversing the direction of influence, running *from* methodology *to* ontology, would be tantamount to adopting a belief about the way the world is for methodological convenience: the tail would be wagging the dog. In short, if one's ontology influences one's aetiology, epistemology, methodology, research techniques, objectives, modes of inference, and conceptions of explanation, prediction, and theory, then a mistaken ontology, however derived, is a meta-theoretical disaster.

Critical Realism, Ontology, and Organization Theory

During the late 1970s and 1980s CR not only found a small and highly receptive audience in sociology and ST, it found a similar audience in OS. At this time, a minor diaspora from sociology departments into the business and management schools was underway, bringing with it substantive developments in disciplines like industrial relations, industrial sociology, organizational behaviour, and labour process theory. While many of these substantive developments were *implicitly* realist, at the time virtually no one thought to make their underlying commitments to realism *explicit*. When, therefore, CR finally emerged in OS, many easily accepted it.⁸ CR is now considered a legitimate perspective in OS, attracting critical evaluation (Contu & Willmott, 2005; Al Amoudi & Willmott, 2011; Willmott, 2005) and symposia (Newton, Deetz, & Reed, 2011). As I write, an article by CR O'Mahoney (2011) has just appeared in the journal *Organisation*.

So how did CR influence OS? A good place to start is with the bewildering tangle of 'positions' found in the OS literature, such as: actor-network theory, critical theory, dialogicism, discourse theory/analysis, empiricism, ethnomethodology, functionalism, grounded theory, hermeneuticism, humanism, ideographic, institutionalism, interpretivism, modernism, narratology, normative, nominalism, nomothetic, phenomenology, positivism, relativism, social constructionism/constructivism, socio-materialism, structuralism (radical and functionalism), structuration, subjectivism, symbolic interactionism, objectivism, population ecology, positivism, anti-positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism, various realisms (e.g. empirical, naïve, scientific, structural, and relational), and *verstehen*, not to mention positions grounded in theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Foucault.



There have been several attempts to untangle these positions, the following four being, arguably, the most well-known. Burrell and Morgan (1979) present four 'paradigms', divided into two 'approaches':

- Radical humanism.
- Radical structuralism.
- Functionalist sociology.
- Interpretive sociology.
 - Subjectivist approach—nominalist ontology, anti-positivist epistemology, voluntarist understanding of human nature and ideographic methodology.
 - Objectivist approaches—realist ontology, positivist epistemology, deterministic understanding of human nature, and nomothetic methodology.

Deetz (2000) presents four 'discourses':

- Dialogic (postmodern and deconstructionism).
- Critical (late modern, reformist).
- Normative (modern, progressive).
- Interpretive (premodern, traditional).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) present four 'basic belief systems' about ontology, epistemology and methodology:

- Positivism.
- Post-positivism.
- Constructivism.
- Critical theory et al.—being a 'blanket term' exemplified by neo-Marxism, feminism, materialism, and participatory inquiry, and divided into 'post-structuralism, postmodernism and a blending of these two' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 109).

Knight (2002: 27–32) presents three paradigms:

- Realism and positivism.
- CR and pragmatism.
- Anti-realism and post-structuralism.

While these observations were useful in 'mapping' the OS terrain, they suffer from (at least) three shortcomings. First, they attempt to 'compare apples and oranges'—i.e. by comparing meta-theoretical concepts to theoretical ones, theoretical concepts to substantive concepts, and so on. Second, they do not sufficiently differentiate between varieties of realism—and *critical* realism is rarely mentioned. Third, postmodernism (etc.) (e.g. postmodernism, post-structuralism, constructivism) are often treated as varieties of idealism.

CR avoids the first two shortcomings by offering a three-fold division of these positions based upon ontology, and then tracing the chain of meta-theoretical concepts rooted in these ontologies. CR avoids the third shortcoming by exposing, as an ontological misconception, the view that *all postmodernists (etc.) are ontological idealists*. This is *not* the case—as the following comments, from three well-known postmodernists (etc.) make clear:

This position is unacceptably idealist because it is understood to conflate discourse with an ‘extra-discursive’ realm, so that changing the world is conceived to be equivalent to changing the discourse. Such a position may be held by some, perhaps many, constructionist and discourse analysts. (Willmott, 2005: 748)

The constant tendency was that postmodernism was rendered as entailing a particular set of epistemological and ontological commitments. Postmodernists, *apparently*, hold a relativist or conventionalist epistemology and an antirealist or idealist ontology. (Jones, 2008: 1245)

Social constructionism could be placed close to critical realism . . . Although there are explicitly idealist strains within constructionism, the latter does not usually protest realism, but essentialism, the ‘things *per se*’, the world that does not need the work to exist in order to be real. (Czarniawska, 2003: 132–1)

In their initial, and quite understandable, enthusiasm to reject empirical realism (and positivism), many early postmodernists (etc.) took an antirealist and idealist position. Although this idealism has since waned, some postmodernists (etc.) remain committed to it. It is, however, often difficult to interpret their commitments because what looks like idealism is sometimes merely a flirtation with antirealist or idealist language. Others affirm a commitment to realism, sometimes unconditionally and sometimes conditionally. An example of the latter is when reality is said to exist, but a condition is added that one cannot know anything about it—i.e. ‘empty’ or ‘fig leaf’ realism (Kukla, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005).

Clarifying this misconception, as CR does, has two very important consequences: one for postmodernism (etc.) and another beyond. First if some postmodernists (etc.) are idealists, some merely flirt with it, some reject it, and some are conditional or unconditional realists, then *postmodernists (etc.) cannot, unequivocally, be labelled idealists*. This is not so difficult to understand once it is realized that *here* are many reasons for accepting the label ‘postmodernism (etc.)’ (e.g. culture, ethics, gender, history, knowledge, politics, and power), *reasons that have little or nothing to do with ontology*. This means that postmodernists (etc.) *could* accept idealist or CR ontologies and many of the concepts in their associated meta-theoretical chains. Moreover, once the CR ontology is clearly spelled out, and its differences and similarities with empirical realism and idealism are made clear, many postmodernists (etc.) will realize that they have little to lose, and a lot to gain, by accepting it—or at least something like it.

Second, this argument can be extended to (virtually) all the positions noted above, although three brief examples will have to suffice. If, as appears to be the case, some ethnomethodologists, some actor-network theorists, and some discourse theorists are

idealists, some merely flirt with it, some reject it, and some are conditional or unconditional realists, then ethnomethodologists, actor-network theorists, and discourse theorists cannot, unequivocally, be labelled idealists. This means ethnomethodologists, actor-network theorists, and discourse theorists/analysts could accept idealist or CR ontologies and many of the concepts in their associated meta-theoretical chains. They would, however, be unlikely to accept an empirical realist ontology. An ethnomethodologist, for example, committed to studying people from the 'inside', would not adopt methods and techniques that only allow people to be studied from the 'outside'—which is all an ontology of observed atomistic events permits.

Unfortunately, this misconception often appears in contemporary OS literature as a *two-way fissure* between postmodernism (etc.) and an (often under-elaborated) realism—exemplified in Westwood and Cleggs's excellent collection: *Debating Organisations: Point-Counterpoint in Organisation Studies*. Westwood and Clegg (2003: 8–9) reflect this misconception when they observe that the 'most recent fissure' in OS has emerged from the 'postmodern turn', adding that postmodernism is 'antithetical to the epistemology of positivism, neopositivism and all forms of naive realism'. Indeed, with a few exceptions, the rest of the collection accepts this *two-way fissure*.

CR avoids this misconception and, thereby, offers OS a different way of 'mapping' the terrain. CR replaces this two-way fissure with a three-way fissure, based firmly on ontology, between:

- Idealism.
- Realism—of which there are two main strands:
 - Empirical realism—encapsulating scientific and structural realism.
 - Critical realism—encapsulating relational and processual realism.

More precisely, the three ontologies are:

- *Idealist ontology*, characterized by entities constituted entirely by discourse (etc.).
- *Empirical realist ontology*, characterized by observed, atomistic events.
- *Critical realist ontology*, characterized by stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, and relations and processes.

At this point the reader might wish to glance at Table 9.1 which highlights the three distinct ontological paradigms and their associated chain of meta-theoretical concepts. This table can be returned to later when all the concepts have been elaborated. The following two sections present CR interpretations, and critical evaluations, of empirical realist and idealist ontologies and their associated chains of meta-theoretical concepts.

Before proceeding, please note the following caveat. Many newcomers to meta-theory will find the following sections rather heavy going. In an effort to keep the exposition as 'uncluttered' as possible, extensive quotations and references to Bhaskar (and other CRs) are avoided. Each section is, however, firmly based upon Bhaskar's (and other CRs) work, and references are provided for the interested reader.

