

2. CULTURAL POLITICAL ECONOMY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodological strategy adopted. The outline of the chapter is as follows. After this introduction, section 2.2 contains a reflection on cultural studies, since it is within this discipline that most research on contemporary networks of aesthetic production tends to be conducted. Building on my comments in section 2.2, section 2.3 develops a critical realist methodology that can do analytical justice to the structural depth of contemporary urban transformations, while remaining sensitive to the specificity of aesthetic practices. In this section, I will also introduce notions such as depth ontology, retroduction and emergence that guide the argument as a whole. Section 2.4 argues for a transdisciplinary approach in order to capture these methodological complexities. Section 2.5 discusses the empirical data collected and the methods used.

2.2 Cultural Studies and Critique

The reason for starting this chapter with a reflection on cultural studies is twofold. First of all, my own disciplinary background is in cultural studies — although mediated through urban studies, geography and sociology — which has directed my analytical concerns towards the political role of culture within larger social formations. As such, I am interested in the role of cultural critique as theorized by cultural studies, but always in relation to the particularities of concrete urban environments in which this critique usually operates. Second, research on electronic music has tended to be con-

ducted within cultural studies, which has created certain methodological biases and directed research in certain directions.¹

Naturally, I am aware of the fact that cultural studies has never been a unified field of research and that the work being done under this banner has become increasingly diverse over the years due to internal differentiation, inter-disciplinary interaction and the global appropriation of cultural studies.² Nevertheless, I think it is safe to say that the one thing everyone can agree on is that cultural studies is defined by political commitment and critique. It is often not quite clear towards which political project this commitment is directed, but the fact *that* cultural studies is politicized is acknowledged by its supporters as well as adversaries. Nick Couldry argues that what defines cultural studies as a “distinctive area of study” (2000, 2) is its focus on the relationship between culture and power, but this is too broad a definition. It is not simply culture and power as such that is the focus of cultural studies, but an understanding of critique as emanating from a particular dimension of culture: not mass culture (as studied by classical communication studies), but ordinary culture (Williams 1958), everyday life (De Certeau 1984) or — particularly since the Birmingham school — popular culture.³ These terms were never unproblematic and Anna McCarthy (2006) offers an excellent account of the tensions existent within and between these terms, but in general it seems to me that the main

- 1 A related, but distinct research strand that also analyzes electronic music is popular music studies. I would argue that most of the research in this field and in particular the research on electronic music and club or dance cultures fits within a broader cultural studies perspective, but it is clearly also true that popular music studies simultaneously draws upon other disciplines, in particular musicology. Thanks to Adam Krims for highlighting this point. For useful overviews of the discipline, see: Negus (1996); Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002); and Bennett *et al.* (2006). Clayton *et al.* (2003) emphasize more strongly the musicological links of the discipline and Connell and Gibson (2003) highlight the geographic dimensions of music. Since, however, the concern of this chapter is with methodology and the notion of critique as developed by cultural studies, I concentrate on this discipline only.
- 2 Thanks to Johan Fornäs for emphasizing this. In contrast to this globalization of cultural studies, the authors I discuss in the following pages can roughly be placed within the British lineage of cultural studies. A more extensive discussion of the notion of critique of cultural studies would have to investigate the continuity and transformation of this term as parts of its globalization, but this task will have to wait for another occasion.
- 3 Even in those instances where cultural studies focuses on mass media — as, most notoriously, in the work of Fiske (1987) — the emphasis tends to lie on the resistant (or, at the very least, ambivalent) moments within mass media production, distribution or reception.

reason for highlighting these and not other dimensions of culture has always been both analytical as well as ethical. Analytical, since cultural studies was never interested in studying various forms of popular culture for the sake of data collection, but always to better understand the resilience of and potentials for resistance within these cultures in the face of powerful regimes. So it was never simply about the celebration of cultural practices, but always about the analysis of these cultures *in relation to* wider processes of regulation and control. Ethical, because cultural studies has always tried to avoid the 'intellectualist bias' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) — in which the analyst naturalizes and prioritizes his or her position and theoretical stance in relation to extra-academic cultural practices — by developing more dialogical forms of engagement and analysis. This has led to a different understanding of the location of critique: instead of treating the academy as the ultimate arbiter of truth, cultural studies has emphasized the role of cultural practices in the development of critical potential with academic reflection in a much more modest as well as collaborative role.

In this section I want to take a look at how these concerns have informed the analyses of urban cultures. My focus is pragmatic in the sense that my interest is not in engaging in trench warfare (between disciplines or supposedly incompatible ontological positions), but in highlighting some of the methodological biases of cultural studies in order to develop improved tools for the analysis of urban cultures. My argument is that: 1) the centrality accorded to cultural critique often leads to a depiction of complex social structures as relatively 'flat'; and 2) critique needs to be specified and concretized in order to be able to reflect on societal and institutional differentiation. This argument is driven by an underlying concern to re-introduce questions of political economy into debates on urban culture (also see Maderthaner and Musner 2002). Certainly, this is not the only route towards a more discriminating and exacting form of critique, but it is an important one.

2.2.1 CULTURE AS IDEOLOGY AND THE HALL/JESSOP DEBATE

Many of the biases I discuss can be broadly traced back to the ways in which cultural studies has dealt with its disciplinary 'others' (in particular sociology and 'traditional' Marxism) during its emergence and defense of its existence as a valid area of research. To illustrate this, I want to focus here on the debate that took place in the mid-1980s between Hall and Jessop (and his co-authors) concerning the nature of Thatcherism. This debate was published in the *New Left Review* in 1984 and 1985 and involved an original article by Jessop *et al.* (1984), followed by a reply by Hall (1985) and another reply by

Jessop *et al.* (1985). To an extent, it has been an ongoing debate between the two authors: Hall's discussion of "New Labour's Double-Shuffle" (2003) provoked another comment by Jessop (2004b). In this section, I want to take a closer look at this exchange, since it is here that many of the methodological limitations of cultural studies (but also, in turn, of critical political economy) are highlighted in their most concise form. Even more importantly, however, the *New Left Review* articles contain first clues on how to develop a more sophisticated understanding of culture in relation to political economic processes.

The main point of contention between Hall and Jessop revolved around the nature of Thatcherism and the extent to which ideology was central to the popularity and power of this regime. Briefly put, Jessop and his co-authors argued that Hall's account was prone to 'ideologism' i.e. the tendency to reflect on the ideological dimension of Thatcherism only, whereas they argued that much more emphasis should be paid to the political and institutional context in which this regime developed. In the subsequent cultural studies literature, this critique has usually been characterized as representative of a Marxist 'reductionist' approach that is insensitive to the important role of ideology in unifying a variety of discourses and actors and creating popular consent with a particular political economic project. There is certainly a grain of truth to this general critique, but a closer analysis of the Hall/Jessop debate reveals a range of more precise points of divergence.

Hall, in earlier work, had developed the concept of authoritarian populism in order to be able to characterize Thatcherism as a regime involving the construction of authoritarian forms of class politics, but also as simultaneously rooted in certain popular forms of discontent. This Gramscian appropriation enabled Hall to foreground questions of ideology and to focus on "the ways in which popular consent can be so constructed, by a historical bloc seeking hegemony, as to harness to its support some popular discontents, neutralize the opposing forces, disaggregate the opposition and really incorporate some strategic elements of popular opinion into its own hegemonic project" (1985, 118). It is this sensitivity to the inclusion of 'the popular' by the state that forms the main theoretical advance on Jessop *et al.* at the time, since the latter hardly offer any tools to understand the success of the Thatcher regime in resonating with popular concerns. It is in this respect that the allegation of economism is correct. In the 1984 and 1985 articles, Jessop and his co-authors largely downplay the role of ideology and often fall back onto rather 'thin' conceptions of human sociality and motivation. Thus, whereas Hall emphasizes authoritarian populism, Jessop *et al.* warn the reader to also look at more pragmatic (read:

economic) interests such as “lower direct taxation, council house sales, rising living standards for those still in private sector employment, lower inflation, and so forth” (1984, 78-79). Although this is certainly important, the almost exclusive emphasis on these economic interests in the two articles makes Hall’s critique understandable and basically correct.

