FCJ-028 Learning and Insurgency in Creative Organisations

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'When capital invests the whole of life, life appears as resistance'.

Antonio Negri

The concept of the "learning organisation" plays a pivotal role in contemporary management theory and practice.[1] In the idealised view of its advocates, the learning organisation is a mobile, self-deconstructing system, perfectly suited to the unstable environments of "post-industrial" or "informational" capitalism. Flexibility and innovation, in this system, are achieved by reversing the traditional top-down flow of information from managers to workers. Workers use their "tacit knowledge" of processes of production and market activity to autonomously transform their conditions of work. The practical question for contemporary management and human resources (HR) theorists is how to create the kinds of workers that are capable of accumulating tacit knowledge and using it in the service of the organisation . This is a problem of control; it is not without its paradoxes. This paper takes an unorthodox perspective on the problem of control, informed by the theory of biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1990: 2000a). Drawing on Foucaultian and post-Foucaultian literature, we seek to model the biopolitics of the learning organisation .

We try to take a non-cynical approach to the learning organisation as a phenomenon. There is good reason, we think, to see the advent of the learning organisation in a positive light.[2] Still we cannot overlook the "dark side" of these organisations – their insidious power of "normalisation". While learning organisations have, for the most part, dispensed with the disciplinary-diagnostic controls that characterised the hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations of the 20th century, they are shot through with "soft" controls that operate on the emotions, attitudes and desires of workers. The ostensible strategy of these control techniques is to liberate and empower workers, to prepare them to activate and engage processes of organisational transformation. However, many of these techniques focus on generating communal values, common ends and a shared ethos, and thus they are implicitly normalising. Viewed in terms of its controls, therefore, the learning organisation presents a systemic paradox. The soft power that is employed to produce autonomous, proactive, sociable subjects – "change agents" or "net-workers" – is ultimately a normalising power, in that it promotes the standardisation of values, ends and ethos.

Such an analysis seems to give lie to the claim – often encountered at the "boosterish" end of the business and management literature – that the conditions of work in post-industrial organisations call for "insurgent" subjectivities – workers who 'do not take orders and mistrust authority'.[3] Rather, it would seem that individuals in these organisations have so deeply internalised controls that they have come to enact them spontaneously under the guise of autonomous human creativity. There is a perverse beauty to these post-industrial control techniques, which normalise individuals precisely by granting them their freedom – the freedom to achieve their identity in pursuit of organisational goals.

Notwithstanding this critique, it would be a mistake to cast the creative organisation as a colony of drones. While we may question the inflated claims of learning organisation theorists,[4] it is clear that the changing conditions of competition in post-industrial capitalist environments over the past twenty or so years have demanded an increased level of innovation and flexibility on the part of organisations. Technological and geopolitical developments, in the second half of the twentieth century, decisively challenged the equilibrium of Fordist-Keynesian competition, radicalising global economics and replacing relative stability with a market-driven flux (see Harvey, 1990; Appelbaum and Blatt, 1994; Castells, 1996). We believe that, ultimately, learning organisation theory represents a pragmatic response to these changes. We are far from the regimented and inflexible regimes of twentieth century industrial production, and equally far from the "docile bodies" of the Fordist-Taylorist factory (Foucault, 1991).

Granting that learning organisations are genuinely committed to the promotion of innovation, however, only makes the paradox of control more puzzling. The power that produces 'change agents' is a normalising one. Yet this normalising power is designed to give rise to genuine processes of innovation and change. The paradox is compounded: control is both normalising and facilitative of change.

This paper seeks to resolve the paradox of control by developing a transdisciplinary theory of the biopolitics of learning organisations. Section 1 introduces the learning organisation, presenting it as an historical event emerging within a specific economic, political and technological context. Section 2 provides a closer examination of the role of HR controls in learning organisations in order to clarify the paradox of control. Section 3 draws on the work of Foucault, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, to resolve – or better, reproblematise – this paradox. Our aim is to show that this paradox is, in fact, an enabling one.

9 Our argument is as follows. We call the total set of discourses, practices and techniques that generate communal values, common ends and a shared ethos within an organisation the regime of "major" biopolitical control. In contemporary organisations, a major regime of control coordinates, inspires and facilitates formal and informal modes of team activity, producing the normalised bodies and minds required for flexible network production. But major biopolitics is not the seat of organisation learning, nor does it produce organisational change. Major biopolitics is simply the "steering system" of the learning organisation. Organisational learning and change, instead, emerge out of the tension or dynamic that is produced by the major biopolitical regime. This dynamic – the material expression of the paradox of control – provides the generative conditions for the emergence of modes of "minor" biopolitics, the creative "cutting edge" of the corporate biopolitical system.[5]

What is a Learning Organisation?