Table 9.1 Ontological paradigms for organization studies

	Empirical realist ontology of atomistic, observable events	Idealist ontology exhausted by discourse, language, signs, symbols, texts	Critical realist ontology of stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, relations, and processes
Associated meta-theory	Positivism or 'scientism'.	Various.	Critical realism.
Ontology	Atomistic, observable, events. No recognition of social construction. No agency-structure approach, only rational agents as individuals.	Entities cannot exist independently of their identification because <i>all</i> entities are constructed from discourse (etc.). 'Reality' is <i>entirely</i> socially constructed. 'Reality' is problematized, doubted, and sometimes denied. 'Reality' is multiple. 'Reality' is becoming and processual. Agents: decentred subjects constructed via discourse. No agency-structure approach	Some entities exist independently of their identification because not all are constructed from discourse—some entities are extra-discursive. Single reality but multiple interpretations. Four modes of reality: materially, artefactually, ideally, and socially real. Reality is stratified, emergent, transformational, systemically open, becoming, processual, and often relational. Agents and structures: distinct but related.
Scope of philosophy of science meta-theory	Avoids virtually all discussion of meta-theory. Gets on with applying its method and 'doing' O&M science.	Replaces philosophy of science with socio-politics of science. Offers a socio-political critique of meta-theory. As yet little engagement with CR.	Explicitly reflects upon meta-theory. Engages with the other ontologies. Accepts socio-political critique of meta-theory. Retains both philosophy of science and socio-politics of science.

(continued)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

	Empirical realist ontology of atomistic, observable events	Idealist ontology <i>exhausted by</i> discourse, language, signs, symbols, texts	Critical realist ontology of stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, relations, and processes
Epistemology	<p>Knowledge derives from (a) observing (b) event <i>regularities</i>.</p> <p>Truth established via testing hypotheses.</p> <p>Not relativist at all.</p>	<p>Primacy of epistemology over ontology.</p> <p>Fudges or denies ontology–epistemology divide.</p> <p>Recognizes the fragility of knowledge—for ontological reasons.</p> <p>'Truth' (with capital 'T') is impossible for ontological reasons: it is socially constructed.</p> <p>Pragmatic notion of 'truth'.</p> <p>Epistemically and judgementally relativist.</p>	<p>Subordination of epistemology to ontology.</p> <p>Recognizes the fragility of knowledge—for epistemological reasons.</p> <p>Knowledge derives from uncovering causal mechanisms.</p> <p>Truth (without capital 'T') is difficult but not impossible.</p> <p>Epistemically but not judgementally relativist.</p>
Aetiology	<p>Humean: causality as event regularity.</p> <p>Laws, law-like relations, and functional relations.</p>	<p>Reduces causality to Humean causality, rejects the latter, thereby rejecting the notion of causality.</p>	<p>Separates Humean causality from causality as powers and tendencies.</p> <p>Powers and tendencies replace laws, law-like relations, and functional relations.</p>
Methodology	<p>Covering law method.</p> <p>Explanation = prediction.</p> <p>Laws or event regularities.</p> <p>Closed systems.</p>	<p>Mainly deconstruction, genealogy, but other methods used.</p>	<p>Causal-explanatory.</p> <p>Explanation comes via uncovering and understanding causal mechanisms.</p> <p>Deconstruction and genealogy accepted.</p>
Research technique	<p>Maths, stats, and quantitative data.</p> <p>Regression, analysis of variance, meta-analysis, correlation, structural equation modelling, factor analysis.</p>	<p>Permissive.</p> <p>Avoids quantitative analysis.</p>	<p>Permissive.</p> <p>Critical discourse analysis, action research, archaeology.</p> <p>Mainly uses qualitative techniques, but the role of (some) quantitative techniques is debated.</p>

(continued)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

	Empirical realist ontology of atomistic, observable events	Idealist ontology <i>exhausted by</i> discourse, language, signs, symbols, texts	Critical realist ontology of stratified, emergent, and transformational entities, relations, and processes
Objective	Prediction. To construct and test predictions and hypotheses to establish whether claims are true or false.	Socio-political not meta-theoretical. Attempts to uncover power-knowledge and socio-political agendas and lend voice to relatively powerless.	Explanation. Accepts attempts to uncover power-knowledge and socio-political agendas and lend voice to relatively powerless.
Explanation	Explanation is 'thin'. Explanation = prediction. Explanation confused with prediction.	What is to be explained shifts from entity to its social construction. To explain is to provide a socio-political account of how 'reality' is socially constructed.	Explanation is 'thick' – an account of the operation of causal mechanisms. Not confused with prediction. Accepts a role for socio-political account.
Prediction	Prediction confused with explanation. Explanation based on inductive generalizations. Spurious precision.	Rejected as a naïve idea sought by positivists who accept the modernist idea that we can predict and control 'reality'.	Tendential prediction based on knowledge of causal mechanisms. Tendential prediction is not precise, but not spurious either.
Theory	Vehicle for delivering predictions.	Unclear. Sceptical of the very idea of theory.	Vehicle for delivering causal-explanatory accounts.
Mode of inference	Deduction and induction.	Unclear.	Retroduction

EMPIRICAL REALIST ONTOLOGY OF EMPIRICALLY OBSERVED AND ATOMISTIC EVENTS

Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* (1978) is, essentially, an interpretation, and critique, of positivist philosophy of science and empirical realist ontology. While Bhaskar does

not trace the whole chain of meta-theoretical conceptions from this ontology as this section does, it is entirely in keeping with his basic ideas. For elaboration of the arguments presented here see Bhaskar (1978), Ackroyd (2009), Lawson (1997, 2003), Fleetwood and Hesketh (2010), and Sayer (1984 [1992], 2000).⁹

Ontology

Observed events are the ultimate phenomena about which positivists collect data—e.g. size and growth rate of organizations, structure of organizations, strength of employee commitment to organizational culture, changes in performance, etc. If these events are observed (or proxied) in terms of quantity or degree they become variables—i.e. *quantified events*. The ontology consists, therefore, of *observed* events that are unique, unconnected, or *atomistic*.

The part of the world amenable to ‘scientific’ enquiry is presumed *exhausted* by observable phenomena, and the latter is presumed fused with the events that underlie, and give rise to, observations. This boils down to a commitment to observation of events as a reliable, indeed as the *only*, pathway to knowledge. This ontology (schematized in Table 9.2) is referred to by CRs as ‘flat’ partly because of the fusion of the empirical and actual domains, and partly because it lacks ‘depth’—discussed in the fourth section on the ‘Ontology of Stratified, Emergent, and Transformational Entities’.

Epistemology

For positivists, particular knowledge is gained through observing events, but more *general* or ‘scientific’ knowledge is gained only if these events manifest themselves in a specific pattern—i.e. *event regularities*. *Deterministic* event regularities can be styled: ‘whenever event x then event y ’; ‘whenever event $x_1 \dots x_n$ then event y ’; $y = f(x)$ or $y = f(x_1 \dots x_n)$. *Stochastic* (or probabilistic) event regularities can be styled: ‘whenever the mean value of events $x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, \dots x_n$ then the mean value of event y ’. A (generic) econometric equation reflecting this stochastic inflection would be:

$$(1) y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 \dots + \dots \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$$

Table 9.2 Flat ontology, based on Bhaskar (1978: 13)

Domain	Entity
Empirical	Experiences and observations
Actual	Events and actions

The following things are noteworthy here—especially the first two:

- Whether deterministic or stochastic, *events* and their *regularities* are fundamental to positivism because they are the basis upon which laws or law-like statements are derived.
- This approach lends itself to mathematical expression. The functional relation is the ‘workhorse’ of mathematics and statistics.
- Positivists tend to gloss epistemological problems by treating them as ‘technical’ problems, to be resolved with better data, estimating techniques, and diagnostic tests, more specific formation of hypotheses, etc.
- Positivists tend to treat truth relatively unproblematically. It emerges from the correct application of the *covering law method*.
- The emphasis is entirely upon quantitative data.

Methodology and Mode of Inference¹⁰

The method used by positivists is an ill-conceived jumble of the deductive nomological (D-N), hypothetico-deductive (H-D), inductive-statistical (IS), and/or covering law models of explanation. According to the *covering law method*, to explain something is to predict a claim about that something, as a deduction from a set of initial conditions, assumptions, axioms, and law(s). The prediction, stated as a hypothesis, might be something like: ‘an increase in the magnitude of the organization (event x) is associated with an increase in administrative intensity (event y)’. The hypothesis can then be tested using a variety of statistical techniques. The mode of inference is a mixture of deduction and induction—elaborated in the fourth section, ‘Ontology of Stratified, Emergent, and Transformational Entities’.

The attraction of positivism for social scientists/theorists lies in three beliefs: natural science is positivist, positivism is successful in natural science, and this success can be reproduced in OS. These beliefs are, however, based upon a very superficial understanding of both natural science and positivism. Where natural science has been successful, this has little or nothing to do with positivism. Even if some version of positivism was successful in natural science, it does not follow that this success can be reproduced in OS.

Aetiology

Positivism’s notion of causation derives from the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume and is, unsurprisingly, referred to as *Humean regularity*, or the *regularity view of causation* (Psillos, 2002). It is inextricably bound up with the *regularity view of law*, whereby a ‘law’ is an event regularity. Stating this carefully:

- (a) Law as *event regularity*. This conception is rooted in the *regularity view of causation*.

The concept of ‘tendency’ is often (mis)used to refer to an event regularity that is not strictly regular. The most plausible (although in my view incorrect) version of this invokes probability such that ‘whenever event x occurs, there is a high probability it will be followed by event y ’. This gives rise to probabilistic (or stochastic) law. Stating this carefully:

- (b) Law as *event regularity/tendency*. This conception is also rooted in the *regularity view of causation*, but this is not obvious because the term ‘tendency’ *appears* to modify the term ‘law’, giving the *appearance* that (a) and (b) are different when they are not.