What has not so often been acknowledged by cultural studies, however, is that Jessop *et al.* might have been wrong on this first, but largely right on most other points. Thus, another point of divergence between the respective authors had to do with the level of analytical abstraction. In his reply to Jessop *et al.*, Hall admitted that his theorization of authoritarian populism was “a bit rough and ready” (1985, 118), but he argued this was linked to the level of abstraction at which one preferred to work. As he writes:

I do not believe that all concepts operate at the same level of abstraction — indeed, I think one of the principal things which separates me from the fundamentalist marxist revival is precisely that they believe that the concepts which Marx advanced at the highest level of abstraction (i.e. mode of production, capitalist epoch) can be transferred directly into the analysis of concrete historical conjunctures. My own view is that concepts like that of ‘hegemony’ (the family or level of abstraction to which AP [authoritarian populism] also belongs) are of necessity somewhat ‘descriptive’, historically more time-bound, concrete in their reference — because they attempt to conceptualize what Marx himself said of ‘the concrete’: that it is the ‘product of many determinations’. (118)

It is worth quoting Hall at length here, since this argument contains a number of problems that cause certain methodological biases particularly prevalent within cultural studies. Hall’s main point here simply seems to be that the notion of hegemony needs to be understood as part of what Merton (1968, 39-72) called theories of the middle-range i.e. theories in-between radical empiricism and grand theories. It is questionable, however, if the notion of hegemony is capable of performing this task, because even though Hall accepts that he only offers a partial explanation of Thatcherism — namely, of the “political/ideological conjuncture” (119) — he uses the notion of hegemony to refer to “changes in the ‘balance of forces’”, which includes the “modalities of political and ideological relations between the ruling bloc, the state and the dominated classes” (119). But surely, not all relations that determine changes in the balance of forces are best characterized as ideological? Economic crisis or breakdown, for example, is without a doubt ideologically mediated, but hardly reducible to this moment of mediation — it is (also) an *economic* crisis, after all. Hall acknowledges this with his emphasis that he doesn’t accept the “dissolution of everything into discourse” (122), but his lack of attention to questions of political economy

makes it impossible for him to understand the extent to which “economic activity”, as Jessop *et al.* put it in their reply, needs to be considered “as a determining element in hegemonic politics” (1985, 93; also see Kellner 1997). In Hall’s account, in other words, the choice for a middle-range level of abstraction through the concept of hegemony involves not so much a concretization of highly abstract Marxist concepts, but a lack of theorization and marginalization of political and economic determinations. Although this is a legitimate move (after all, not everyone *has* to do research on political economy), it tends to lead not only to misguided characterizations of the political economy, but also to false claims on the terrain of culture itself. If ideology is the only determination that is seen to actively impact on culture, then every reception, production or other action that deviates from the main hegemonic ideologies tends to be interpreted as a progressive moment of resistance or, less normatively, as difference. It is such a theoretical schemata that partly explains, I would argue, many of the trends within cultural studies: from research on subcultures to reception analysis, everyday life tactics and queer subjectivities, to name just a few of the many strands. Research on the role of ideology in structuring cultures and lifestyle subjectivities is enormously important and without cultural studies we would have hardly been aware of this role in any depth, but the dominance of the ideology/culture couplet in the discipline has caused its own methodological biases.

2.2.2 URBAN CULTURES AND CRITIQUE

Many strands within cultural studies have move beyond this Gramscian analysis and notions such as discourse, text or practice have increasingly replaced the notion of ideology, even though the role of cultural critique has remained central to the self-description of the project of cultural studies. Nevertheless, I would argue that the methodological biases produced by Hall’s theoretical conceptualization still inform many of the cultural studies’ analyses of urban cultures. This is important to recognize, since cultural studies has always been a discipline concerned with the urban environment. Although ‘the urban’ is often not explicitly thematized as such, if one looks at the actual empirical research undertaken, there is a clear orientation towards cultural practices within an urban context. From ‘classics’ such as Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture* (1979), Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Hall and Tony Jefferson’s *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) or Paul Gilroy’s *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) to newer work such as Scott Lash’s *Critique of Information* (2002) and Ben Highmore’s *Cityscapes* (2005), many publications focus on urban cultures in one

way or another. In this section, I will merely discuss the later two examples in order to point to some of the central problems of this tradition. A more exhaustive analysis is certainly needed, but would go beyond the limits set to this research project.

Thus, in his recent *Critique of Information*, Lash goes so far as to argue that critique as we know it is no longer possible, since we are now part of a global information order that no longer allows any “transcendentals” or an “outside space” for reflection. Instead, “the critique of information will have to come from inside the information itself” (vii). This argument is couched in a narrative that is global in orientation, but which takes the urban as a starting-point. Lash argues that the information order is constituted and connected by networks, which has radical consequences for the city:

[i]mportant here is the occupation of expensive space in the central districts of the increasingly generic global cities, again opening up the array of face-to-face communications and transactions [...]. The consequence is the emergence of a global elite, whose point of identification is the global elite in other such cities. Thus in the global culture industries, the elite in São Paulo (journalists, TV presenters, curators, architects, film distributors, pay television producers, advertising, pop music sector etc.) have more in common with their counterparts in Tokyo, New York, London, Paris, Milan and Los Angeles than they do with their own compatriots in Brazil. [...] To self-include and self-identify in the context of *global* information and communication flows is to self-exclude and dis-identify from the *national* flows. (4-5)

There are at least five major problems to this depiction of the global city. First, it is characterized by a local/global dichotomy that simply does not do justice to the complexities of contemporary urban life. Does identification with global flows necessarily entail a dis-identification from national flows? Hardly ever, I would argue. Even those global elites that do intensely communicate with other elites in other global cities are by no means disconnected from sub-global flows, such as television, newspapers, family members, friends, tax collectors and local companies.⁴ Second and related to this first problem, it leads Lash to argue along simplistic ‘elite vs. the excluded’ lines: you are either in (the global information flows) or out. By doing so, he reproduces the same conceptual mistakes made by Manuel Castells in his work on the network society (e.g. 1996). This creates a highly reductionist notion of social stratification that cannot come to grips with societal differentiation (such as the emer-

4 It is Lash who would argue that these examples are all part of ‘flows’ and my immanent critique follows his line of argumentation, even though I would argue that such a broad use of the notion of flows loses most analytical value.

gence of global subcultures or the fragmentation of the working and middle classes) nor does it have much to say about unequal forms of inclusion into these global flows. Often, the problem is not so much the forced exclusion of the “underclass” by the “overclass” (5), but hierarchical inclusion and control — the global labor market would be an example of this. Third, Lash hardly has anything to say about the role of state institutions or other forms of governance in either contributing to or inhibiting the emergence of this information order. According to him, “[n]ational economic, political and cultural relations are in decline and being displaced by global flows”. Although he does acknowledge that these national relations are replaced by “supra- and sub-national institutions” (26), this remains on the level of observation. There is no analysis of how these new forms of governance impact on and structure the global flows, which leads to a persistent technological-economic determinist tendency in his larger argument. Fourth, Lash’s generalizing argument leads to a flattening of social and urban space, which makes any sophisticated understanding of the continuing differences between cities very difficult. Comparative research becomes impossible or even unnecessary, since cities are simply “increasingly generic” (4). And fifth, the book operates with a very linear and one-dimensional view of history, despite Lash’s constant references to non-linear “socio-technical assemblages” (112), non-linear “multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism” (20), non-linear “reterritorializations” (163) and non-linear “networks” (183). In contrast to the openness and movement promised by this kind of language, history paradoxically moves in one direction only: from the manufacturing society to the global informational culture (32), from economies of scale to economies of scope (82), from practical to discursive knowledge (142), and from ideological power to informational power (1). It is left unexplained how to theorize the connection between these many non-linear movements and the broader one-directional thrust of history.

It is only on the basis of this flawed conceptualization of the urban information society that Lash can come to the conclusion that critique — as old-fashioned *Ideologiekritik* — is no longer possible, but will have to come from inside information itself. Informationcritique is the word he uses to refer to this new situation. According to Lash: “[...] as long as we have a transcendental realm of thought, and this transcendental realm is identified with truth, being, the primordial and the like [...], we are still in the realm of *Ideologiekritik*. [...] This ideologycritique has been effective. But it is suited much better to the constitutive dualisms of the era of the national manufacturing society. The problem is that the global information culture tends to destroy these dualisms, tends to erase the possibil-

ity of a transcendental realm. [...] As transcendentals disappear, thought is swept up into the general plane of immanence with everything else" (8-9). As a result of his over-reliance on the notion of immanence, however, Lash confuses the philosophical distinction between the transcendental and the empirical with actual distinctions and changes *within* the empirical realm. According to him, the global information culture not only tends to question national boundaries (which it clearly does and this is empirically observable), but it also tends to erase the transcendental realm, which is an argument that makes no sense, since the transcendental realm is a theoretical construction to begin with.⁵ As Scott Cutler Shershow, in a similar critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri has pointed out, "signification itself always involves a relation between immanence and transcendence, between the ontic and the ontological, between becoming and Being." Refusing transcendent ideas as such is an impossibility, since that would mean "a refusal of thought itself" (2005, 70).⁶ Also, Lash remains quite unclear as to what his so-called informationcritique actually involves. In the section I quoted above, he even argues that not only *Ideologiekritik*, but informationcritique as well is "swept up into the general plane of immanence" (9) — a comment I take to mean the near impossibility of any form of critique. At other points, he argues that we need a more situated and grounded critique of informational capitalism (see in particular Ch. 9 where he discusses Henri Lefebvre) and more empiricist, phenomenological accounts (see in particular Ch. 12). One of the main problems of phenomenological accounts, however, is their reliance on categories that are not simply given within the experience of phenomena, but that need to be actively constructed by consciousness and through theory-building. This gap between phenomenological sense-data and theoretically overdetermined categories and concepts is strikingly obvious in Lash's account and causes his problematic wavering between data and theory without making explicit the methodological linkages between them. Maybe as a result of this confusion, Lash too easily ends up

5 Although this of course does not mean that this transcendental realm is universally objective or applicable. It is a theoretical *construction*, after all. I therefore agree with Lash's point that this transcendental sphere is a historical achievement, the universality of which has been relativized and questioned by technologies of transport and communication and the possibility of cultural comparison. I disagree with him, however, that this has led to an impossibility of abstraction and transcendence. Thanks to Ignacio Fariás for forcing me to clarify my position here.

6 Lash does indeed tend toward the conclusion that thought is impossible, but this seems to me a dramatic overstatement. Also see Rossiter (2006) for an excellent critique of Lash's argument.

advocating Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of *amor fati* — we need, in other words, to embrace our fate. Focused critique, no matter how positive or modest, is not provided.