10 In the industrial capitalism of the early twentieth century, firms derived competitive advantage from economies of scale and scope. As a consequence, small groups of oligopolists were able to dominate major industrial markets and standardise their product ranges to capture scale savings (Chandler, 1992). The model of organisation that dominated this period was grounded in diagnostic control and notions of punctuated equilibrium (Giglioni and Bedeian, 1974). Competition was a 'war of position' won by 'building and defending market share in clearly defined product or market segments' (Stalk et al., 1992).

11 In the latter part of the twentieth century, rapid technological developments ruptured market equilibrium by facilitating new forms of competition based on customisation and agility. In the manufacturing industries, microprocessor-based technologies reduced the cost advantages of mass production (Appelbaum and Blatt, 1994). Further down the production-to-consumption "value chain", advances in data analysis and communications technologies created new sources of potential advantage such as improved market responsiveness and supply chain efficiency (Stalk et al., 1992). These technological developments both miniaturised the nature and globalised the scope of competition. On the one hand, new information and communications technologies (ICTs) allowed competitors to target specific stages of a firm's production-to-consumption value chain (Evans and Wurster, 2000). This initiated the demand for continuous control at all levels of the organisation and drove diagnostic reporting systems deep into the organisational fabric. On the other hand, advances in communications enabled the coordination of trans-national networks and supply chains, globalising the scope of competition. This was aided and abetted, through the 1980s and 1990s, by a neo-liberal shift in international politics and economics that touted fiscal conservatism and "free" market competition as the fundamental sources of national prosperity.

12 In combination, these political, economic and technological changes resulted in an exponential increase in the complexity and overall uncertainty of the business environment. Firms can no longer draw up long-term plans on the basis of recent history or linear trends. Instead they must constantly monitor market signals and competitor moves, be alert to the possibility of sudden seismic shifts and be prepared to adjust their behaviour accordingly (Stacey, 1992, 1996; Kaufmann, 1995; Evans and Wurster, 2000). The emergence of learning organisation theory in the late 1980s can be understood as a pragmatic response to this new competitive environment.[6] Learning organisation theorists advocate replacing mechanistic conceptions of organisations with models that characterise them as complex information processing systems. Crucially, systems must be organised from the bottom up – it is the co-ordinated activities of workers that determines the structure of the system, not an exhaustive plan or program imposed from above.

13 While various versions of this theory have been in circulation since the late 1980s, the canonical accounts are generally considered to be Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline (1990) and Mike Pedler, John Burgoyne and Tom Boydell's The Learning Company (1991). Senge's book was an

international bestseller, and has had significant influence on management practice (Symon, 2002). The work of Pedlar et al. was based on an extensive empirical study and is generally accorded greater academic significance. In the mid-1980s, the United Kingdom's Manpower Services Commission retained Pedler et al. to conduct a review of new models of organisation. This study was motivated by a concern that the organisational structures and management techniques that dominated British industry were a potential source of competitive disadvantage in the global economy. The resulting Learning Company Report (Pedler et al., 1988) aimed to provide British industry with a prescription for enhanced competitiveness. Pedler et al. claimed that this could be achieved through practices facilitating employee empowerment and the establishment of a more flexible, harmonious workplace.

14 We find in the work of Senge and Pedler et al. a set of core principles that define the learning organisation as an ideal form (after Symon, 2002). By way of introduction to the concept of the learning organisation, let us divide these principles into three groups: those pertaining to corporate values, perceived ends and prescribed ethos respectively. What unites these three sets of principles is their common concern for the "human fabric" of the learning organisation. Having defined the learning organisation as an ideal form, we will go on to discuss the regime of controls that work this human fabric, so to identify the implied paradox in this system of control and the possibility of its circumnavigation.