Despite the fact that the term ‘aetiology’ is never mentioned, it retains a central place in positivist OS. As Donaldson (2003: 118) puts it: ‘A key idea in Organisational Studies is that there are causal regularities.’

Notice that this aetiology is influenced by ontology. If one has an ontology of observed atomistic events, one’s concept of causality cannot be conceived of in terms of anything other than events and their regularity. The cause of event x must be some prior event y . And if the epistemology is one whereby knowledge is reliant upon identifying event regularities, then knowing the cause of something requires one to know about event regularities. To know the cause of event x , requires us to know (no more than) that event x , or events $x_1, x_2 \dots x_n$, is/are regularly conjoined to event y . The cause of the lamp’s illumination is the finger that flicks the light switch. The cause of the increased productivity is the introduction of a PM scheme.

Prediction and Explanation

Prediction is based upon induction from past event regularities. But prediction and explanation are often (wrongly) conflated in the ‘symmetry thesis’, wherein the only difference between explanation and prediction relates to the direction of time. If one predicts that the introduction of a PM scheme will be followed by an increase in profitability, then one explains the increase in profitability by the introduction of the PM scheme. Unfortunately, however, prediction does not constitute explanation. Even if one could use regression analysis to predict that profit would increase following the introduction of a PM scheme, the regression equation would not contain an explanation: one would simply be left asking ‘Why?’

There is an affinity between Humean causality and what I call *thin* explanation. To explain is to give a causal history. But if causality is reduced to mere event regularity, then explanation is reduced to merely providing information on a succession of events. Thin explanation of the lamp’s illumination simply requires information that ‘a finger flicked a switch’. Any further information about the finger, the switch, or anything else, adds no more information than is *necessary*. Thin explanation of the increase in profit requires (only) information to the effect that ‘a PM system was introduced’. Any further information about people, workplace, management, or anything

else, adds no more information than is necessary and so is superfluous. Such an 'explanation' might not actually be worthy of the name because it leaves one asking 'Why?'

Research Technique and Quantification

Research techniques are quantitative and statistical with analysis of variance, meta-analysis, correlation, structural equation modelling, and factor analysis being common. Quantitative data can be derived directly from quantitative phenomena such as size of organizations, from quasi-quantitative sources such as Likert scales, or from *qualitative* sources such as interviews or even ethnographies where the data are coded, quantified, and transformed into variables. Obtaining *quantitative* data from *qualitative* techniques has been a source of confusion. It need not be confusing, however, provided it is realized that what matters is *not* how the data were obtained, but how they are analysed, that is, *the form the data are transposed into in order for them to be analysed*. Interviews using Likert scales, for example, end up transposing data obtained via a qualitative technique into quantitative data, ultimately variables that are then treated via statistical analysis.¹¹

Theory and Objective

For positivists a theory should (minimally) have *two dimensions: predictive and explanatory*. The predictive dimension contains statements delivering predictions in terms of relations between events. When theory predicts, it does so by asking 'What?' and answers it by stating what will happen—e.g. 'y will follow x'. The explanatory dimension consists of statements delivering explanation. When theory explains, it does so by asking 'Why?' and answers it by stating why what will happen, will happen—e.g. 'y will follow x because of z'. In practice the explanatory dimension evaporates, with consequences for theory. Because of the symmetry thesis, explanation collapses into prediction. Moreover, because the ontology is of events, causality is reduced to mere event regularity, knowledge (epistemology) is reduced to identifying event regularities, and methodology is reduced to engineering event regularities and presenting them as predictions. A theory, therefore, is reduced to a set of statements that deliver the sought-after predictions.

The objective of positivism is to deduce predictions, and (often) go on to test them (*qua* hypotheses) to establish whether claims are true or false.

Agency

The concept of agency used (explicitly or implicitly) by positivists is the *rational individual*—i.e. an atomistic bundle of preferences. Some positivists use the rational

individual because it is considered to be a fair representation of real people, whereas others use it because it provides mathematical tractability. Moreover, as ontological individualists, positivists (should) have no conception of anything (e.g. social structures or mechanisms) existing *independently of agents* that enables and constrains their actions. Structures and mechanisms are nothing more than the outcome of agents' actions—meaning structures and mechanisms are collapsed into agency. Instead of an *agency–structure* relation, positivists have only an *agency–agency* relation.

IDEALIST ONTOLOGY EXHAUSTED ENTIRELY BY DISCOURSE (ETC.)

Bhaskar's *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom* (1991) confronts idealism. But because he deals specifically with the influential philosopher Rorty, this book is limited for the requirements of this chapter. It is, therefore, necessary to augment Bhaskar's work with that of other CRs.¹²

Ontology

Understanding the idealist claim that the social world is constructed *entirely* via discourse (etc.) requires an understanding of the relationship between an entity (the 'signified') and the word (*qua* part of discourse) used to refer to it (the 'signifier').

- (a) The relation between an entity and the word used to refer to it can be *stretched* by recognizing there is no non-arbitrary relationship between entity and word, signifier and signified.
- (b) The relation between signified and signifier can be *broken*, making it possible to conceive of a *reversal* in the direction of causality between entity and word.
 - (b₁) Breaking (not reversing) the relation between entity and word introduces a degree of indeterminacy, undecidability, or *inability* in the meaning of words. Transmitting meaning between people is now fraught with inability. The entity itself has *little* causal impact on the way one speaks (or writes) about it. A word (signifier) can float free of an entity (signified) to become a free-floating signifier.
 - (b₂) Breaking, *and* reversing, the relation between entity and word introduces a far stronger claim. One must abandon the idea that one has a word *because* one has an entity, and accept the idea that one has an entity because one has a word. The entity does not cause the word; the word causes, or constructs, the entity. This ontology introduces a far more *fundamental* inability in meaning. Transmitting meaning between people is now *impossible*.

It is meaningless to suggest that the entity has *little* causal impact; it has *no* causal impact—because causality does not run from entity to word, but from word to entity. One also has to be careful about the idea of free-floating signifiers because it is not clear what any signifier is floating free of. Because ‘reality’ is now understood to be constructed via words, or discourse (etc.) more generally, and this is fundamentally unable, then ‘reality’ is understood to be fundamentally unable. Note that b_2 , (but not b_1) presupposes an ontology exhausted entirely by discourse (etc.).

The following section thinks through the reasoning leading *from* ontological idealism to the chain of meta-theoretical conceptions it influences.

First, the distinction between ontology and epistemology is now untenable. If ‘reality’ is entirely socially constructed, then it is constructed from the very discourse (etc.) used to make knowledge claims. There is no longer a separation between ‘reality’ and knowledge of ‘reality’; no longer a separation between ontology and epistemology. Whatever entities are said to exist are now synonymous with knowledge of them. CRs call this the ‘epistemic fallacy’.

Second, if ‘reality’ is constructed by *us* through discursive (etc.) activity, two questions arise: who are ‘us’ and how many ‘realities’ are there? Consider the following example where ‘us’ refers to social scientists and lay agents studied by social scientists.

Consider Lay Agents

- (i) The discourse (etc.) of (e.g.) middle managers socially constructs *their* ‘reality’;
- (ii) The discourse (etc.) of (e.g.) trade union representatives, socially constructs *their* ‘reality’;
- (iii) The discourse (etc.) of (e.g.) financiers socially constructs *their* ‘reality’;
- (iv) The discourse (etc.) of customers (e.g.) socially constructs *their* ‘reality’.

There are four ‘realities’ of, for, or relative to, middle managers, trade union representatives, financiers, and customers.

Consider Social Scientists

- (a) The discourse (etc.) of social scientists with (e.g.) a pro-business agenda socially constructs *their* ‘reality’;
- (b) The discourse (etc.) of social scientists with (e.g.) an anti-business agenda socially constructs *their* ‘reality’.

There are two ‘realities’ of, for, or relative to, pro-business social scientists and anti-business social scientists.

Now combine all the above:

- The ‘reality’ of middle managers is that ‘the company offers “good” jobs’;
- The ‘reality’ of trade union representatives is that ‘the company offers “bad” jobs’;

- The ‘reality’ of pro-business social scientists is that ‘the company offers flexible jobs’;
- The ‘reality’ of anti-business social scientists is that ‘the company offers employee-unfriendly types of flexible jobs’.

If ‘reality’ is socially constructed by different discursive communities, then there are as many ‘realities’ as there are discursive communities—there are *multiple* ‘realities’. Notice that socially constructing these ‘realities’ is not the same as *interpreting* them. For idealists there is no ‘reality’ to be interpreted: to interpret is to construct.

Epistemology

For idealists, it is not just *difficult* to know if competing knowledge claims are true or false; it is *impossible*. Breaking, *and* reversing, the relation between an entity and word introduces fundamental *instability* not simply into the transmission of meaning, but into the very social construction of ‘reality’. There is, now, a fundamental *instability* in entirely social constructs like ‘good’ or ‘bad’ jobs. Instability in discourse (etc.) is coterminous with instability in ‘reality’ because there is not believed to exist an entity (‘good’ or ‘bad’ jobs) independent of the discourse (etc.) of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ jobs. In this case one is dealing with ontic matters and are those arising from the way the world is, not (just) our knowledge about it. The epistemological consequences of this can be uncovered via the following question: is the claim that ‘the company offers “good” jobs’ true or false?