In *Cityscapes*, the second example, Highmore offers a highly readable and absorbing account of urban culture in the nineteenth and twentieth century with ample references to film, literature, architecture, shopping and infrastructure. My critique of his work is somewhat unfair, since Highmore never claims to offer a full-blown systematic analysis — he embraces Lefebvrian-inspired rhythmanalysis as a way of orienting attention towards the “multiple rhythms of modernity” (11) — nor does he strive towards an explanatory account — his main interest is descriptive in the sense that he treats the urban as dense, thick and complex (17). His interpretive skills are impressive and he nicely manages to convey the complexity and unruliness of urban life. By doing so, he comes much closer to the modest empiricist critique advocated by Lash (xii) than does Lash himself. Nevertheless, Highmore does claim to be a realist in the sense that he treats cultural materials as a “product of real-world limits and pressures” (22) and he therefore finds himself linking particular cultural objects and practices to the broader political economic context via notions such as exchange, gentrification, commodities and consumption. It is precisely at those moments of linkage, however, that certain methodological and theoretical problems arise. This can be most clearly illustrated with reference to chapter three, in which Highmore analyzes shopping. His rhythm-analytical approach enables him to emphasize the plurality of shopping rhythms, countering a popular view of shopping history as involving a replacement of one form by another. As Highmore writes: “[...] a rhythmanalysis of urban modernity needs to extend attention beyond the glamour of *emerging* and *dominating* cultural forms to take account of the tenacious persistence of more established practices (the corner shop as well as internet shopping, so to speak)” (64). A few pages later he argues: “One point to note, then, is the spatial specificity of different forms of exchange. The other point to note is the tenacity of seemingly outmoded practices of circulation” (67). These are important remarks and they counter the often-hyped discussions of new social, technological, political or economic developments not just within cultural studies, but also within many other disciplines. At the same time, this simultaneous existence of plural practices necessitates a more complex conceptualization than the one put forward by Highmore with his emphasis on circulation and rhythms. What is lacking is a real grasp of the ways in which ‘seemingly outmoded practices of circulation’ are re-organized as a result of their existence next to newer and emerging, but often more dominant forms of exchange. In other words: an

understanding of the hierarchization of exchange networks is missing and, as a result, the analysis of power — central to the project of cultural studies — is not undertaken. It needs to be asked therefore what kind of heterogeneity this is. To what extent do these older forms of exchange really link up with older social practices? And to what extent have they simply become post-Fordist forms of niche production? In order to interpret these data, however, a more sophisticated theoretical framework is necessary. Thus, not only should cultural studies pay attention to the diachronic dimension — how have particular cultural practices changed over time? — but also to the synchronic dimension — what is the position of particular cultural practices within the hierarchical urban context and in relation to other cultural practices? Most importantly, it needs to look at the intertwinement of these diachronic and synchronic dimensions, since it is this intertwinement that produces the “peculiarly condensed material” (6) of urban culture. Highmore is aware of this, but in the actual moment of analysis he falls back into a non-relational mode of argumentation in which the “seemingly outmoded practices of circulation” are understood as autonomous from the “emerging and dominating cultural forms” instead of being partly constituted by them.

2.2.3 CULTURE, POLITICAL ECONOMY AND URBAN COMPLEXITY

So how does one acknowledge urban complexity and what are the consequences of this acknowledgement for understanding urban cultures? Clearly, simply embracing complexity won't do, since it leaves open the basic methodological question of how to apply such a notion to empirical data (McLennan 2003, 558). In my view, more attention should be paid to the following aspects:

First, analysis might benefit from taking more seriously the premise that urban cultures are the product of multiple determinations. Although cultural studies often subscribed to this view (see Hall's quote above, but also the constant references in the literature to culture being ‘overdetermined’), it never really got a handle on the analytical complexity lurking behind this premise. There are, of course, many ways of theorizing determination, but within cultural studies this issue has largely been governed by the often polemical discussions surrounding explanation vs. description. As Gregor McLennan (2002) reminds us, early Birmingham cultural studies, as part of its critique of empiricist sociology, actually aspired towards a more explanatory understanding, “achieving proper depth and perspective, with a more adequate transformative political practice to follow as a consequence” (639), but in later work this aspiration has either been rejected or has moved to the background

of conceptual attention. I take the position that some level of explanation (and not 'merely' description) and analysis of causality is necessary for all forms of social inquiry and critique.⁷ It is not enough, for example, to simply refer to neoliberal cities as some broad context determining cultural change; one has to be much clearer about how this context relates to particular institutions and actors. Fortunately, some recent work within cultural studies is starting to address these questions. Thus, in their analysis of twentieth-century Vienna, Wolfgang Maderthaner and Lutz Musner (2002) choose to analyze urban cultures within the broader paradigm of Fordism. As they argue:

Culture as a social text in this model is neither a direct after-effect of the market nor simply a socio-structurally or historically mediated entity. Rather, the given reciprocal dynamic of accumulation and regulation generates the characteristic texture of the social fabric, which can be interpreted as 'culture' [...]. (874)

This is useful work, since it neither sees urban culture as an effect of the market nor as an autonomous phenomenon, but instead as shot through with political economic determinations on various levels.⁸

Second, acknowledging these multiple determinations makes it easier for cultural studies to understand how discourses cluster around particular "institutional fixes" (Peck and Tickell 1994) and how this creates a certain sedimentation and stabilization of these discourses and their material effects. Although cities have always played a central role both as sites of cultural production as well as capital accumulation and for that reason ought to be central objects of investigation, it can be argued that this role has become even

7 Please note that I am explicitly not defending a radical distinction between explanation and description. Description, as practiced by most in cultural studies, is never mere description, but always involves 'ideal types', reinterpretation and exemplification. Similarly, although explanation is often seen to involve purely the identification of causal links, this argument is built with reference to the identity of this cause. As McLennan argues: "[...] we are trying to identify certain *constitutive tendential features* that might give us a more comprehensive grasp of the phenomena in question. Causality can thus be broadened out of its traditional remit to *include* those various relations of determination, structural correlation or 'constitutional-ity' that characterize things and processes" (2002, 643).

8 Although, it must be added, Maderthaner and Musner do seem to grant too much explanatory power to the notions of accumulation and regulation, ignoring the incompleteness of these processes. In doing so, they adopt an overly totalizing perspective on regulation theory. See chapter three for a critique.

more important due to the crisis of Fordist-Keynesian capitalism during the 1970s and the resulting emergence (however partial) of a KBE (Jessop 2002a).⁹ As a result of this crisis, cities have become explicitly targeted by states as sites for the development of entrepreneurial and competitive practices. This has been accompanied by an expansion of governance mechanisms through a variety of public-private partnerships, infrastructure development as well as urban, social and cultural policies (Brenner 2004; O'Connor 2004). Cultural studies could certainly spend more time investigating the impact of these strategies on urban cultures. At the same time, I am not making this argument in order to emphasize the actual successes of such strategies in making these cultures more compliant with capital accumulation. On the contrary, what needs to be kept in mind is that the many networks of cultural and aesthetic production and consumption are not mere derivations of the capitalist economy, but always also "alternative modes of regulation" with their own logics that "can never be fully fixed within any one mode of regulation" (Jessop 2002b, 103). Although the political economy literature has sometimes emphasized this dimension, it has hardly done any research on these alternative forms of regulation. It is here that I can see cultural studies offering important contributions to a truly transdisciplinary debate, since it is one of the few disciplines that has developed a highly differentiated knowledge of contemporary cultures. In order, however, not to fall back onto a simplified and amorphous view of culture, there is a need to investigate where and how these urban cultures interact with other and possibly more dominant modes of regulation.

Adopting a research perspective in which more care is taken to distinguish multiple determinations constituting social phenomena and in which the focus is on the intertwinement of dominant and alternative modes of regulation offers many advantages. Methodologically — and this is the third and last point — it enables cultural studies to engage more seriously in historical research. The political economy tradition has developed a sophisticated theoretical framework with which to analyze the historical transformations of capitalism in a variety of spatial contexts and on multiple scales, but a similar level of analysis has not been achieved by cultural studies. Although "[h]istorical contextualization", according to Richard Johnson, "was and remains an important aspect of cultural

9 These comments are meant to apply to Western Europe and North America only, since it was in these areas that the Fordist regime in combination with a Keynesian welfare mode of regulation was most fully developed. In other areas around the world, it is likely that the trajectory will have been different. See Leitner *et al.* (2007) for an excellent overview of urban neo-liberalisms across the world.

studies method" (2001, 266), it could be argued that the tendency to focus on the ways in which historical representations are appropriated by contemporary actors often leads to a discursification of history that analytically marginalizes the structuring role of historical trajectories on contemporary actions. Having said that, I see no reason why this more structural dimension of history cannot be included, since the research narratives within cultural studies are often implicitly driven by historicized arguments. Thus, whereas many in the political economy tradition emphasize the path dependency of political economic change — largely in order to emphasize the persistence of institutions and their role in defining and delimiting agency — as well as the 'layering' of new rounds of political regulation and economic accumulation on older already sedimented layers (e.g. Massey 1985), cultural studies tends to highlight the continuity of cultural form (despite constant transformations) and the relative autonomy of 'the popular' (despite its partial instrumentalization).