- Values. The first principle of the learning organisation is that this organisation must be built on shared values and visions. In the face of continuous competitive threats, workers and management are called on to work together to ensure the ongoing survival and success of the organisation. It is not enough for employees to simply work side by side for the sake of equitable remuneration. Workers must actively seek to improve the organisation – this must become their highest value and goal.
- Ends. The second principle is that the learning organisation must be its own incentive, in that it provides employees with a rich and rewarding learning environment. It is vital that workers perceive the organisational environment as an end in itself – a site for relational development, personal discovery and enhancement. Learning organisation theorists argue that in an environment of market-driven flux, the fate of the organisation is ultimately in workers' hands. Constantly changing conditions demand the proactive engagement of workers in the perpetual transformation and improvement of the organisation. In particular, the tacit knowledge of frontline employees must be mobilised for the benefit of the organisation (Nonaka, 1991: 96-97).[7] Since frontline employees are typically best placed to identify new markets, new product opportunities and dominant emergent technologies, the learning organisations' culture, structure and processes must be set up to allow them to generate knowledge on these matters, to communicate this information upwards and thereby challenge the status quo.[8] The first step towards achieving this end is to ensure that workers view the organisation not only as a site for personal advancement but for self-discovery and development. Ideally, the ends of the organisation and workers' personal ends will be synonymous.
- Ethos. In addition to values and ends, learning organisations require workers to assume an ethos of proactivity and self-development. As changes in the external environment place new demands on the organisation and its members, it is necessary that employees are motivated to continually seek out development opportunities both on a personal and organisational level. The virtue that links personal and organisational development is the spirit of entrepreneurship, manifested in an interpersonal engagement directed towards innovative solutions for common problems. Creative organisations function best when they are driven by the desire of workers to engage the organisational structure, to prove themselves capable of intervening in established processes and of effecting positive transformation.

15 Advocates of learning organisations typically present them as a utopian scenario – as Michaela Driver puts it, a 'workplace paradise for employees resulting in phenomenal organisational performance and success' (Driver, 2002: 1). Critics, however, are less convinced. Some argue that the most powerful members of an organisation will inevitably dominate the learning process and determine the ends the organisation will pursue (Coopey, 1995; Easterby-Smith, 1997; Symon, 2002). Even in the most egalitarian organisations, it is said, learning that would genuinely challenge established norms will be declared off-limits (Hendry, 1996). The insistence that all members of the

organisation constantly pursue personal development has been depicted as less a matter of becoming highly skilled and 'more about being highly moulded into what the employer wants the employee to be' (Symon, 2002: 166, after Du Gay, 1996). Similarly, the 'community of learners' has been portrayed as a nexus of coercive, normalising forces that can result in painful employee experiences (Rifkin and Fulop, 1997; McHugh et al., 1998).

16 These critical perspectives appear to amount to a comprehensive rejection of the idea that learning organisations emancipate workers and encourage genuine innovation and diversity. The practices of learning organisations are seen instead as manifestations of a normalising power that aggressively shapes the identities of their members. Such criticisms bring the paradox of control in learning organisations into stark relief. To what extent do learning organisations genuinely promote freedom and creativity, and to what extent do they promote conformity? While we agree with these critics that learning organisations exert a normalising power over their employees and concede that this can be a source of pain, we do not believe that this normalisation precludes the possibility of organisational creativity and change. On the contrary, it is precisely from out of these acts of normalisation that the conditions for creative insurgency emerge. There is an immanent tension between social-affective normalisation and the exigency of creation in learning organisations. This tension, we shall argue, provides the grounds for the emergence of modes of minor biopolitics, triggering genuine processes of organisational change.

Control and Creative Organisations

17 To prepare for this argument, let us now transfer the discussion to a practical level, and consider the kinds of controls that are used to enable organisational learning. We will utilise once again the division between values, ends and ethos that we have applied in the analysis of the principles of the learning organisation. This time, however, we are interested in the mechanisms and techniques that are employed to put these principles into action. With a view to further specifying the paradox of control and its implications for the learning organisation, we are particularly interested in identifying the normalising effects of these mechanisms and techniques.

- Values. The most obvious means of generating an appropriate set of values in a body of workers is through the manipulation of the wage regime. Deleuze argues that in the Fordist factory, the science of remuneration sought to establish 'an equilibrium between the highest possible production and the lowest possible wages' (Deleuze, 1995: 179). The deregulation of labour markets through the 1980s and 1990s, concomitant with the rise of contractualisation and "precarious" labour, was part of a strategy to shatter this homeostasis and the system of values it produced. By depriving individuals of the security of a guaranteed income, and by introducing 'a deeper level of modulation into all wages', corporations instilled 'an inexorable rivalry' into the workplace – a rivalry, moreover, 'presented as healthy competition, a wonderful motivation that sets individuals against each other and…[divides] each within himself' (Deleuze, 1995: 179). Through the manipulation of the wage regime, the pain of precarious labour is mobilised to produce hyper-engaged and competitive subjectivities. This form of subjectivation is exemplified in creative industries such as film-making in which the radical insecurity of short-term, project-based employment leads the lowest-ranked workers to treat each role as an opportunity to display their boundless commitment and capacity for learning (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). In a workplace environment every bit as hazardous and uncertain as the wider realm of capitalist competition, workers tend to assume values and visions similar to those of corporate management.