Once the existence of extra-discursive (etc.) entities is denied, all that is believed to exist are discursive (etc.) entities, entirely socially constructed. The claim is a discourse (etc.) that constructs a ‘reality’ of ‘good’ jobs. All that is believed to exist are other claims such as ‘the company offers “bad” jobs’. This too is a discourse (etc.) that constructs a ‘reality’ of ‘bad’ jobs. Now, if ‘reality’ is entirely socially constructed, there are multiple social constructions, multiple ‘realities’ and multiple ‘truths’—truth now has scare quotes also. The claim that ‘the company offers “good” jobs’ is one ‘reality’ and is ‘true’ for those who claim it. The claim that ‘the company offers “bad” jobs’ is a ‘reality’ and is ‘true’ for those who claim it. This leaves idealist OS theorists trapped in a (judgementally) relativist prison, where all they can do is compare competing claims.

One possible way to avoid the nihilism of relativism is to adopt pragmatism and take refuge in the idea that ‘truth’ is a matter of convention or agreement, not a matter of the relation between claim and ‘reality’. For the pragmatist, a claim is ‘true’ if a community agrees it is true. While there are many problems with this (that cannot be pursued here) the point to note is that it is ontology that is driving the move to pragmatism.

Methodology and Research Techniques

Whether the term 'method' or 'technique' is used, it is unclear which methods or techniques should be attributed to idealism. While two obvious candidates are deconstruction and genealogy, matters are far from clear, not least because many deconstructivists (including Derrida himself) deny that deconstruction is a *method*. This could be an attempt to avoid the association of (their) method with that of positivism rather than to an explicit commitment to deconstruction not being a method. This matter cannot be reconciled here, so the compound term 'method/technique' will be used.

Deconstruction

Accepting an ontology exhausted entirely by discourse (etc.), and accepting the fundamental ~~inability~~ of meaning and its transmission, means undermining the notion of *authorship*. The primacy of the author (of texts) is denied, and a (hyper)active role opens up for readers. Readers (must) create their own meanings and 'realities' which are unstable and multiple. Deconstruction is a method/technique that questions the primacy, and hence the power, of the author to impose meanings and 'realities' on the reader. Deconstruction seeks to uncover the inherent tensions and contradictions that reside in texts, especially where binary opposites (e.g. masculine and feminine) are involved.

Genealogy

While genealogy is an historical method/technique, it is very different to some kind of *modernist* historical method/technique. The difference between the two is that the genealogical method/technique concentrates on the particularistic (not the universalistic); the local and local narrative (not the grand and grand narrative); superficial, surface events (not deep, underlying structures); single events (not multiple events and laws); small, minor details (not significant developments); minor shifts (not major shifts and upheavals); accident, chance, and arbitrariness (not determinism and necessity); lies (not truth); the strange (not the familiar); the powerless, the silent, and those without voice (not the powerful and the vocal); suppressed conflict (not open conflict). Indeed, genealogy is preoccupied with power more than anything else. Genealogy, therefore, focuses upon matters that are apt to be overlooked.

Research Techniques

Several research techniques are compatible with deconstruction and genealogy. Indeed, any research technique that allows one to scrutinize discourse (etc.) and focus upon matters that are apt to be overlooked, can be employed. Obvious candidates are ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and action research, but others are used such as: unobtrusive methods; semi-structured observation; semi-structured interviews; observing by being there; lightly structured interviews; focus groups; action interviews;

memory work; diaries, logs, and journals; analysis of images; analysis of document; and post-empirical approaches (Knight, 2002: 117–18).

Objective

In recent decades many OS theorists have shifted their focus from philosophy of science to what might be called the ‘sociology and politics of science’. Czarniawska (2003: 129), for example, notes that the answers to her enquiry ‘should be given an “ethico-political” and not a “methodological-ontological” key’. Deetz (2000: 126) echoes this sentiment.

Methods/techniques like deconstruction, genealogy, and action research are often used to identify the relatively powerless and the silent, tease out the multiple and hidden voices of the oppressed, speak in their name, and change existing socio-political arrangements. Seeking to uncover the socio-political processes through which powerful groups create and disseminate important discourses (etc.) is a perfectly legitimate objective, as is deconstructing complex webs of discourse (etc.) through which one particular claim becomes constructed as hegemonic. It is, however, pointless for idealists to ask philosophical questions about ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ because as we saw above, for them such questions are otiose. Faced with questions like this, idealists transpose the problematic from philosophy of science to socio-politics of science. Instead of investigating the ‘truth’ of particular claims, they turn to investigating *regimes of truth*—e.g. to how and why an organization, enmeshed in power–knowledge discourses, is able to socially construct ‘reality’ and ‘truth’. There is absolutely nothing wrong with pursuing the socio-politics of science. But, the socio-politics of science and the philosophy of science are different undertakings, they are not competitors and one can engage in both. Shifting from the former to the latter does not make philosophical questions disappear, it simply leaves them ‘dangling in mid-air’.

Explanation

How might an idealist *explain* why company x offers ‘good’ jobs, while company y offers ‘bad’ jobs. Suppose her explanation, derived from an ethnographic study, is that company y can recruit from a pool of cheap, local, immigrant labour ‘forced’ into accepting ‘bad’ jobs. This would almost certainly be one explanation among several, such as the employees of company y have lower productivity so there is not the revenue to create ‘good’ jobs. The idealist would realize that her explanation, as a socially constructed discourse (etc.), is one of several ‘realities’, several ‘truths’, and would transpose the problematic to a socio-political one. She might, for example, explain the webs of power–knowledge that investigating the discourse (etc.) of recruiting cheap, local, immigrant labour to ‘bad’ jobs, thereby, continuing to marginalize this relatively powerless group. While this might well be a useful thing to explain, many non-idealists will still be left asking why company x offers ‘good’ jobs, while company y offers ‘bad’ jobs.



Aetiology and Prediction

Idealists are reluctant to discuss aetiology, although they appear to believe that: (a) causality is a naïve idea sought by positivists, stemming from the modernist belief that humans can control ‘reality’; (b) causality is based upon event regularity and laws; and (c) event regularities and law-like relations (probabilistic or otherwise) are entirely socially constructed. ‘Probabilistic and law-like claims are artifacts of a particular peer review group shared language game or a set of constitutive activities’ (Deetz, 2000: 128).

Prediction too seems to be ruled out, in part because this is another naïve idea sought by positivists and modernists (who believe that humans can predict and therefore control ‘reality’); and in part because the idealist understanding of prediction is based upon causality as event regularity which, as just noted, is seen as a misconception. What idealists would make of the CR concepts of causal powers, tendencies, and tendential prediction is (as yet) unknown.

Theory

Idealists are sceptical of the very idea of theory because they presume this necessarily involves ‘grand narratives’ and ‘Truth’. But, there is also an ontological argument. If a theory is a discourse, then a theory is not *of* some phenomenon; a theory *is* the phenomenon. It is, therefore, impossible to have a theory *of* or *about* something that is not at the same time constitutive of that theory, and so theory becomes unintelligible.

Agency and Structure

If people are socially constructed via discourse (etc.), then people cannot be anything other than the product or result of the discourses (etc.) they are constructed out of. According to Westwood and Linstead (2001: 5) structure is ‘an effect of language’. Idealism collapses agency into structure, structure into discourse (etc.), and genuine agency vanishes.

ONTOLOGY OF STRATIFIED, EMERGENT, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL ENTITIES

Bhaskar’s *The Possibility of Naturalism* (1998 [1979]) sets out the basic CR ontology for the social world and social science. He does not, however, trace out the full extent of the



meta-theoretical concepts influenced by this ontology. For this, arguments developed by other CRs are needed.¹³

Ontology

This section starts by clarifying some basic terms:

‘Entity’ is neutral. It does not refer to a tangible, material, or unchanging thing. It can refer to a person, a planet, a discourse, a computer, or an organization. Most entities undergo continual change and so are processual. Some entities *can* exist independently of their identification, that is, can exist without someone observing them, knowing about them (tacitly or non-tacitly), or socially constructing them, while other entities *cannot*.

‘Real’ refers to an entity that *has causal efficacy or makes a difference*. While many things are real, they are real in different ways or *modes*. (At least) four modes of reality can be identified: *material*, *ideal*, *artefactual*, and *social*. Entities often straddle modes, and many undergo constant evolution and change resulting in entities shifting between modes.

‘Materially real’ refers to material or physical entities like stars, oceans, the weather, and mountains that exist independently of their identification. It is sometimes better to classify what seem to be materially real entities as artefacts—e.g. a quarry.

‘Ideally real’ refers to conceptual entities like discourse, language, genres, signs, symbols, and semiotized entities, texts, ideas, beliefs, meanings, understandings, explanations, and concepts.

‘Artefactually real’ refers to entities like cosmetics, computers, and technologies. Artefactually real entities are a synthesis of the materially, ideally, and socially real entities.

‘Socially real’ refers to entities like being employed, organizations, or social structures like class and gender. Like ideally real entities, socially real entities contain not one iota of materiality, physicality, or solidity. One cannot touch a social entity.