2.2.4 CULTURAL ANALYSIS AND RE-SPECIFYING CRITIQUE

So where does this leave cultural studies, its sensitivity towards cultural practices and the role of critique? In the previous sections, I have argued that cultural studies was never simply about the celebration of cultural practices, but always about the analysis of these cultures *in relation to* broader and often more powerful processes of regulation and control. If I am correct in this characterization of the core of cultural studies, then this means that research will have to conceptualize this relation. It is here that the critical political economy tradition offers useful tools that could be appropriated by cultural studies. The preliminary methodological and theoretical thoughts I have developed in the previous sections largely draw upon neo-Marxist work on the contemporary (urban) political economy, but I see no reason why this approach could not be replaced by or combined with other approaches — the framework is 'weak' enough to accommodate a variety of perspectives. The only ontological premise of this framework is that the world is structured, layered, differentiated and relatively resistant to all-encompassing cataclysmic social change, which is the result of my reliance on a critical realist ontology.¹⁰

In its engagement with popular cultures, cultural studies has been very good at decentralizing the truth claims of the academy through the acknowledgement of the critical potential of various

¹⁰ See Dean *et al.* (2005) for a useful introductory overview of critical realism. See section II.3 for a development of this critical realist methodology.

cultural practices. At the same time, in the more interesting work there has always been an acknowledgement of the simultaneous regulation of these cultures: Hall's notion of authoritarian populism discussed above tried to capture this two-sidedness. This is a very specific form of critique that comes close to Fredric Jameson's notion of "'double hermeneutic', simultaneously embracing both the negative hermeneutic of ideology-critique and the positive of a 'non-instrumental conception of culture'" (Milner 2006, 117).¹¹ Such a notion of critique necessitates an engagement with the practices of and arguments put forward by social actors, while simultaneously pointing to the biases of these practices and arguments. In order to explain these biases, this critique needs to be related to the structured, layered and differentiated reality in which (urban) cultures operate. It is at this point, however, that the cultural studies' notion of critique all too often finds its limits, since it doesn't deal satisfactorily with social complexity. As we saw above: Hall's discursified account of hegemony tendentially leads to a simplistic characterization of political and economic processes; Lash's discussion of information and immanence as the central dynamics of the current era unhelpfully conflates the distinction between epistemology and ontology and produces an unrealistically flat ontology of the contemporary global city; and Highmore's analysis of shopping as constituted of multiple rhythms cannot come to grips with unequal relations between various exchange networks.

If anything, therefore, critique needs to be re-specified in order to be able to reflect on the structuring power of multiple and partly overlapping and interacting processes. Figure one¹² offers some first

11 The reference is to Jameson (1981), 286. Please note that Milner discusses this notion of double hermeneutic in relation to Raymond Williams' approach, but it seems to me that this equally applies to the early Hall, even though Milner himself harshly criticizes the later work of Hall.

12 This figure is partly derived from Downward and Mearman (2007), but is developed here in a different direction and in a different context. The figure approaches the practice of critique from a critical realist perspective and thus distinguishes between an intransitive domain of structured reality (including events and causes) and a transitive domain of knowledge in an epistemologically relative context. The 'empirical' straddles the line between the intransitive and transitive domains. On the one hand, it provides the point of access to the actual events and real causes. On the other hand, it constitutes the data with which we develop our knowledge. The arrow on the left-hand side points from events to causes, since this reflects the direction of analysis: the analyst retroduces from events to causes. If the figure would present the ontology of reality, the arrow would point in the different direction (since causal mechanisms produce events) or in both directions (since events can also exert feedback effects on and transform causal mechanisms).

thoughts on how to develop such a re-specified critique, even though answering this complex question would clearly benefit from much more extensive debate than can be accomplished here.

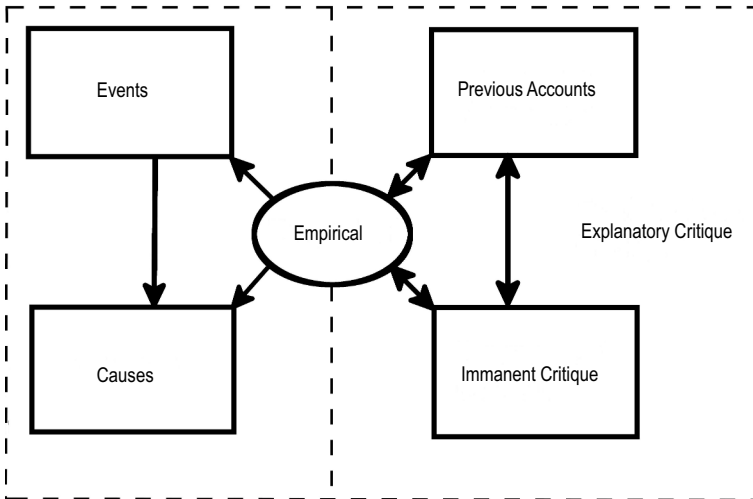


Figure 1: Immanent and Explanatory Critique

Firstly, there is a need to engage with cultural and aesthetic practices *on their own terms* — something referred to in the literature as immanent critique and practiced by many in cultural studies. As explained by Mervyn Hartwig, this avoids “the ‘bad circularity’ or arbitrariness implicit in external criteria of knowledge [...] by taking its departure from within the accounts it seeks to situate, correct or replace [...] to demonstrate either that an account is theory-practice inconsistent or, if consistent, beset with aporiai or problems that are insoluble in its own terms” (2007a, 107). This immanent critique not only reflects on the phenomena that are the object of investigation, but also on explanatory and/or descriptive accounts used by others to analyze these phenomena, since it is often only through these discourses that one can ‘extract’ many empirical data in the first place. Although causal argumentation can be and often is used on this level, it is only on the second level that we arrive at a more comprehensive explanatory critique. It is here that the problems and paradoxes of the earlier inadequate account are taken up and explained theoretically and sociologically by showing that the identified problems are the effect of particular social causes on

deeper (more general) levels of reality.¹³ Once again, this critique needs to be undertaken towards the cultural practices under investigation as well as towards other theories used to describe these practices.

2.3 Critical Realism and Empirical Research

In the attempt to overcome the specific weaknesses of cultural studies — in particular the ‘flattening’ of urban space, the unsatisfactory grasp of multiple determinations, and the limited conceptualization of the link between empirical data and theory — I have found a critical realist methodology very helpful. This section, therefore, discusses some of the key tenets of and concepts in critical realism that guide my analysis of networks of aesthetic production in relation to the urban political economy. This work has been mainly associated with the philosophy of Roy Bhaskar, but is now being developed in a number of directions.¹⁴

2.3.1 RETRODUCTION

As a methodology, critical realism is characterized by a retroductive research strategy, which offers an alternative to positivism as well as hermeneutics. Retroduction, as a concept, refers to a specific form of argumentation. While clearly illustrating the (necessarily) rhetorical nature of academic writing, it simultaneously makes explicit my research strategy by identifying a starting point, a particular way of ‘doing research’ (on a general methodological level, since it does not specify particular methods), and a provisional endpoint. A brief look at the etymological roots of this term is useful here. The Latin prefix *retro* has to do with going backwards, but simultaneously provides, according to Phyllis Chiasson (2005, 225–226), an implication of deliberateness, of deliberately choosing to go backwards.¹⁵ In combination with the suffix ‘ductive’ from the Latin

13 As Hartwig puts it: “Ideology-critique, and more generally, explanatory critique, may thus ground a threefold criticism, (1) of theories (theoretical ideologies), (2) of social practices (practical ideologies) and (3) of the generative social structures that underpin them [...]” (2007a, 108).

14 For major publications, see Bhaskar (1975, 1989, 1993).

15 This dimension of deliberateness is not contained within the Latin *retro*, but emerges in the use of this prefix in combinations with other words. Thus, Chiasson points to ‘retroactive’ (make something operative as of an earlier date) and ‘retrofit’ (modify an earlier model in order to improve) as examples of this deliberateness. Please note that the remainder of this discussion on retroduction also largely relies on Chiasson’s argument.

ducere (to lead), this implies that retroduction is intended to involve not only the observation of an interesting and extra-ordinary fact and the formulation of an ensuing hunch, but also that this hunch is deliberately related to something that came before – which, within a critical realist ontology, are underlying structures or mechanisms (but more on this below). Retroduction, therefore, involves more than abduction — another form of argumentation and one that is increasingly popular within the social sciences. In contrast to ‘retro’, the prefix ‘ab’ means ‘away from’. Both in the case of abduction and retroduction the starting point is the same (an interesting observation and the formulation of a preliminary hunch), but whereas retroduction involves a going backward to explicate and evaluate this idea, abduction knows an outward movement that is not subject to stringent analysis. According to Chiasson, Charles S. Peirce — whose work on the logic of scientific inquiry is foundational in this context — “even ventures so far as to insist that pessimists cannot properly perform abductive reasoning, since pessimism closes off entire categories of possibilities and is thus a hindrance to obeying the ‘law of liberty’” (2005, 230).¹⁶ This is probably not wholly untrue and in my own writing I would have to plead guilty to this charge, since a retroductive research strategy (particularly when applied in the context of regulationist theories, as discussed in chapter three) does tend to produce theories of constraint: empirical phenomena are related back to underlying causes or mechanisms. At the same time, it must be emphasized that retroduction is a much more encompassing logic of inference than either deduction or induction and should actually be understood as the recursive interplay between abduction, deduction and induction. The research cycle, following such a retroductive approach, is thus constructed as follows: first, the observation of an interesting or surprising fact is followed by abductive reasoning, which tries to make a guess that could explain the fact; second, deductive reasoning is applied to explicate the guess (through the formulation of a general rule); and third, inductive reasoning is used to test and evaluate the guess (on the basis of observation). In the messiness of actual research practice, however, these analytical moments will interact and co-constitute each other at all stages of the research project. More problematically still, the moment of abduction remains inescapably marked by its refusal to become formalized.