18 A second way to use wage regimes to inspire appropriate values is through the deployment of financial incentives such as stock-option packages and performance-based remuneration. High-growth technology companies, for example, offer workers relatively low salaries plus stock options packages that can yield huge rewards if the company prospers. These systems are ostensibly intended to give workers a sense of "ownership" in the company. Perceived in light of systems of control, they can be seen as value-inducing measures that work to coordinate workers' personal sense of evaluation with the general interests of the company. By apportioning to workers a share of the risk taken on by investors, stock options directly link the threat of corporate failure to workers' sense of self-preservation, presenting them with a vested interest in furthering the fortunes of the company.

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A subtler means employed in learning organisations to instill appropriate values is the establishment of a pervasive organisational culture. Numerous techniques are used to achieve this culture, including the definition and promotion of a clear and powerful "corporate mission", team-building exercises, various formal and informal publications (company newspapers, zines, etc.) and events. Driver suggests that a well-defined organisational culture ultimately serves as an even 'stronger and more effective control system' than the rigid processes of performance monitoring and reward found in traditional organisations (Driver, 2002: 3). By generating idealised images of the work environment, representations of organisational culture serve to promote fundamental norms of attitude and behaviour coordinated about a predetermined set of corporate values. Employees "choose" to identify with this culture in order to be "part of the team".

We should note that the kind of normalisation that is generated by a corporate culture is not a "disciplinary" mode of normalisation. Disciplinary normalisation, as defined by Foucault, derives from repetitive exercise – drill or "dressage" – applied to the materiality of bodies. Discipline dissolves and forges habits, creates capacities and generally optimises the body as a useful resource. Control, on the other hand, rarely directly treats the body as such. Whereas discipline drills norms into individuals, control normalises in the process of setting individuals free. As Manuel Castells maintains, regimes of informational production call for self-empowered and autonomous workers to deliver the full promise of their productive potential (Castells, 1996: 257). It is clearly counter-productive in this context to discipline workers. Instead of moulding bodies, the attitudes and desires of self-directing subjects must be modulated and controlled. While the forms of subjectivity produced within regimes of control are infinitely more fluid and transformable than those produced within disciplinary regimes, we believe it is correct to say that they represent normalised subject-forms nonetheless. Such normalisation transpires through the gradual modulation and standardisation of behaviour. It unfolds on the level of affect and desire; it is manifested, as Deleuze claims, in 'a strange craving to be "motivated"', the pursuit of 'special courses and continuing education' (Deleuze, 1995: 182).

- Ends. To encourage employees to freely mobilise tacit knowledge for the benefit of the organisation, it is important that individuals are convinced that their personal ends and the ends of the organisation coincide. To this end, learning organisations make it their first end to promote a work environment that facilitates ongoing relational development and self-discovery (Senge, 1990). The task of establishing such an environment typically falls to the HR department in the organisation. The training sessions and team-building exercises hosted by HR not only have the end of equipping workers with the technical skills required for their day to day labours, but of facilitating the kind of rich relational fabric that is required for flexible network production. Beyond its essential function of binding networks together, this relational field serves as a dynamic plane of affective production and consumption. Relationality is not only the condition of informational production, but also an important source of workers' happiness and sense of well-being. As such, this biopolitically-mediated field functions as the nexus of individual and organisational ends, and the nucleus of flexible network production.

HR training programmes produce "net-workers" – workers able to thrive within a complex, ever-changing web of relations and contacts. This training crucially involves taking on board certain social-affective norms necessary for the functioning of networks. These affective norms play an instrumental role in the construction and maintenance of networks of communication – thus they are an end of the learning organisation. But affectivity also has intrinsic benefits for workers in that it assists in forming relations, bonds and intimacies. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put a political spin on this point (to which we shall return): 'What affective labour produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 293). The learning organisation would be incapable of functioning without its fundamental affective charge, where the intelligence and emotions of workers are indistinguishable from the operation of network production itself.[9]

- Ethos. Creative organisations are ideally driven by a desire on the part of workers to proactively engage and transform the operations of the organisation. To achieve this state of affairs, workers in these organisations are encouraged to assume an ethos of self-development based on a norm of perpetual self-improvement. As Senge would say, employees are set on a 'life-long quest' for 'personal mastery' (Senge, 1990). In addition to more obvious measures, such as financial incentives and review processes, which create a demand for personal development,

this norm is created through the management of the identity of workers – or more precisely, through the '[incorporation of] managerial discourses into narratives of self-identity' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2000: 622). The control of narrative-identity is an essential technique in the normalisation of corporate ethos. As Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott remind us, it is important not to assume that workers are merely passive, malleable objects in these processes (Alvesson and Willmott, 2000: 636-637). The ethos that is required for network production is inseparable from new technologies of the self, which enable active individuals 'to give their lives a specifically entrepreneurial form' (Lemke, 2001: 202).