‘Structures and mechanisms’ is shorthand to cover any entity that has causal properties—e.g. the class structure or recruitment mechanisms such as psychometric tests.

Sometimes artefactually, ideally, or socially real entities *do* exist independently of their identification, sometimes they *do not*, and it is important to be able to differentiate. Consider a *belief* that ‘the company offers “bad” jobs.’ This is an ideally real entity. It *cannot* exist independently of its identification by *everyone*, because a belief requires belief-holders whom, for argument’s sake, are the company’s employees. This belief can exist independently of its identification by *others*. Indeed, it exists independently of literally everyone in the world other than the company’s employees. Artefactually, ideally, or socially real entities (but not materially real entities) cannot exist independently



of their identification by *all* people, but they can and do exist independently of *some* people. While some would say that beliefs, discourses, or technologies are socially constructed by ‘us’, or that ‘we’ socially construct them, it should now be clear that terms like ‘us’ and ‘we’ hide important differences about just who is doing what, and when.

The fact that artefactually, ideally, or socially real entities can exist independently of their identification, does not alter the fact that access to reality can *only* come via a pre-existing stock of conceptual resources (including discourse (etc.)) which are used to understand that reality. Does this mean that what exists depends upon what can be known? No. And the reason why is easily seen via the following two statements: ‘the only way I can see reality is through my eyes’; and ‘the only way I can see reality is through my eyes, *therefore, there are only my eyes*’. The second statement is a *non-sequitur*. The same faulty logic is at work in statements such as: ‘the only way we can know reality is via discourse (etc.), *therefore there is only discourse (etc.)*’.

Reality is Stratified, Emergent, and Transformed (by Agents)

Rather than the ontology being restricted to the fused domains of the actual and empirical, as is the case with empirical realists (Table 9.2), CRs recognize the existence of another domain, referred to (metaphorically) as the ‘deep’. Table 9.3 illustrates this *stratified* ontology.

Not only is the ontology stratified, it is also emergent, meaning that entities existing at one ‘level’ are rooted in, but irreducible to, entities existing at another ‘level’. For example, the social is rooted in but irreducible to the biological, which is rooted in but irreducible to the chemical, which is rooted in but irreducible to the atomic, and so on. This holds for the social world too. The tendencies for an organization to process information are rooted in, but irreducible to, the tendencies of the materially, artefactually, ideally, and/or socially real entities that constitute the organization—along with the agents that reproduce and transform these entities.

Social reality is also transformational. This concept is captured in Bhaskar’s *Transformational Model of Social Action* (TMSA); and Archer’s *Morphogenetic/*

Table 9.3 A stratified ontology based on Bhaskar (1978: 13)

Domain	Entity
Empirical	Experiences and perceptions
Actual	Events and actions
‘Deep’	Structures, mechanisms, tendencies, powers, rules, institutions, conventions, etc.



Morphostatic (M-M) approach. Agents do not create or produce structures and mechanisms *ab initio*, rather they reproduce (hence *morphostatic*) or transform (hence *morphogenetic*) a set of pre-existing structures and mechanisms. Society continues to exist only because agents reproduce or transform those structures and mechanisms that they encounter in their social actions. Every action performed requires the pre-existence of structures and mechanisms which agents draw upon in order to initiate that action. By drawing upon these structures and mechanisms, agents reproduce or transform them. For example, speaking requires the structure of grammar, and the operation of a business organization requires mechanisms for establishing ownership rights. The transformational principle, then, centres upon the structures and mechanisms that are the *ever-present condition*, and the *continually reproduced or transformed outcome*, of human agency. This is, arguably, the most sophisticated approach to reconciling the vexed question of how agents and structures interact.

CR accommodates a qualified *relational realism*, something recently espoused by Barad (2003) as ‘agential realism’.¹⁴ CR recognizes the existence of *relata and relations*, but *contra* agential realism rejects the possibility of there being relations *without* *relata*. It is, for example, impossible to have a relation between employer and employee without having an employer and employee. This does not, of course, mean that employer and employee exist independently of the relation. An employee is only an employee, and an employer is only an employer, when they enter into an employment relationship—perhaps by signing an employment contract. This kind of relation is an *internal* one: each of the *relata* is what it is only on account of the relation. Other relations are *external*—e.g. the relation between a barking dog and a postman. Agential realism’s relational ontology is, therefore, encapsulated in CR’s ontology. Some agential realists flirt with idealism, while others flirt with a naïve materialism wherein everything (including humans) is reduced to an underelaborated concept of ‘matter’ or ‘material’.

CR also accommodates a qualified *becoming* ontology—which is often (mis)associated with idealism. CRs accept the Heraclitian notion of continual flux whereby entities are never complete or finished, but always in a state of motion, process, and *becoming*.

Agency and Structure

At least from the time Marx famously observed that ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please’, sociologists, STs, and OS theorists have wrestled with the relation between the parts and the whole, the individual and society, the agent and the (social) structures. Many positivists collapse structure into agency. The resulting voluntarism, and ontological and methodological individualism, leaves them unable to investigate the way non-agential forces influence agents. Many organizational economists take refuge in some version of Rational Economic Man, driven entirely by his preferences in an environment where the constraining or enabling forces of social structures do not exist. Many structural-functionalists collapse agency into structure. This is sometimes expressed in terms of ‘decentering the subject’, meaning the removal of the



human agent from the centre of action and replacing it with discourse (etc.). The resulting structural determinism means genuine agency (i.e. the ability to have done otherwise) vanishes, leaving oversocialized ‘cultural dopes’. Some versions of actor-network theory employ a form of structural determinism, losing the distinction between human agency and non-human ‘agency’. Workers and computers get reduced to an undifferentiated category of ‘agency’ or ‘matter’. Many more sociologists, STs, and OS theorists conflate agency and structure. Sometimes this is done carelessly and unreflectively, driven by the common sense idea that ‘surely it’s a bit of both’. Occasionally this is done carefully and reflectively in an attempt to reconcile them—e.g. Berger and Luckman’s (1967) ‘dialectical’ approach and Giddens’s structuration theory (1979).

CR’s transformational ontology retains both agency *and* structure. Sometimes agents reflect on the structures and mechanisms that enable and constrain them, and engage in conscious deliberation (although not in the sense of the *rational individual*) designed to meet some objective. At other times agents act unconsciously and act on the basis of habit or *habitus*. While non-human phenomena (e.g. computers) exert a causal influence on humans, the former’s ‘agency’ is of a different kind to the latter’s. CRs keep the term ‘agency’ to refer to human agency. Just as agents draw upon and reproduce or transform structures, in so doing they reproduce or transform *themselves* as agents of a specific kind—e.g. workers or managers.

Event Regularities, Open and Closed Systems

Because social phenomena, like organizations, are multiply caused, complex, evolving, and subject to the exercise of human agency, they are not characterized by event regularities and, therefore, by laws—deterministic or stochastic. Organizations are open systems. For example, empirical evidence of an association between HRM practices and organizational performance is, at best, inconclusive (Fleetwood & Hesketh, 2010).

Epistemology

With the recognition that events do not manifest as regularities or laws, combined with the further recognition that *something* must govern these events, the emphasis of investigation necessarily switches from the domains of the empirical and actual to the ‘deep’, and to the structures and mechanisms that govern the flux of events. Investigation switches from the *consequences*, that is, from the *outcomes or results* (i.e. patterns as event regularities) of some action, to the conditions that make that action possible. Knowledge derives from investigating the ‘deep’ structures and mechanisms *not* patterns in the flux of events.

CRs accept the possibility of judging between competing claims because they reject the claim that to accept epistemic relativism is to accept *judgemental* relativism. CRs accept empirical relativism but reject judgemental relativism. The reason for their



relative epistemic optimism lies in the very concept that idealists reject—i.e. reality. Here is how the argument works.

CRs reject the idea of ‘multiple’ realities as a category mistake: reality is not the kind of thing that there can be more than one of. There is only *one* reality although, importantly, there often are several discourses (etc.) that act as *interpretations* of it. If there is only *one* reality then there is something extra-discursive, with which to compare discursive (etc.) claims—i.e. one does not simply have to compare competing claims to each other. One can, for example, compare the competing claims ‘women in this organization *are* restricted by glass ceilings’, and ‘women in this organization are *not* restricted by glass ceilings’ to (the reality of) women’s promotion patterns within an organization. And this has implications for truth. For CRs, a claim is true in virtue of the way the world is. The claim that ‘women *are* restricted by glass ceilings’ is true or false in virtue of whether women are, or are not, promoted in the organization. Recognizing the distinction between epistemic and judgemental relativism does not, of course, mean the process of adjudicating between competing claims like these is easy, on the contrary. But adjudication ceases to be a matter of philosophy, and becomes one of empirical investigation.

Furthermore, idealists (and others) often conflate truth with ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth’, ‘truth as true for all time and places’, or truth with a capital ‘T’. Clearly, if one interprets truth in a very strong sense, then one is unlikely to ever find it. Wight (2006: 53) refers to the ‘foundationalist fallacy’, which holds that unless and until we have absolute untarnished access to knowledge, then we have nothing. CRs advocate checking out knowledge claims using whatever research techniques are appropriate.