16 Wirth (2003), for example, points to the ways in which abductive inference is an aesthetic operation and a “strategy of innovation” related to fantasy and imagination. Also see Kleining and Witt (2001) and Kelle (2001) for a defense of a heuristic methodology (which is, in many ways, a synonym for abductive research), while simultaneously (esp. in the case of Kelle) defending the usefulness of methodological rules.

Guided by the 'law of liberty' and oriented towards the discovery of the new, abduction introduces a dynamic of instability and uncertainty into the analytical process that cannot be captured by overly formal modes of reasoning. This was also recognized by Peirce who, even though he believed that all scientific inquiry was dependent on mathematics, argued that abduction and retroduction could also draw on non-mathematical models, most importantly aesthetics as a "state of potentiality" (Chiasson 2005, 235).

Closely intertwined with this retroductive research strategy is the critical realist insistence on a distinction between the so-called transitive (epistemological) and intransitive (ontological) dimensions of reality. Generally speaking, the transitive dimensions are the concepts, theories and models used to understand and explain aspects of reality, whereas the intransitive dimensions are the real events, structures and mechanisms that make up the natural and social world. This distinction, of course, is central to all versions of realism, but the adoption of retroduction forces critical realists to develop a sophisticated understanding of the relation between both dimensions. This is because the process of retroduction demonstrates the mutual intertwinement of transitive and intransitive dimensions at all stages of the research process: induction is constantly alternated with deduction; and the intimate connection between abduction and aesthetics 'infects' the more encompassing strategy of retroduction as such. Instead of rejecting realism entirely, however, critical realism broadens the notion of epistemology, while grounding it within a much wider-ranging, complex and possibly limitless ontology. The transitive dimension or epistemology, according to Hartwig, needs to be understood in "its broadest, socially contextualised or materialist (non-idealist) sense [...] encompassing everything imbricated with human praxis and currently being affected by it" (2007b, 264). This socialized approach to knowledge production allows critical realists to acknowledge the concept-dependence of the social — social structures and practices are reproduced and transformed, at least in part, semiotically — while limiting this constructivist argument in space and time. Temporally, the transitive dimension is limited to the present, since the epistemological process is related to human praxis and the enrolment of objects, institutions, structures, discourses, etc. in this project of knowledge production. Once a particular project is finished, however, the transitive dimension can be seen (by a perspectival switch) "as continually passing over into the intransitive, without annulling the distinction" (265). In other words, epistemology gains a certain ontological reality through the passage of time (what else are the sedimented layers of history?). Spatially, the transitive dimension relates to the intransitive by emphasizing the spatial differentiation

of complex societies. Naturally, knowledge production operates within certain spaces (e.g. laboratories, schools, the home) and is socially grounded and mediated, but this social process is also spatially limited, since each spatially embedded transitive moment operates within a much vaster and wider-ranging ontology that is left untouched by our knowledge.

2.3.2 ONTOLOGY

So what is the ontology of critical realism? Leaving aside the differences between the various contributions to this tradition, the following four themes emerge.¹⁷ First of all, critical realism accepts a “commonsense realism” (Collier 2005, 335): concrete objects such as human beings, animals, buildings and planets are real and exist independently of our knowledge of them, even though we can clearly only know these objects under particular descriptions (i.e. the adoption of a realist ontology in combination with a relativist epistemology). Also, as discussed in the previous section, these epistemological dimensions might feed back into the actual construction of these (and possibly new) objects. In taking this route, critical realism hopes to avoid the ‘epistemic fallacy’ that completely collapses ontology into epistemology.

Second, the fact that natural and social reality does not constitute a closed system (as might be the case with laboratory experiments¹⁸) limits the extent to which one can rely on Humean constant conjunctions i.e. the regular succession of events (whenever A occurs, then B will follow) as an indication of causation.¹⁹ Whereas the laboratory enables the isolation of one mechanism to test it in a closed system, in the reality outside the laboratory this mechanism operates alongside other causal mechanisms, and these conjointly bring about an outcome that is irreducible to each single mechanism (Collier 2005, 329). In order to grasp this causal complexity, critical realism works with a notion of depth realism or ontological depth, which is “a realism that insists upon the structured, stratified and orderly nature of reality” (Dean, Joseph and Norrie 2005, 8). In Bhaskar (1975), this reality is divided into three

17 See Blaikie (2000), in particular 108-114 and 180-181, for an excellent discussion of critical realism and the retroductive research strategy in relation to research design and methodology.

18 Although, as even the early ethnographic literature on laboratory science (e.g. Knorr-Cetina 1981; Latour and Woolgar 1979) has shown, this image was always more of an ideal than a practical reality.

19 Although note that Hume always relates this definition of causation to the argument that the connection between A and B is identified as causation in the mind due to experience and expectation.

overlapping domains: the real (comprising causal mechanisms); the actual (constituted by events that can but do not have to be observed); and the empirical (experiences). The three domains are interrelated, with the real encompassing the actual and the empirical, and the actual including the empirical.

Third, and following from this understanding of reality as stratified, critical realism argues that scientific inquiry should involve the discovery of underlying mechanisms that can explain certain events but that are simultaneously not always manifested in these events. This involves a shift in research priorities away from the analysis of causation between events towards the analysis of the causal relations between events and underlying mechanisms. More precisely, critical realism distinguishes between causal powers, tendencies, mechanisms and structures. Whereas a causal power is a potential that may or may not be exercised, a tendency involves a causal power which is exercised, but which may remain unactualized and/or unmanifested to people. The notion of causal or generative mechanisms is used to refer to either a power, a tendency or both. All these are instantiated in structures, including social structures (Pinkstone and Hartwig 2007). Structures, in other words, are not neutral time-spaces of organization, but possess causal powers and tendencies that derive from deeper layers of reality.

And fourth, critical realism (at least its dialectical version) operates with a critique of 'pure presence' (or a critique of 'ontological monovalence') that emphasizes the importance of absence in the structuration of reality. The role played by absence is already acknowledged by Bhaskar's early distinction between the real, the actual and the empirical, since this creates a gap between what is experienced and the whole of reality — there is (potentially) more to life than what you experience or observe. At the same time, this account can be criticized for simply positing an ontology of pure presence at a deeper level, namely the 'real' level of generative mechanisms. In Bhaskar's later work (starting with Bhaskar 1993), however, this critique is answered by emphasizing more strongly than before the importance of potentiality at the level of the real and by placing, as Alan Norrie points out, "at the heart of the underlying and co-constituting real a sense of mobility, unfinishedness, and openness to the new [...]" (2005, 101). There are similarities here between the work of Bhaskar and the negative dialectics of Theodor W. Adorno in the sense that Adorno also tried to think through this gap, although he distinguishes between *das Ganze* ('the whole') and *die gesellschaftliche Totalität* ('the social totality').²⁰

20 Pointed out by Norrie (2005), footnote 20. The reference is to Adorno (1973), 47. Also see Norrie (2004).

2.3.3 CRITICAL REALISM AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Bhaskar's philosophy and many of the debates within critical realism are pitched at a highly abstract level and there is a need to develop this ontology in relation to substantive social research. In this context I have found Jessop's strategic-relational approach particularly useful. Instead of relying too heavily on the philosophical distinction between the real, the actual and the empirical, he retains the idea that reality is stratified and complex, but concretizes this general ontology. According to Jessop, structures should be conceptualized as "strategically-selective in their form, content, and operation", whereas actions should be seen as "structurally-constrained, more or less context-sensitive, and structuring" (2005, 48).²¹ Stated like this, this approach doesn't seem to differ too much from Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (1984), but Giddens repeated characterization of a structure as a 'system of generative rules and resources' which is instantiated by social actors lacks spatial and temporal specificity (structures tends to be posited outside space and time (Thompson 1989)) as well as ontological depth (Jessop 2005, 45). His theory implies that a structure is equally constraining and enabling for all actors, which makes it difficult for him to think through the ways in which specific structural constraints have differential effects on actors. Jessop, in contrast, is much more sensitive to this and to the ways in which "structures emerge in specific places and at specific times, operate on one or more particular scales and with specific temporal horizons of action, have their own specific ways of articulating and interweaving their various spatial and temporal horizons of action, develop their own specific capacities to stretch social relations and/to compress events in space and time, and, in consequence, have their own specific spatial and temporal rhythms" (51). The strategic-relational approach, in other words, enables a historically and spatially sensitive analysis of social structure and action in which the notion of path dependency is taken as a premise: the prior development of structures shapes subsequent action. At the same time, Jessop's critical realist ontology leads him to argue in a non-determinist fashion that although these structures instantiate tendencies, these tendencies might remain unactualized or unmanifested. More contingently still, the structures themselves need to be socially reproduced and are therefore also tendential. This creates a situation of double or multiple tendentiality (Jessop 2005, 51). Reflexivity, according to Jessop, is important in this regard, but should "include reflection on the specific spatio-temporal selectivi-

21 Also see Jessop (2001).

ties of structures and the appropriateness of different spatio-temporal horizons of action" (52). This kind of "second-order observation" (52) concretizes my earlier remarks concerning the need for a two-level notion of critique, involving both immanence and explanation.