22 Technologies of the self are merely one aspect of a complex "major" regime of biopolitical control. This is a regime that encourages individuals to fashion themselves as proactive, perpetually self-improving subjects. With the normalisation of personal ethos, this regime of control is complete. In preparing themselves for perpetual self-improvement, workers actively produce the human resource that is required for ongoing organisational learning, willingly fashioning themselves as the enabling elements of self-deconstructing systems.

23 Are learning organisations simply normalising machines? If so, how could they foster creativity? Some would argue that those who promote and implement organisational learning structures are not genuinely concerned with such matters. On this account, the paradoxical presence of normalising controls in the training regime for corporate technicity and culture reveals the emptiness of the learning organisation rhetoric. The appeal to creativity is seen as nothing more than a decoy – serving to distract us, perhaps, from the fact that the adoption of team-based "learning" practices promotes self-managing workers, thus preparing the way for the replacement of middle managers with costless coercive controls.

Contrary to this position, we will take an affirmative view. We believe that the tension in learning organisations between the exigency to create and the processes of normalisation that are required to facilitate this creation amounts to a genuine paradox. However, we also believe that real processes of collective innovation are driven by the paradox of control. The paradox of control is generative – it gives rise to collective, creative insurgencies. Learning and insurgency in creative organisations go hand in hand – both are inspired by the paradox of control.

Biopolitics, Learning and Insurgency

25 To establish this argument, we need to introduce a new theoretical vocabulary into our discussion: the Foucaultian discourse of "biopolitics". In a series of groundbreaking studies through the late 1970s, Foucault associated the rise of the modern administrative state with the development of a new mode of power over life: "biopower". Unlike the sovereign power that preceded it, which assumed a transcendent relation to subjects, wielding power by taking life or letting live, biopower engages life from the inside, infiltrating bodies, their capacities, habits, affects and dispositions, through innumerable disciplinary practices and micropolitical controls. The biopolitical strategy is to 'incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimise, and organise the forces under it: [biopower] is a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them' (Foucault, 1990: 136). Instead of taking life, biopower places it in an organised system, fosters, nurtures and exploits it.

26 Foucault's concept of the relationship between power and life in modern societies casts the politics of capitalist production in a new light. In particular, the biopolitical perspective disrupts the historical necessity of the "working class". The proletariat did not spring fully formed from relations of production – they are the product of disciplinary-biopolitical relations that are presupposed by the capitalist apparatus. Works such as Discipline and Punish (1991) analyse the technical and institutional means by which the proletariat qua productive subjectivity has been produced. To create productive subjectivities, Foucault claims,

27 > an operation is necessary, or a complex series of operations, by which men are effectively…bound to the production apparatus for which they labour…. A web of microscopic, capillary political power had to be established at the level of man's very existence, attaching men to the productive apparatus, while making them into agents of production, into workers. (Foucault, 2000b: 86)

28 This same rule applies to contemporary learning organisations. Construed in a Foucaultian light, the mechanisms and techniques that we have discussed in Section 2 can be seen as biopolitical controls – a 'complex series of operations' that serve to bind individuals to the productive apparatus, that foster, optimise and organise those elements of human life required for flexible

network production. Through the standardisation of specific elements of life (values, ends, ethos), biopolitical controls produce specific forms of identity and normalised types. To isolate this biopolitical regime (together with its human product), we call the whole operation a regime of "major" biopolitical control. In contemporary learning organisations, regimes of major biopolitical control create functional and motivated workers dedicated to productive activities. Since these activities centrally involve teamwork and fluid communications, it is particularly important that the major regime fosters the somatic-affective conditions necessary for the collective production of knowledge.