Aetiology, Objective, Explanation, Prediction

For CRs ‘law’ means ‘tendency’. A tendency is a force that, metaphorically speaking, drives, propels, pushes, thrusts, asserts pressure, and so on. The tendency is the *force itself*, which is very different to the way tendency is often used by positivists to refer to a stochastically expressed law, or some loosely operating event regularity. Stating this carefully:

- (c) Law as (*genuine*) tendency. This conception is *not* rooted in events, event regularities, or the *regularity view of causation*, but in the concept of causal power. Tendency is the ~~(way)~~ *transfactual* of acting of a thing with properties.

To write that a phenomenon has a tendency to β , does not mean that it does β . In an open system, causal mechanisms do not exist in isolation from one another. There are, typically, a multiplicity of mechanisms each generating their own tendencies. These tendencies converge in some space-time location. Any particular causal mechanism that has a tendency does not always bring about certain effects, but it always *tends* to—i.e. it acts *transfactually*. The actual outcome of this confluence of tendencies is impossible to predict a priori. The tendency for line managers, for example, to motivate employees

depends upon the existence or absence in the same space-time location of other tendencies such as the tendency for downsizing to demotivate them.

Thick (as opposed to thin) causality refers to a situation where the cause of an event is not assumed merely to be the event(s) that preceded it, but rather is the wider conflux of interacting causal phenomena. The cause of the lamp's illumination, for example, is the nature of the glass, the gas, the filament, the wire, the switch, the plug, the electricity, as well as the finger that flicked the switch. It is possible to 'map', as it were, thick causality on to *thick explanation*.

Giving a causal history of a phenomenon, and hence explaining it, could be interpreted to mean giving information about the underlying causal mechanisms along with information about the appropriate agents. That is, explanation could be based upon thick causality. When causality is thick, explanation requires information about the wider conflux of interacting causal mechanisms. Information about the nature of the glass, the gas, the filament, the wire, the switch, the plug, the electricity, as well as the finger that flicked the switch, all add to the richness of the explanation and are, therefore, not superfluous but absolutely necessary. There is little doubt that most of us would recognize this information immediately as constituting a very rich, or thick, explanation because it would go some way to answering the question 'Why?'

A thick explanation requires what might be called *hermeneutic* information. That is, information relating to a range of human cognitive activities such as understanding, intention, purpose, meaning, interpretation, and reason. Human actions are, typically, the result of human intention, and so intentions are causes. One does not, however, know what the cause of the action is—one does not understand it until one knows the intention that underlies it, that is, until one knows *why* the actor did what she did. If, to explain an action is to give a causal account of it, then to explain an action is to give an account of *why* the actor did what she did.

In open systems where prediction based on induction is impossible, (thick) explanation is probably our only guide to the future, and hence our only guide to action. If, for example, one can uncover and explain the causal mechanisms (e.g. HR practices) that, when drawn upon by workers and managers, increase organizational performance, then one has an explanation of the increase in performance. Such an explanation would allow one to understand the tendencies generated when workers and managers engage with HR practices. If one understands these tendencies one can make *tendential predictions*. One might, for example, be able to understand the tendencies possessed by workers for creative, imaginative, ingenious, self motivated, and self directed action, along with the counter-tendencies generated by the alienation, exploitation, and commodification of workers. One might, therefore, be able to assess the efficacy of tendencies and counter-tendencies, and make a tendential *prediction* about the likelihood of HR practices increasing organizational performance. One might hesitate to call this a prediction, largely because it is not an *inductive* prediction of any kind. Nonetheless, because it is a claim about what may happen in a future period, it is a prediction of some kind, albeit heavily qualified. Tendential predictions, made in full recognition that the system under investigation is open,

may be imprecise, but they are not spurious: it is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong.

Methodology, Objective, and Mode of Inference

Because of the openness of socio-economic systems, consequences *cannot* be induced, logically deduced, or predicted. But the structures and mechanisms that govern human action *can* be *retroduced* and their operation illuminated and (thickly) *explained*. Retroduction consists of ‘arguing backwards’, as it were, from some phenomenon of interest via metaphor and analogy to a totally different kind of thing, structure, or mechanism that causally governs the behaviour of that phenomenon.

The method is referred to as ‘causal-explanatory’ because its objective is to *explain* and it explains in terms of providing a (non-Humean) *causal* account. Explanation, not prediction, is the correct objective of social science. Moreover, explanatory power, not predictive power, is the criteria that should be used to evaluate theory. This does, of course, beg the following question: by what criteria might an explanation be identified as powerful? CR has no clear answer to this.

Technique

CRs are prepared to use most interpretive techniques, including genealogy and deconstruction, and what is referred to in Foucault’s early work as ‘archaeology’. Archaeology is about excavating the underlying structures—phenomena that are rejected in his later work. While there is no preoccupation with quantification and the use of mathematics and statistics, there is a debate within CR circles about the extent to which these techniques are useful. CRs tend not to prescribe which techniques should be used, but favour tailoring the techniques to the way the world is.

Theory

A theory consists of statements that deliver causal explanations. Consider what a (causal-explanatory) theory of action in the workplace would look like. In order to carry out the set of tasks associated with her job, a worker necessarily draws upon a variety of structures and mechanisms. While one knows ‘that’ she does this, one may not know ‘why’ this is possible. To explain ‘why’ one needs to uncover the mechanisms and structures that make this activity possible. Some form of case study designed specifically to identify the structures and mechanisms would reveal typical workers necessarily drawing upon a variety of mechanisms such as the explicit rules laid out in the employment contract and tacit rules that constitute the psychological contract. A theory of this activity would have to explain (a) the tendencies or powers possessed

by workers, and (b) how workers interact with these mechanisms noting how the latter are reproduced or transformed by this interaction. This theory would identify the mechanisms and, therefore, the tendencies and counter-tendencies operating in the workplace.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS AN ORGANIZATION?

While this chapter has argued that one's ontology influences one's aetiology, epistemology, methodology, research techniques, objectives, modes of inference, and conceptions of explanation, prediction, and theory, it has been silent on *substantive* claims—i.e. theoretical and empirical claims. It is, however, inconceivable that one's substantive claims could remain uninfluenced by one's ontology and associated chain of meta-theoretical concepts. This influence need not, of course, be explicit, consistent, or fully worked out for there to be some kind of 'elective affinity'—to use Weber's (in)famous phrase. To see this in action, consider an issue that is absolutely central to organization theory, namely *definitions of organizations*.¹⁵

Rather than trawl through the literature looking for definitions, I asked leading OS writers Royston Greenwood, Bob Hinings, and Lex Donaldson for definitions of organizations that I believed would be associated with empirical realism and positivism; and Steve Linstead, Pippa Carter, and Norman Jackson for definitions that I believed would be associated with idealism. The definition associated with CR is my own—a liberty I took because I am unaware of an existing CR definition of organizations. This approach has the added benefit of using definitions that are bang up to date.

While an in-depth CR interpretation, and critical evaluation, of definitions of organizations with an elective affinity to empirical realist, idealist, and CR ontologies and their associated chains of meta-theoretical concepts would be nice, it is impossible to undertake here. What is possible, however, is to briefly sketch three definitions of organizations with an elective affinity to the three ontologies, and then briefly comment on one or two meta-theoretical issues. The objective of the exercise is to show that substantive claims, exemplified in differing definitions of organizations, are influenced by different ontologies and their associated chain of meta-theoretical concepts.

Ontology of Observed, Atomistic Events Associated with Positivism

Organizations, typically characterized by authority structures (i.e. the subordination of some members of the organization to incumbents of formal positions) and a formalized division of labour, are socially constructed vehicles for



the harnessing of collective and coordinated effort towards specified purposes. (Greenwood & Hinings)¹⁶

An organization is a set of people who together achieve some collective purpose. This collective purpose is not necessarily wanted by all of them, however, and their inclusion is not always voluntary: e.g. prisoners are in a gaol organization involuntarily and have other intentions. (Donaldson)

Both these definitions explicitly recognize people and structures. Does this mean positivists can conceive of organizations as constituted by agents *and* structures? No—at least not consistently. For consistency, ontological and methodological individualists like positivists should conceive of social structures as the ongoing actions of other individuals. The authority structures of the prison, for example, are nothing more than the actions of those agents in authority. This is not, however, a *bone fide* conception of structures; it is a *reduction* of structures to agents' actions. Without a *bone fide* conception of structures, the actions of agents cannot be explained—except as the outcome of unexplained and ungoverned preferences. As the transformational ontology of CR makes clear, every action requires the pre-existence of independently existing, and irreducible, structures which agents draw upon in order to initiate that action. Without social structures, agents would, quite simply, be unable to act.