But even the strategic-relational approach is in need of further methodological refinement, since it still lacks clear guidelines for empirical work: how does one, for example, identify spatio-temporal selectivities? Here we need to return to the retroductive research strategy discussed above, but this time we can be more precise. As we now know, retroduction involves a method of iterative abstraction by which causal mechanisms are isolated in relation to concrete phenomena — the objects analyzed are transformed into ideal-types through a one-sided accentuation of certain aspects of these objects. As Henry Wai-chung Yeung points out, there are two analytical criteria that can be applied in order to decide whether a postulated mechanism can indeed be considered a causal mechanism: "1) When this mechanism is activated under appropriate circumstances or contingencies, will the proposed phenomenon occur?" and "2) Can this phenomenon be caused by other mechanisms?" (1997, 59). To give a concrete example: the emergence of entrepreneurial subjectivities might not simply be the effect of processes of neoliberalization, but instead (or also) the effect of strategies of radical self-organization. Analysis, therefore, needs to be sensitive to these situations in which one phenomenon or object can be (and usually is) governed by multiple determinations. As I pointed out in my section on cultural studies, one has to keep in mind the interplay between dominant and alternative modes of regulation. This interplay cannot, of course, be determined in advance, but needs to be demonstrated through specific research inquiries and *post hoc* reconstructions.

Another way of bringing critical realist philosophy closer to social research is by focusing on so-called quasi-closures. As institutional economics has shown, structures as well as actions can be understood as institutionally mediated in the sense that specific institutional contexts promote particular forms of behavior, ethics, or aesthetics, while discouraging or actively excluding others. This, as Paul Downward *et al.* (2002) have pointed out, produces "situations of quasi-closure", since "agents' mental models of situations acquire a close level of overlap or high degree of sharing, as mutually consistent and stable interpretations of that situation, its assumptions, values, beliefs, knowledge and information" (488). Critical realist research, therefore, can analyze these quasi-closures, since they offer clues to the spatio-temporal selectivities and the underlying causal mechanisms that guide action. At

the same time, it is through the modification of these institutions that actors can open up new possibilities and new ways of acting that were previously impossible.

2.3.4 EMERGENCE

Critical realism's stratified account of reality, its argument that social reality should be understood as an open system, the view that causal mechanisms and structures possess tendencies instead of causal laws and its emphasis on absence distinguishes critical realism from other 'macro'-explanations such as structural functionalism that analyzes society as a closed system tending towards equilibrium. Central to this account is Bhaskar's argument that we should understand the relations between the different strata of reality as simultaneously rooted and emergent (Collier 1994, 110). Rootedness simply means that higher levels (for example, society) presuppose lower or deeper levels of reality (e.g. biological, chemical, physical, matter). Emergence is more complex to grasp, but refers to the fact that higher levels — despite their rootedness — are irreducible to lower levels of reality. Jamie Morgan offers the best summary of this relation by highlighting the three characteristics of emergence:

(1) that some substance, entity, property or system β is dependent for its existence upon some other substance, entity, property or system α ; (2) that dependency implies some form of co-variance where fundamental changes in α mean fundamental changes in β ; and (3) that the form, operation and consequences of β cannot be reduced to α . Thus, though (1) and (2) imply some form of relation that may perhaps be conceptualised as non-constant conjunction, or irregular, and/or multiply realisable causation, (3) makes the form of that relation conceptually problematic because irreducibility implies some form of disjuncture between α and β such that β cannot be translated, explained or predicted from α alone. (2007, 166)

Placed within a stratified ontology, the concept of emergence acknowledges not only that the interaction of generative mechanisms produces certain events that can be explained with reference to these mechanisms, but also that this interaction produces events that, in turn, can create new higher-level strata (with their own generative mechanisms), which cannot (fully) be explained with reference to the underlying strata. To an extent, this implies that events at higher levels of reality will tendentially be subject to a broader range of causal mechanisms operative at multiple levels of reality than those events at lower or deeper levels of reality: human beings, for example, are constituted by social, neurological, biological, physical and other mechanisms, whereas rocks are subject to a

few of these mechanisms only. At the same time, emergence potentially operates in two directions, questioning this vertical hierarchy of strata. First of all, higher-level strata can produce feedback that affects the workings of lower-level strata, thereby possibly (and somewhat paradoxically) complicating the reproduction of the stratum from which this feedback emerged. An example would be ecological crises that are clearly societally produced, but which threaten the livelihood of human beings due to the destruction of necessary underlying strata of reality. Second, the interaction of causal mechanisms or social structures within higher strata might not directly impact on lower strata of reality, but the dynamic and emergent properties produced by these interactions can only be understood with reference to the social organization in which these interactions are situated (Creaven 2002, 137). This relativizes the emphasis in critical realism on relations of vertical causality between different strata, since the analysis of such interactions necessarily downplays the structuring role of lower-level on higher-level strata (through vertical causalities), while emphasizing intra-stratum interactions (or, horizontal causalities). Andrew Brown even goes so far as to argue that there is nothing that necessarily relates the higher to the lower stratum and that each stratum can be adequately conceptualized in isolation (2002, 173), but this seems to be pushing the argument too far. As I see it, it is to be expected that the identification of the respective importance of vertical and horizontal causalities is dependent on the phenomenon under investigation, indicating the need for more substantive social theory. As Sean Creaven puts it: "realism' as such is non-committal in relation to the fundamental question of which strata of reality are basic to or emergent from which, and this applies as much to the stratification of nature as to that of society" (2002, 142). As we will see in chapter three, regulation theories try to concretize this critical realist ontology by locating accumulation and, to an extent, regulation on deeper levels of reality than other social processes. This is a productive approach, since it enables a sophisticated analysis of the political economic stratum on which other social processes operate. At the same time, this Marxist concretization of a critical realist ontology structurally downplays the irreducibility of higher social strata to this underlying stratum, while operating with a reductionist understanding of this deep level of reality. In chapter three, therefore, I introduce the concept of network as a complement to accumulation and regulation in order to counter this particular bias.

2.4 From Disciplinary Deconstruction to Transdisciplinarity

All this has important implications for research practices, since a critical realist orientation — if it is to grasp the specificities of social processes within a highly complex and stratified reality, while holding on to an encompassing notion of critique — cannot be discipline-based or specialized, but needs to incorporate and transcend a variety of disciplinary discourses and methods in order to explore the mutual constitution of political, economic and cultural processes at all scales (Brenner 2004, 23-25). Methodologically, this involves a “reciprocal analytical movement between the micro through the meso to the macro and back again” (Jessop and Sum 2001).

Even though I subscribe to such a notion of and need for transdisciplinarity²², it is important to recognize that often this search for a new transdisciplinary understanding of research remains wedded to an ideal of a unity in knowledge. But this is a highly problematic ideal, since it assumes that the various disciplinary knowledges add up i.e. that their integration will actually provide us with a more comprehensive and unified knowledge of one and the same object. However, this still presupposes that the object actually has only one reality, whereas it needs to be recognized that each discipline also constructs its own objects and realities — the separation of disciplinary knowledge and object is an impossible task.²³ Thierry Ramadier (2004) instead has argued that in order for transdisciplinarity to be possible we need to move away from this kind of thinking in terms of division (which can then be re-unified) and instead start thinking in terms of deconstruction. As he argues:

Deconstruction follows an entirely different principle, since in this perspective an object can be seen as pertaining to different levels of reality. The numerous levels of reality reflect the different structures of a single object reality. [...] If

22 Please note that I use the notion of transdisciplinarity, whereas other authors might prefer postdisciplinarity (e.g. Jessop and Sum 2001; Brenner 2004). I prefer transdisciplinarity, since it refers, in my view, to the integration of disciplinary frameworks at a higher level, while simultaneously acknowledging the distinctions between disciplines. Postdisciplinarity too easily ends up with a pick-and-mix situation in which certain concepts from various disciplines are selected without paying attention to the theoretical coherence between these concepts. This, however, is clearly not the version of postdisciplinarity Jessop and Sum or Brenner propose and my understanding of transdisciplinarity largely overlaps with their version of postdisciplinarity.

23 See Law (2004) for a longer exposition of this problematic.

one takes the example of cities, a city refers to various realities (for example, geographic, sociological, economic, etc.). Thus, a city is no longer a natural object but a cultural object to which neither the researcher nor any other person can be completely exterior. (429)

This deconstruction is followed by a process of reconstruction that is no longer guided by a notion of unity, but that instead aims to seek coherence between these different accounts and that tries to understand the interactions between these different levels of reality (429). Disciplinary knowledges, in other words, are certainly not superfluous (or even avoidable), but always — through disciplinary deconstruction — need to be put in a wider context and in relation to other disciplinary knowledges (430). Here I can point to my earlier distinction between immanent and explanatory critique, which was developed to accomplish this task. Unavoidably, however, paradoxes and contradictions will remain, since a unified body of knowledge is impossible.