29 How does the concept of major biopolitical control shine new light on the paradox of control? To answer this question, we must consider the specific affective register of this paradox. The paradox of control is experienced by workers as an abiding tension between the "rules of the game" (implicit in the values, ends and ethos of the corporate culture) and the overarching exigency of creativity. Viewed relative to the logic of the major biopolitical regime, this tension appears as a surplus, a problematic remainder. Viewed as part of the overall economy of the corporate biopolitical system, however, it is seen as an origin – a dynamic source of energy with huge implications for organisational politics and culture. It is from out of this tension, this surplus, that genuine moments of collective innovation arise. Through the construction of autonomous, proactive, sociable bodies in a context that confounds the genuine expression of creativity, major biopolitical control produces an incorporeal fabric of insurgent energies and desires, thereby nurturing the emergence of minor biopolitical planes that self-organise, innovate and produce.

30 Up to now, we have conceived of workers as normalised individuals. Workers are normalised as individuals through a regime of major biopolitical control. At this point, we need to shift focus from the individuation to the "dividuation" of workers. It is by becoming-dividual that workers comprise minor biopolitical planes of collective activity. Deleuze was first to associate processes of dividuation with societies of control (Deleuze, 1995: 179-180). We understand his argument as an extension of the theory of "minoritarianism" that he developed in his work with Guattari. Our distinction between major and minor biopolitics corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between "majoritarian" and "minoritarian" forms of life. For Deleuze and Guattari, a majoritarian, or major, form of life comprises a type or standard by which all other forms of life are evaluated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 105). In opposition to major norms, Deleuze and Guattari affirm processes of "becoming-minoritarian", involving subliminal flows of mass intelligence and desire that rend us from major norms and carry us away on "lines of flight" (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 105-106, 291-293).

31 In parallel with this argument, we understand a major biopolitics as a regime of behavioural modification and enhancement that produces exemplary, normalised types. Yet, even as major biopolitics constructs the types required for network production, it fosters a proactive insurgency and desire for change, and thereby prepares the ground for the spontaneous emergence of informal constellations of workers that band together in pursuit of goals that are neither established nor sanctioned by management. Modes of minor biopolitics emerge out of the immanent tension established by the major regime of control. This tension sunders the constants of normalisation, fractures the subjectivities of workers, and produces spontaneous moments of collective innovation.

32 What is a minor biopolitics? One way of understanding this concept is to compare it to Hardt and Negri's concept of the "multitude". Hardt and Negri define a multitude as 'an open network of singularities that links together on the basis of the common they [the singularities] share and the common they produce' (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 129). To illustrate this idea, Hardt and Negri refer to the phenomenon of 'economic innovation in networks'. Innovation, they argue, 'necessarily takes place in common.... We have to rid ourselves of the notion that innovation relies on the genius of the individual.... If there is an act of genius, it is the genius of the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 338).

33 There is clear proximity between the concepts of the multitude and minor biopolitics. Both concepts refer to biopolitical phenomena. Hardt and Negri understand (minor) "biopolitics" in terms of Marx's notion of "living labour". In the post-industrial economy, they argue, living labour has overspilled the factory walls and become immanent to society, generating an abundance of productive relationships through various forms of collaborative praxis (see Hardt and Negri 2004:

95). Qua biopolitical phenomena, both the multitude and minor biopolitics emerge on the basis of a somatic-affective fabric knit together by a common desire for innovation. Both are directed towards "flight", or escape, from the impasses of capitalist production; both represent a kind of "exodus", fired by the dream of genuine innovation and the radical transformation of circumstances (Virno, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004).

34 Yet, while it points us in the right direction, the concept of the multitude is ultimately too expansive for our purposes. This concept is ideal for theorising transversal movements in a context of radical social, cultural and political difference. But it is out of place in the normalised environments of the learning organisation. Whereas the multitude arises on the basis of radical difference (coordinated by that held in common), a minor biopolitics emerges out of a regulated sameness to establish a difference in the moment of innovation. More decisively, there is a metaphysical dimension to this concept that is absent from (or at least not required for) the concept of a minor biopolitics (see Rayner, 2005). Far from an expression of the "always-already" of constituent power (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 221-222), a minor biopolitics is an historically and institutionally determinate figure arising out of the political dynamics of post-industrial production. Whereas the multitude is sui generis, a minor biopolitics is a systemic aberration.

35 A superior strategy for understanding the idea of a minor biopolitics is to start with the normalised individual and to ask how this individual is transformed in its engagement in minor biopolitical activity. Individuals in learning organisations derive their identity as individuals from the machinations of major biopolitical control. Despite the collective conditions of work in these organisations, individuals tend to cling to their sense of identity as a prized possession. With the emergence of a minor biopolitics, however, these identities are shattered and dissolved into collective modes of experience. The individual becomes "dividual": an emergent subject-form that is shared in common with others (see Deleuze, 1995: 180).