Ontology Exhausted Entirely by Discourse (etc.) Associated with Idealism

Definitions can be both oppressive and liberating. With a background in literary criticism, I'm used to the idea that language can mean almost anything whilst never saying exactly what you are trying to say. Language is always simultaneously excessive, yet leaves a remainder of untouched 'reality'. Wittgenstein proposed that all problems in philosophy (and disciplines deriving therefrom) are actually problems of language; when we agree, we agree not conceptually but socially, in form-of-life. This influenced Winch, Kuhn, and the paradigm debate, but also Lyotard and the emphasis post-structuralism places on what is always missing, but shaping, eluding our peripheral vision. Derrida preferred avoiding 'being' words as being too inappropriately definitive, placing them 'under erasure'. So he'd say 'Organization is...' and consider how our impression of organization as a 'thing' is constructed through specific practices of what he calls 'writing'—ordering, sequencing, sentencing, bracketing, marginalizing, indexing, punctuating, timing, erasing, and yes, defining. So the organizing act of defining organization *performs/creates* organization. (Linstead, personal communication, 2011)

Actions such as writing, ordering, sequencing, sentencing, bracketing, marginalizing, indexing, punctuating, timing, erasing, and defining are the kinds of activities I have referred to as discursive (etc.). These discursive (etc.) activities are constructive. But Linstead leaves it unclear what it is that these activities construct. Do they construct organization, or merely the *impression* of organization? Is there some 'thing' (i.e.



organization) located in some remainder of untouched 'reality', while its impression is constructed via discourse and located in some other 'touched' reality? Does the mere act of defining organization constitute organization?

Organizations do not have an objective existence. They are useful cognitive devices for making sense out of non-sense, an apparent order out of chaos. They attenuate an excess of information and facilitate our coping with the problem of existence. They are useful labels in that they facilitate communication and interaction. However, the sense of structure which organizations apparently manifest is not a property of the organization but of our perception. For humans to improve on nature we need to cooperate. For example, if it is thought desirable that young humans should be given exposure to adult knowledge, then we may gather together in time and space a group of children and adults. By labelling this collection-in-time-and-space-for-a-specific-purpose a school, we facilitate it being talked about and managed. It also allows us to establish a boundary, physical and metaphorical, between school and not-school. However, such boundaries are determined by us as individuals and are not necessarily shared by others. Some boundaries may be imposed by the powerful, e.g. the boundary that defines the legal status of our school or the physical space it occupies, but these do not, and cannot, define the organization. The idea of 'school' allows *us* to 'know' what is proper to education and to communicate efficiently, albeit imperfectly, with others about it. By having a number of these conceptual 'organizations' we can facilitate making sense of an inherently chaotic world in which we must survive—that is, they are coping devices. Thus, by being able efficiently to cognize, to differentiate, to label, apparently distinct organizations from the background mass of information (family, prison, theatre, supermarket, NATO, McDonalds) we *make* sense of our world. (Carter & Jackson, personal communication, 2012)

Actions such as perceiving, labelling, differentiating, and sense making are the kinds of activities I have referred to as discursive (etc.). Organizations are constructed via these discursive (etc.) activities and are the cognitive and/or conceptual devices that give order to a chaotic world.

Neither definition makes (significant) reference to any independent and non-discursive or extra-discursive entities. Indeed, both definitions discourage such interpretations. Carter and Jackson explicitly state that organizations have no existence other than as the outcome of perceiving (etc.). Linstead implies that organizations have no existence other than as the outcome of writing (etc.).

Both of these definitions are problematic. If organizations are constructed via discursive (etc.) activities, why can they not be reconstructed simply by changing the discourse (etc.)? This is, of course, a rhetorical question: few, if any OS theorists believe this is possible. But the question is interesting because it poses a dilemma for idealists—but not for realists. For realists, organizations cannot be reconstructed simply by changing the discourse (etc.) because our actions are constrained by extra-discursive, or non-discursive entities—i.e. materially, artefactually, and socially real entities. Idealists cannot pursue this argument because such entities are not part of their ontology.

Ontology of Stratified, Emergent, and Transformational Entities Associated with Critical Realism

Organizations have criteria to establish their boundaries and to distinguish members from non-members and these boundaries are typically porous and fuzzy; have principles of sovereignty identifying who is in charge and assigning responsibilities; have a division of labour delineating tasks and responsibilities within the organization; are consciously designed, and often redesigned, to meet specific objectives. Organizations are socially, conceptually, and artefactually real entities where: (a) the social structures that enable and constrain the actions of the organizations' agents are consciously and deliberately reproduced or transformed by these agents; (b) mechanisms (e.g. recruiting devices such as interviews or psychometric tests, implicit employment contracts, strikes) are consciously reproduced by agents; (c) the rules (i.e. conventions, norms, values, customs, etc.) that are unconsciously internalized via a process of habituation to become agents' habits, are semi-consciously and/or tacitly followed (to varying degrees) by agents, and are thereby unconsciously reproduced or transformed by them; (d) the laws and regulations that enable and constrain the actions of the organizations' agents are followed (to varying degrees), and are thereby consciously reproduced by them; (e) artefacts like bricks and computers are reproduced and transformed by agents; and (f) the agents who reproduce or transform these social, conceptual, and artefactual entities simultaneously reproduce or transform themselves as the organizations' agents.

CR has a sophisticated understanding of the interaction between agents and structures. It differentiates between structures, mechanisms, rules (etc.), laws, and regulations, thereby allowing for both conscious (deliberative) and unconscious (habitual) action. It recognizes a similarity between structures, mechanisms, rules (etc.), laws, and regulations, treating them as a different class of phenomena than the agents who reproduce or transform them. It recognizes another similarity: they are all socially real entities, and as such are irreducible to either agents' actions, or discourse, even if they have a discursive component. There is nothing in the CR definition that rejects Linstead's idea that 'language can mean almost anything while never saying exactly what you are trying to say'. This definition also has a place for (irreducible) artefactually real phenomena (e.g. electric appliances), which is important for the investigation of things like health and safety in the organization.

NOTES

1. The name evolved from a combination of what Bhaskar had previously referred to as 'transcendental *realism*' and '*critical* naturalism'.
2. Substantive claims are, typically, theoretical and empirical claims.

3. Thanks go to Stephen Ackroyd, Ismael Almoudi, Jason Ferdinand, and Paul Edwards for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts.
4. For example, Harré (1986); Harré & Secord (1972); Harré & Madden (1975).
5. For example, Benton, (1981); Chalmers, (1988); Collier, (1981); Manicas, (1987); Outhwaite, (1987); Soper, (1981).
6. For example, Archer (1988, 1995, 1998); Archer et al. (1998); Keat & Urry (1975); Layder (1990, 1994); Lloyd (1986); Sayer (1984 [1992]).
7. The terms 'objective' and 'subjective' have created enormous confusion—see Fleetwood (2004: 37–8) for a clarification.
8. I thank Stephen Ackroyd for these important observations.
9. While, strictly speaking, positivism is the name of the philosophy of science rooted in the ontology of empirical realism, it is commonplace to refer to the entire oeuvre as 'positivism' and I will continue this usage.
10. Although 'scientism' is a more accurate description, I stick with the term 'positivism' because it is engrained in the literature. See Fleetwood and Hesketh (2010). For elaboration of positivism in OS studies see Donaldson (1996, 2003, 2005) and Johnson and Duberley (2000).
11. Sometimes this is stated in terms of extensive techniques that seek patterns *qua* regularities in the flux of events, typically for a large population, and almost always use inferential statistics; and intensive techniques seek causal explanations, typically for small cases, and almost never use inferential statistics.
12. For example, Fairclough et al. (2002); Fleetwood (2005); Joseph (2004); Joseph & Roberts (2007); Lopez & Potter (2001); Sayer (2000).
13. Examples include Archer (1988, 1995, 1998, 2003); Archer et al. (1988); Danermark et al. (1997); Elder-Vass (2010); and Lawson (1997, 2003). In a specifically OS context, see Ackroyd (2009); Ackroyd & Fleetwood (2000); Al Amoudi (2007); Clark (2000); Delbridge (1998, 2008); Fleetwood (2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011a, 2011b); Fleetwood & Ackroyd (2002, 2004); Fleetwood & Hesketh (2010); Reed (1997, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2005b); Mutch (1999, 2000, 2002, 2004), Mutch et al. (2005); O'Mahoney (2005, 2011); Tsoukas (2000a, 2000b); Thompson & Vincent (2010); Willmott (2000).
14. See also Iedema (2007); Orlikowski (2007); Nyberg (2009); Fenwick (2010).
15. I toyed with other substantive issues such as the possibility of employee resistance.
16. Greenwood and Hinnings use 'socially constructed' to mean something like 'constructed by people'—with no idealist connotation.