There are also political reasons for holding on to this constitutive tension between disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity and of the latter being based on the former. This once again has to do with my earlier distinction between immanent and explanatory critique. Even though it often might be tempting to imagine an all-encompassing theory of everything, this evades the fact that contemporary society is highly differentiated and (re-)produced by numerous specialized (and thus disciplinary) knowledges and practices — both within and beyond academia. If a critical theory is to have any chance of effecting actors in these highly specialized fields, it needs to be familiar with their vocabulary used in order to be able to re-orient this vocabulary towards different theoretical and social imaginaries. This applies to academic disciplines, but also and at least as important to disciplinary knowledges produced by policy networks, economic agencies or subcultural groups, to name but a few. In the following chapters, my analysis involves such an immanent critique and will engage with the discourses and practices of the music networks in London and Berlin as well as the representations of these networks within policy circles. By relating these to a critical realist ontology and (as discussed in chapter three) a (post-)regulationist theoretical framework, I hope to be able to show its biases. This by necessity goes beyond a positivist data collection exercise, since engagement also means the interpretive analysis of the often theoretically inspired languages and modes of communication adopted by the various actors in these fields. Based on such a broad understanding of disciplinary knowledges (encompassing both academic as well as non-academic discourses), this transdisciplinary approach therefore also registers the growing discontent with the division of labor between the academy (respon-

sible for theory development and abstraction) and everyday life 'out there' (constituting empirical data that can be appropriated) and proposes a much more hybrid process of knowledge production that connects these everyday and academic worlds and that acknowledges the theory-laden character of everyday practices (Turnbull 2003-04, 110). Gilles Deleuze, dramatic as always, made this point most poignantly when he argued: "True lived experience [le vécu] is an absolutely abstract thing. The abstract is lived experience."²⁴ In taking this route towards transdisciplinarity, it bypasses the 'academicization' of the term and instead builds on a more radical lineage — visible in Félix Guattari and Sergio Vilar's *metamethodology* (1992, as qtd. in Genosko 2003) and recently developed further by Gary Genosko (2003) and Ned Rossiter (2006) — that intimately connects transdisciplinary research practices to institutional change and the emergence of new social forms.

2.5 Methods and Data Collection

The above methodological discussion has direct implications for my understanding of methods. Following Andrew Sayer (1992), this book takes the position that a critical realist research strategy is compatible with various methods, as long as these methods are matched to the appropriate level of abstraction and the object under investigation. Methods — understood here as techniques of data collection and transformation — do not presume certain ontological positions, but can be used in combination during the process of retroduction. Downward and Andrew Mearman (2007) follow this line of argument and also emphasize that the use of methods is dependent on the levels of abstraction stressed at various points of one's argument:

[...] the level of abstraction required for the analysis ultimately determines which methods are used as, say, retroduction proceeds. The point is that methods are merely redescriptive devices revealing different aspects of objects of analysis. (90-91)

Such an understanding of methods as redescriptive devices is related to the earlier discussion on coherence instead of unity as the goal of knowledge accumulation. Methods are very much like disciplinary knowledges in that respect, since each method reveals different features of the phenomena being investigated. In the proc-

24 <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=67&groupe=Kant&langue=2> (27.06.2007). Thanks to Tobias c. van Veen for pointing me to this Deleuze lecture.

ess of this discovery, however, the features can no longer be extricated from the method used. From such a perspective, unity is no longer an option and it is only transdisciplinary coherence that remains. This implies an understanding of research in which “a nexus of mutually supportive explained propositions can be constructed in which the whole stands distinct from its parts” (Downward and Mearman 2007, 92). According to Downward and Mearman, retroductive research aimed at the formulation of a nexus of mutually supportive explained propositions involves not so much a strict reliance on methodical rules (as ideally achieved in deduction or induction), but a “question and answer’ theoretical structure” (91) that asks questions about a specific object of analysis. To answer this question, certain methods are needed. Each answer to the question provokes another round of questions that might necessitate the use of different methods. Although the ultimate goal of critical realist research is the discovery of underlying causal mechanisms, not all questions need to be directed towards causal relations — for example, the interpretive analysis of particular phenomena might reveal more about its specific dynamics and its complex position within a stratified and emergent reality than a mere causal analysis.

For this project, I started with research questions that would enable me to find out more about the dynamics of creative networks in relation to capital accumulation and state regulation. In order to approach these questions, I decided to heuristically focus on three dimensions: location, communication, and labor. Within each of these three dimensions, I asked questions and selected those methods that would be supportive in collecting relevant data to answer each question. Thus, in relation to location, I wanted to find out how music networks operated spatially and in what ways one could understand these spatial dynamics as related to the spatialities of regulation and accumulation. To answer the first part of this question, I engaged in a spatial data mapping of the various nodes of these music networks in order to map these nodes onto the geographies of Berlin and London. It soon became clear, however, that the explanatory power of such a quantitative approach — due to the nature of the spatial data — would be limited and could not answer the question of how these nodes were actually linked to each other. Answering this question, I decided to focus on an institutional analysis of music networks, relying on secondary literatures (publications on the sociology of music and the cultural industries) and qualitative interviews. Answering the second part of the main question proved to be more difficult, since the notions of regulation and accumulation operate at various levels of abstraction simultaneously and encompass not only the analyzed networks, but also

the broader temporal and spatial environment characterized by multiple overlapping and interacting but partly decoupled processes. In relation to spatial regulation, I decided to focus in the interviews on the role of possible couplings between music networks and creative industries policy mechanisms through an analysis of clustering processes. Accumulation was analyzed, on the one hand, by investigating the capitalist spatial dynamics within the music networks (secondary literatures and interviews) and, on the other hand, by understanding policy regulation as strategically and spatially selective and oriented towards the promotion of the KBE.

The analysis of the second dimension of communication tried to answer the question of how one can understand the communicative dynamics of music networks and to what extent and in which ways this networked communication is related to accumulation and regulation. After specifying my definition of communication, it seemed to me that one useful route towards answering the first part of the question would be to simply analyze the main discourses prevalent within these music networks. Drawing largely on secondary literatures, but illustrating these with examples from London and Berlin, I identified three main narratives that substantially shaped (and, to an extent, still shape) the dynamics of these networks. Once again and for the same reasons as above, answering the second part of the question turned out to be more difficult than originally expected. The approach, however, remained the same. Accumulation was theorized as structuring the broader social dynamic, while policy regulation was characterized as possessing a strategic selectivity oriented towards the emergence of the KBE. First, I analyzed in more depth the various creative industries policies in London and Berlin, since I wanted to better understand its discursive dimensions as well as the possible ambivalences within these policies. This was achieved through an extensive discourse analysis of the various policy publications on the creative industries in the two cities. Second — since this policy analysis still could not give me any answers concerning the actual coupling of policy mechanisms and music networks — I tried to analyze this coupling and the structuring role of accumulation and regulation through an analysis of four features (intellectual property; free choice and commodification; built environment; discourse of flexibility and change) that are central to the reproduction of the capital relation, while paying attention to the ways in which recent creative industries policies aim to re-articulate these features in order to make them fit with the new requirements of the KBE. I derived my data from interviews, secondary literature, policy documents, music magazines, music websites and online discussion forums.

Finally, the research on the third dimension of labor was oriented towards the question as to how networked labor operates and to what extent and in which ways we can understand this form of labor as related to capital accumulation and state regulation. Drawing on interviews and secondary literature, I tried to answer the first part of the question by concentrating on the entrepreneurial dimensions of labor in the discussed music networks. This one-sided accentuation of this aspect of labor was undertaken in order to highlight the structuring role of accumulation within these networks, but these entrepreneurial dimensions also need to be seen in conjunction with other (non-entrepreneurial) practices and discourses as discussed in the analysis of communication. The question concerning policy regulation was partly answered by analyzing the discourses on creative industries policies in relation to labor. As with the other two dimensions (location and communication), however, this still did not answer the question concerning the role of policy-music couplings in re-orienting music networks towards a form of labor compatible with the KBE. Answering this question, I decided to concentrate — relying on interviews, secondary literatures as well as further theoretical development — on an analysis of the constitutive role of free or unremunerated labor in explaining not only the parallels between policy discourses and music labor realities, but also the limited direct regulation of these music networks by policy mechanisms.

Methodically, this research relies on the following approaches: discourse analysis, involving interviews and other primary literatures such as music magazines, websites and online discussion forums; and spatial data analysis, relying on spatial data derived from music magazines as well as online event calendars. The following paragraphs briefly discuss these methods and associated data in some more depth.

2.5.1 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis is a useful approach in the context of this project, since it aims to connect discursive forms to larger power structures. I am above all interested in those strands of discourse analysis that investigate the rules of discursive formation — “non-positivist ‘laws’, which organize the production of specific discursive acts, their combination to complex ensembles of distinctive elements as well as their inscription into certain institutional contexts” (Angermüller 2005, par. 40) — and less in more openly hermeneutic and ethnographic accounts that try to offer Geertzian-style “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973). In some ways, this involves a going back to Michel Foucault’s ‘early phase’ (Foucault 1966, 1972), dur-

ing which he started moving away from the Saussurean structural linguistic tradition without, however, completely rejecting structural ways of theory-building.²⁵ It was in his 1969 book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) that he introduced the notion of discursive formation, a term that clearly incorporates both static ('structural') as well as dynamic ('poststructural') dimensions. On a similar level of analysis, Dominique Maingueneau's theory of "self-constituting discourses" (1999) argues that each discourse implies a certain scenography, which involves a particular representation of the speaker, the addressee, the place (*topography*) and the moment (*chronography*) of discourse, with each scenography linked to certain ideological positions. In order to better understand the role discourses play in these ideological processes, we need to analyze these scenographies, the specific tone and corporeality ("ethos") that is produced by these texts and the "linguistic codes" they use. There is overlap here with Bourdieu's notion of corporeal hexis and his work on language and symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991) as well as the emerging field of critical discourse analysis, which explicitly aims to analyze the ideological use of discourses (e.g. Fairclough 1995; Wodak and Meyer 2001). Also, Maingueneau urges discourse analysts to consider the 'mediological' dimension of utterances²⁶, by which he means the ways in which these discourses are circulated and are part of material infrastructures.