36 To illuminate the process of becoming dividual, let us imagine the fluid interplay of communications that comprises the day-to-day labour of net-workers. We must recall that these workers are stricken by the incompatibility of the demand for innovation with the normalisation of the major biopolitical regime. The net-worker endures the impossibility of genuine creation on an immanent basis. Imagine the interest, therefore, when in the play of communications, they acquire the sense that something new is taking shape – something inchoate and ill-defined, perhaps, but a possibility nonetheless – a chance for innovation. A ripple of excitement runs across the surface of the network, registered in synapses and nerves, the flutter of pulses, the tensing of muscles. Well before an actual community of individuals has emerged to bring this perceived opportunity to life, a community is established on the virtual level – a community of common desire and affect focused about the potential for innovation.

37 This virtual collective is a minor biopolitics. It is crucial to note how the concept of minor biopolitics transforms our understanding of informational work and workers. Strictly speaking, in being drawn into a minor biopolitics, the individual ceases to be an individual. Individuals become-dividual, assuming a consciousness that is divided within itself and shared with others. A minor biopolitics is a cluster of dividuals – a plateau of technologically mediated desire that is itself pre-individual, a singularity (see Deleuze, 1990: 52). In the science of non-linear dynamics, a singularity is the preferred position of a complex system, such that the system will evolve towards this position unless it is constrained by other factors (see DeLanda, 2002: 15). To become-dividual is to be drawn into the basin of attraction of a virtual singularity. A mass of individuals becoming-dividual, gravitating on a pre-reflective level towards a common point of view: this is the definition of a minor biopolitics. These virtual formations, which essentially operate outside the control of management, are the cutting edge of contemporary organisational learning systems.[10]

38 We are now in a position to define the operation of the corporate biopolitical regime as a whole. To lend focus to this account, it will help to contrast our view with Deleuze and Guattari's vision of capitalist production. Deleuze and Guattari argue that capitalism is defined by a minoritarian tendency towards 'absolute deterritorialisation' (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 453-473). In a parallel manner, we argue that, in a system of competition defined by market-driven flux, in which profits are derived from the possession of transitory relative advantage as opposed to stable positions of superiority, the capitalist is called upon to nurture rather than repress innovation and difference. Far from claiming that the normalising aspects of major regimes of control work to

cancel out processes of collective innovation, we perceive them as the preconditions of these processes. Increasingly, management is learning how to manipulate major biopolitical regimes so as to nurture the tensions that give rise to productive minor insurgency.

39 Deleuze and Guattari are thus completely right, in our view, to emphasise the deterritorialising logic of informational capitalist production. Their mistake is to emphasise this logic of deterritorialisation at the expense of detailing the technological and biopolitical systems used to facilitate deterritorialisation. At this point, we side with Foucault against Deleuze. As Hardt and Negri complain, Deleuze and Guattari discover the immanence of minoritarian production only to articulate it 'superficially and ephemerally, as a chaotic, indeterminate horizon marked by the ungraspable event' (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 28). They forget that absolute deterritorialisation is the asymptote of capitalism's lines of flight, representing both its underlying tendency and its ultimate constraint.[11] The limit of absolute deterritorialisation lies in the strategies and systems that make it possible. Pursuing this intuition, we have sought to recommend a post-Foucaultian perspective on the generative operation of major biopolitical control.

40 Our argument brings to light the "politics of immanence" in contemporary capitalist organisations. Leading edge corporations aim not only to cultivate minoritarian becomings (since these are the source of differentiation, innovation and value creation) but also to constrain them (since taken to the extreme, they threaten to overthrow the organisational regime). This dynamic marks out a singular site of struggle in contemporary organisations. Learning organisations proceed from crisis to crisis; wherever net-workers grasp the value of their tacit production and mobilise knowledge to their advantage, the role and legitimacy of management is called into question. Clearly, capitalism has purchased its flexibility at the price of a significant risk. By promoting the constant modulation of systems while seeking to preserve an overall metastability, corporate capitalism aspires to a state of 'controlled schizophrenia' (see Hardt, n.d.). We should not be surprised to witness unforeseen reactions resulting from such a volatile state of affairs.

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Notes

[1] See Senge (1990), Pedler et al. (1991), Casey (1993), Chawla and Renesch (1995), Baets (1998), also the journal The Learning Organisation (Bradford: MCB University Press, 1999).