REFERENCES

- Ackroyd, S. (2009). Research Designs for Realist Research. In D. Buchanan & A. Bryman (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organisational Research Methods* (pp. 532–48). London: Sage.
- Ackroyd, S., & Fleetwood, S. (2000). *Realist Perspectives on Organisation and Management*, London: Routledge.
- Al Amoudi, I. (2007). Redrawing Foucault's Social Ontology. *Organisation*, 14(4), 543–63.
- Al Amoudi, I., & Willmott, H. (2011). Where Constructionism and CR Converge: Interrogating the Domain of Epistemological Relativism. *Organisation Studies*, 32, 27–46.
- Archer, M. (1988). *Culture and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Archer, M. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. (1998). Realism and Morphogenesis. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson, & A. Norrie (Eds), *CR: Essential Readings* (pp. 189–205). London: Routledge.
- Archer, M. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M., Bhaskar, R., Collier, A., Lawson, T., & Norrie, A. (1998). *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. London: Routledge.
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801–31.
- Benton, T. (1981). Realism in Social Science. *Radical Philosophy*, 27, 13–21.
- Berger, P., & Luckman T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Society*. London: Allen Lane.
- Bhaskar, R. (1978). *A Realist Theory of Science*. Brighton: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
- Bhaskar, R. (1998) [1979] *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar (1991). *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Burrell, G., & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Collier, A. (1981). Scientific Realism in the Human World: The Case of Psychoanalysis. *Radical Philosophy*, 29, 8–18.
- Collier, A. (1994). *Critical Realism: An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*. London: Verso.
- Chalmers, A. (1988). Is Bhaskar's Realism Realistic? *Radical Philosophy*, 49, 18–23.
- Clark, P. (2000). *Organisations in Action: Competition Between Contexts*. London: Routledge.
- Contu, A., & Willmott, H. (2005). You Spin Me Around: The Realist Turn in Organisation and Management Studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(8), 1645–62.
- Czarniawska, B. (2003). Social Constructionism and Organisation Studies. In R. Westwood, & S. Clegg (Eds), *Debating Organisation: Point-Counterpoint in Organisation Studies* (pp. 128–39). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Danermark, B., Ekrom, M., Jakobsen, L., & Karlsson, J. (1997). *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Deetz, S. (2000). Describing Differences in Approaches to Organisation Science: Rethinking Burrell and Morgan and Their Legacy. In P. Frost, A. Lewin, & R. Daft (Eds), *Talking about Organisation Science: Debates and Dialogues from Crossroads* (pp. 123–52). London: Sage.
- Delbridge, R. (1998). *Life On The Line in Contemporary Manufacturing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delbridge, R. (2008). Explaining Conflicted Collaboration: A Critical Realist Approach to Hegemony. *Organisation Studies*, 28(9), 1347–57.
- Donaldson, L. (1996). *For Positivist Organisation Theory: Proving the Hard Core*. London: Sage.
- Donaldson, L. (2003). Position Statement for Positivism. In R. Westwood, & S. Clegg (Eds), *Debating Organisation: Point-Counterpoint in Organisation studies* (pp. 116–27). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Donaldson, L. (2005). Following the Scientific Method: How I Became a Committed Functionalist and Positivist. *Organisation Studies*, 26(7), 1071–88.
- Elder-Vass, D. (2010). *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, N., Jessop, B., & Sayer, A. (2002), Critical Realism and Semiosis. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 5(1), 2–10.

- Fenwick, T. (2010). Re-thinking the 'Thing': Sociomaterial Approaches to Understanding and Researching Learning in Work. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 22(1/2), 104–16.
- Feyerabend, P. (1993). *Against Method*. London: Verso.
- Fleetwood, S. (2005). The Ontology of Organisation and Management studies: A CR Approach, *Organisation*, 12(2), 197–222.
- Fleetwood, S. (2008a). Institutions and Social Structures. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 38(3), 241–65.
- Fleetwood, S. (2008b). Structure, Institution, Agency, Habit and Reflexive Deliberation. *Journal of Institutional Economics*, 4(2), 183–203.
- Fleetwood, S. (2009). The Ontology of Things, Powers and Properties. *Journal of CR*, 8(3), 343–66.
- Fleetwood, S. (2011). Laws and Tendencies. *Capital & Class*, 36(2), 235–62.
- Fleetwood, S. (2011). Powers and Tendencies Revisited. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 10(1), 80–99.
- Fleetwood, S., & Ackroyd, S. (2002). *Realism in Action in Organisation and Management*. London: Routledge.
- Fleetwood, S., & Ackroyd, S. (2004). *Critical Realist Applications in Organisation and Management Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Fleetwood, S., & Hesketh A. (2010). *Explaining the Performance of HRM*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems of Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. California: University of California Press.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 105–16). London: Sage.
- Harré, R. (1986). *Varieties of Realism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harré, R., & Madden, E. (1975). *Causal Powers*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harré, R., & Secord, P. (1972). *The Explanation of Social Behaviour*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Iedema, R. (2007). On the Multi-Modality, Materiality and Contingency of Organisational Discourse. *Organisation Studies*, 28(6), 931–46.
- Johnson, P., & Duberley, J. (2000). *Understanding Management Research: An Introduction to Epistemology*. London: Sage.
- Jones, C. (2008). Philosophy of Science. In J. Bailey, & S. Clegg (Eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Organisation Studies* (pp. 1244–7). London: Sage.
- Joseph, J. (2004). Foucault and Reality. *Capital & Class*, 82, 141–63.
- Joseph, J., & Roberts, J. (2007). *Realism, Discourse and Deconstruction*. London: Routledge.
- Keat, R., & Urry, J. (1975). *Social Theory as Science*. London: Routledge Keegan-Paul.
- Knight, P. (2002). *Small Scale Research: Pragmatic Inquiry in Social Science and the Caring Professions*. London: Sage.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kukla, A. (2000). *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science*. London: Routledge.
- Lawson, T. (1997). *Economics and Reality*. London: Routledge.
- Lawson, T. (2003). *Reorienting Economics*. London: Routledge.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in Action*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Layder, D. (1990). *The Realist Image in Social Science*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Layder, D. (1994). *Understanding Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Lloyd, C. (1986). *Explanation in Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lopez, J., & Potter, G. (2001). *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to CR*. London: Athlone Press.

- Manicas, P. (1987). *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mutch, A. (1999). Critical Realism, Managers and Information. *British Journal of Management*, 10, 323–33.
- Mutch, A. (2000). Managers and Information: Agency and Structure. *Information Systems Review*, 1, 169–80.
- Mutch, A. (2002). Actors and Networks or Agents and Structures: Towards a Realist View of Information Systems, *Organisation*, 9(3), 477–96.
- Mutch, A. (2004). Constraints on the Internal Conversation: Margaret Archer and the Structural Shaping of Thought. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 34(4), 429–45.
- Mutch, A., Delbridge, R., & Ventresca, M. (2005). Critical Realism, Agency and Discourse: Moving the Debate Forward (Response to Hugh Willmott). *Organisation*, 12(5), 781–6.
- Nyberg, D. (2009). Computers, Customer Service Operatives and Cyborgs: Intra-Actions in Call Centres. *Organisation Studies*, 30(11), 1181–99.
- Newton, T., Deetz, S., & Reed, M. (2011). Responses to Social Constructionism and Critical Realism in Organisation studies. *Organisation Studies*, 32(1), 7–26.
- O'Mahoney, J. (2005) Constructing Habitus: The Negotiation of Moral Encounters at Telekom. *Work, Employment and Society*, 21(3), 479–96.
- O'Mahoney, J. (2011). Embracing Essentialism: A Realist Critique of Resistance to Discursive Power, *Organisation*, 19(6), 723–41.
- Outhwaite, W. (1987). *New Philosophies of Social Science*. New York: St Martins Press.
- Orlikowski, W. (2007). Sociomaterial Practices: Exploring Technology at Work. *Organisation Studies*, 28(9), 1435–48.
- Psillos, S. (2002). *Causation and Explanation*. Chesham: Acumen.
- Reed, M. (1997). In Praise of Duality and Dualism: Rethinking Agency and Structure in Organisational Analysis. *Organisation Studies*, 18(1), 21–42.
- Reed, M. (2000). The Limits of Discourse Analysis in Organisational Analysis. *Organisation*, 7(3), 524–30.
- Reed, M. (2001). Organisation, Trust and Control: A Realist Analysis. *Organisation Studies*, 22(2), 201–28.
- Reed, M. (2003). The Agency-Structure Dilemma in Organisation Theory. In H. Tsoukas, & C. Knudsen (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Organisation Theory* (pp. 289–309). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reed, M. (2005a). Doing the Loco-Motion: Response to Contu and Willmott's Commentary on the Realist Turn in Organisation and Management Studies. *Journal of Management Studies*. 42(8), 1663–73.
- Reed, M. (2005b). Reflections on the Realist Turn in Organisation and Management studies. *British Journal of Management studies*, 42(8), 1621–44.
- Sayer, A. (1984) [1992]. *Methodology in Social Science: A Realist Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and Social Science*. London: Sage.
- Soper, K. (1981). *On Human Needs*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Thompson, P., & Vincent, S. (2010). Labour Process Theory and Critical Realism. In P. Thompson, & S. Smith (Eds), *Working Life: Renewing Labour Process Analysis* (pp. 47–69). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsoukas, H. (2000a) False Dilemmas in Organization Theory: Realism vs. Social Constructivism. *Organization*, 7(3), 531–5.

- Tsoukas, H. (2000b). False Dilemmas in Organisation Theory: Realism vs. Social Constructivism. *Organisation* 7(3), 531–5.
- Westwood, R., & Clegg, S. (2003) *Debating Organisation: Point-Counterpoint in Organisation Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Westwood, R., & Linstead, S. (2001) Language/Organization: Introduction. In R. Westwood, & S. Linstead (Eds), *The Language of Organizations* (pp. 1–20). London, Sage.
- Wight, C. (2006). Realism, Science and Emancipation. In K. Dean, J. Joseph, J. Roberts, & C. Wight (Eds), *Realism, Philosophy and Social Science* (pp. 32–64). Palgrave Macmillan
- Winch, P. (1959). *The Idea of Social Science*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul.
- Willmott, H. (2005). Theorizing Contemporary Control: Some Post-Structuralist Responses to Some CR Questions. *Organisation*, 12(7), 747–80.
- Willmott, R. (2000). The Place of Culture in Organisation Theory: Introducing the Morphogenetic Approach. *Organisation*, 7(1), 95–128.