Above all, any analysis of discourse needs to pay attention to the ways in which narratives are constructed. Narratives here can simply be defined as a structure of representations of events in a particular temporal and spatial order. As a rule, narratives will possess "objectifying devices" (Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 32), which means that the narrative will locate certain elements in the realm of the true and the objective, whereas other elements will be designated false. Further, narratives in general are littered with

25 Despite his own claims to the contrary. See the 'Foreword for the English Edition' in Foucault (1970), in which he humorously and arrogantly writes: "In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis. I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I have not deserved. There may well be certain similarities between the works of the structuralists and my own work. It would hardly behove me, of all people, to claim my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today. But it is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label" (xiv).

26 The reference is to Debray (1991).

what V.N. Volosinov (the colleague or possibly alter ego of Mikhail Bakhtin) called the 'evaluative accent' of specific words or phrases (1986), i.e. the way in which these signs convey specific judgments in relation to the object the sign refers to.²⁷ Also, it is important to attend to the emergence of patterns in discourse, which can be identified within the utterance of one actor, but also within the utterances across various actors, institutions and networks (Wood and Kroger 2000, 117-127).

2.5.2 QUALITATIVE DATA

As discussed above, I relied on interviews to answer questions in relation to location, communication and labor. Semistructured interviews seemed the best option in this regard, since they enable a relatively open form of interviewing while still being restricted to a particular range of topics. My original idea was to send out a large amount of e-mail questionnaires to a wide variety of actors in order to gain a representative level of empirical generalization. The low response rate, however, led me to move away from questionnaires towards a more restricted number of in-depth face-to-face and e-mail interviews. The selection of interviewees is, of course, never an objective process, but driven by previous knowledges and interests. In order to control this, however, the interviewees were selected according to the following criteria. First of all, there had to be a balance between actors performing the various functions within the electronic music networks (i.e. a balanced mixture of label owners, distributors, venue owners, publishers, etc.). And second, they had to be based within the urban areas that emerged as important 'clusters' as part of the spatial data analysis (see below). All the interviews were digitally recorded and took place in the period from November 2006 until December 2007. The first step in the analysis of the interview data involved the identification of explicit descriptions that could be thematically developed in relation to the broader argument of this book (Mayring 2003), while simultaneously remaining sensitive to the existence of possible negative instances that contradicted this argument. I decided against the full transcription of all interviews, since such a process would have been very time-consuming with only limited added analytical value to be expected.

Besides interviews, other important sources of data were the many publications (off- as well as online) available on electronic music and based in Berlin or London as well as other cities around

27 See Bamberg (1997) for a similar concept of 'narrative positioning'. See Korobov (2001) for a review.

the world. The ‘popular’ discourses surrounding electronic music are intense and need to be acknowledged in any sociological analysis of networks of aesthetic production, since these discourses constitute the aesthetics of music to an important extent. Just as importantly in the context of this book is the fact that these discourses connect with wider historical, social and political economic processes that are projected back into the ‘music itself’. As Georgina Born argues, it is “the forms of talk, text, and theory that surround music — the metaphors, representations, and rhetoric explaining and constructing it — that may be liable to analysis as ideological” (1995, 19).

2.5.3 SPATIAL DATA ANALYSIS

One of the premises of this research is, quite simply and as Doreen Massey and John Allen (1984) declared over twenty years ago, that geography matters. Spatial data analysis is interested in the geographical references of data and is based on the assumption that variation in a data set is geographically structured (Haining 2003). Explaining this double variation (namely variation in the data values as well as actual *spatial* variation) is achieved in this project through a process of retrodution about the real. On the level of method, this raises a number of issues that need to be discussed and clarified. For one thing, due to the nature of spatial data used, this research can only employ a very restricted form of quantitative analysis and descriptive statistics. Electronic music is produced within highly informal and unstable networks, which makes a classical probability sample impossible: at no point can one statistically identify the relation between sample and population. The data have been acquired through a variety of sources and I am confident that the used sources (see below) are exhaustive, but they are certainly not complete. Also, in statistical research all data should ideally refer to one point in time (or the aspect of time should become an explicit part of statistical reasoning) in order to homogenize the relation between data. This has not been possible in this research, since the collection of data has been an ongoing process over a 1.5-year period and I have relied on sources that usually do not address the temporal references of its data. Finally, the data I have collected are at their most nominal (such as postal codes of electronic music nodes) and are often more usefully described in qualitative terms. For example, in chapter four on location, I could of course have quantified the relations between music nodes (for example, the amount of connections between record labels and music venues), but this ignores the constantly changing nature of these connections, their intensity and their frequency. The quantitative aspect of

my research, therefore, is very limited and should mainly be seen as a way to: 1) generalize qualitative findings by being able to identify the actual frequencies of specific data; as well as 2) facilitate qualitative research by revealing spatial patterns that can be investigated in more depth by qualitative methods.²⁸

2.5.4 QUANTITATIVE DATA

In the case of spatial data analysis, my original and main goal was simply to collect data on what is actually 'out there' in the field of electronic music and to relate this to their locations within the two cities. Partly this was for the reasons discussed above, but it should also be seen as an attempt to develop a clearer understanding of the spatial grounding of music networks and the different uses of space among actors within these networks than is usually undertaken by the literature on music production. It was clear from the beginning, however, that it would be an impossible task to map all actors and firms and I decided therefore to exclude single artists from the mapping process. All data were entered into SPSS and categorized according to postal code, city and activity. This last category was given the following values: record label; venue (clubs, bars, galleries); agency; distribution; publication (magazines, blogs, online forums); event organization (either specific club nights or activities in various venues); store (records or DJ equipment), radio (off- and online); and various (including professional networks, post-production and software/hardware, festivals). Naturally, some cases would occupy more than one value and where this was the case I either assigned them one specific value based on their primary activity or — if a primary focus was not visible — I assigned them the 'other' value. Nevertheless, the majority of data could easily be grasped by the use of these values.²⁹ The data were intermittently collected over a period of approximately 1.5 years (November 2005 until March 2007). Due to the informal nature of many of these activities, it was not possible to use official statistics and survey data and I had to rely therefore on a variety of different sources.

28 The distinction between 'facilitate' and 'generalize' is derived from Spicer (2004, 299-302).

29 Still, one problem remains: it is very well possible that certain nodes show up in the data set as occupying one category, but that these nodes are simultaneously involved in other music activities that, however, are not as visible. Thus, a label owner might also work as a DJ at certain club nights or organize a series of events for a limited amount of time. This points to the performance of multiple roles particularly prevalent in music networks and is something that needs to be acknowledged when interpreting these data.

These sources were the following: *De:Bug* (electronic music magazine, based in Berlin); *The Wire* (experimental music magazine, London); *Knowledge Magazine* (drum and bass magazine, London); *Zitty* (event calendar, Berlin); *Time Out London* (event calendar); *berlinatnight.de* (event calendar, Berlin); *Flavorpill LDN* (event mailing list, London); *Kultureflash* (event mailing list, London); *Allinlondon.co.uk* (overview of clubs and bars; London); *Resident Advisor* (website on electronic music); *e/i* (electronic music magazine); *LondonNet Club Guide* (website with guide to clubs; London); *DJ Mag* (music magazine, London); and *International DJ* (music magazine). One important gap in these data needs to be acknowledged. Although event organizers (those actors that organize club nights or put on shows by DJ's or bands in venues or other locations) play an important role in electronic music networks, they are hardly visible in the quantitative data and the numbers attached to this value can therefore be considered much too low. One possible reason for their invisibility in this data set is that these actors often operate 'behind the screens' (in contrast to record labels or venues, they are usually not directly in contact with audiences) and are less spatially 'fixed' than other nodes in the network, since their activities rely on their mobility between venues (usually within one city, but sometimes in multiple cities). Even if their existence would be registered, therefore, it is likely that they still would not emerge in the spatial data set, since they often cannot be attached to a particular postal code.

2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to develop a sophisticated methodological starting point that will enable us to acknowledge the stratified, differentiated and emergent nature of reality that can then be used to further develop particular theories and undertake more substantive social research projects. After discussing certain strands within cultural studies, I closed the first section with some preliminary thoughts on a revised notion of critique. The second section introduced the philosophy of critical realism, focusing in particular on its methodological consequences. Central to critical realism, it was argued, is a retroductive research strategy that offers a particular form of argumentation and logic of inference. Retroduction is informed by a philosophical position that distinguishes between the transitive (epistemological) and intransitive (ontological) dimensions of reality, while acknowledging the important role played by semiosis in transforming causal mechanisms and social structures. This section also introduced the idea that realism is stratified and onto-

logically 'deep' and pointed to the importance of absence in the structuration of reality. Concretizing these philosophical reflections in relation to social research, I introduced Jessop's strategic-relational approach and offered some further guidelines for empirical work. I closed the section with a discussion of the important role played by emergence in open systems and already directed attention towards the reductionist tendencies of the regulation approach. Section II.4 analyzed the consequences this critical realist approach has for research practices and argued for the need to conduct transdisciplinary research, although always in relation to disciplinary knowledges. After these methodological reflections, I discussed the implications of this critical realist approach for the actual use of methods and data collection. Building on this methodological approach, the following chapter introduces the three main concepts of this book — accumulation, regulation, and networks — and develops a theoretical framework sensitive to a stratified reality, multiple determinations, dominant and alternative modes of regulation, and emergence.