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[2] In a sense, the learning organisation represents the 'democratisation' of the business unit, insofar as the nature and direction of the business is determined by frontline staff. It would be a mistake, however, to see in this the emergence of a politically horizontal organisation. Commentators on "horizontal organisations" all too often elide the theme of power in business organisations – it is as if power did not exist! But a determined ignorance does not detract from the existence of disparate relations. What we are witnessing is not the dissolution of power in the business organisation but the constitution of an original political dynamic. Democratic powers, in contemporary corporations, have been incorporated within a new productive system – this is the key to our concept of the learning organisation.

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[3] Per Bäckius cites the viewpoint of an anonymous project manager: '"What you must be fully aware of...is that we are now dealing with a new individual – a new consumer and a new employee. The new individuals do not take orders and mistrust authority. They are in charge of their own lives and make their own choices. They take crap from no one. You have to design your business as well as your organisation in accordance with their dispositions otherwise they will leave you. This is the most significant change we are witnessing today. If you were born after 1968 you are a part of this, you are the new individuals'" (2002: 282-282).

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[4] For a critical perspective on this literature, see Thompson and O'Connell-Davidson (1995), Alvesson and Willmott (2002), and Symon (2002). These commentators contend that the discourse of "turbulence" that underwrites the call for ongoing organisational change is a construction that has been used to legitimate the imposition of new controls or the silencing of worker dissent (Symon, 2002: 163).

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[5] This argument provides a theoretical underpinning for the accounts of collective creativity common in the business and management literature. Michael Fradette and Steve Michaud, for example, argue that leading corporations today are specifically designed to facilitate "market events", in which autonomous teams of workers, uninstructed by management, seize on 'unpredictable market opportunities' and together create 'a totally new kind of product or service'. Fradette and Michaud claim: 'The event begins when the active, inquiring mind of a worker spots an opportunity. It takes wing as the worker forms an ad hoc team of colleagues to pursue and refine the idea and realise its potential. They make it happen. They create new ways to operate....They innovate with suppliers, partners, and competitors. They invent new businesses' (Fradette and Michaud, 2000: 207). The concept of a dynamic relationship between major and minor biopolitics also provides an explanatory perspective on the interrelation of what Ralph Stacey calls 'legitimate' and 'shadow' systems in organisations. Stacey argues: 'Every organization must perform a set of primary tasks, tasks that members must jointly carry out if... they are to attract sufficient support from other systems they need to interact with. To perform its primary tasks an organization must have a system for carrying them out;... this is the purpose of an organization's legitimate system with its dominant schema. However... people do not come together in organizations simply to perform primary tasks. While they work they also socialise with each other to form a shadow system. They may use this system to sabotage the primary task or to constitute a learning community that assists the legitimate system to function in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty by circumventing its rules....The legitimate and shadow systems clearly interact within one another. Indeed, I suggest that the basic dynamics of an organization are determined by the manner in which these two systems interact' (Stacey, 1996: 167-168; our emphasis).

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[6] The "creative industries" (in particular, film production) are commonly cited as prototypical examples of the destabilisation and dis-integration of traditional industry structures (see, for example, DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998; Evans and Wurster, 2000). The decline of the oligopolistic Hollywood studio system in the 1950s and the corresponding emergence of project-based production ventures are seen as precursors of changes that would later occur in other industries. Where an increasingly complex competitive environment forces firms to rely on employee creativity, more flexible organisational structures become essential for survival.

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[7] As Baets claims, 'tacit knowledge... is the real value adding knowledge in a company' (Baets, 1998: 44).

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[8] A recent interview (personal communication) conducted with a senior manager at a global software company sheds light on the specific attitude and social skills required for this task. Asked about the most essential requirement for success in the organisation, he replied: 'A lot of it you would summarise as relationship and people skills and being able to manage up...."Managing up" means you have high levels of communication with your managers and their managers, you explain your rationale really clearly to people and you really genuinely make yourself open to feedback from people. Those sorts of skills allow you to have the sorts of conversations with people that allow you to change things'.

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[9] Paolo Virno claims that professionalism today is 'nothing other than a generic sociality, a capacity to form interpersonal relationships, an aptitude for mastering information and

interpreting linguistic messages, and an ability to adjust to continuous and sudden reconversions' (Virno, 1996: 248).

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[10] Hence Baets is correct: 'A company's attempt should be to identify the emergent faster....The interaction between the authorized and the emergent creates a "generative strategy": this is the sense making process of the company. This way of looking to a company considers the organisation as a platform, rather than as a (fixed) structure' (Baets, 1998: 207).

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[11] Deleuze and Guattari are not unaware of this point – they simply underplay it. See Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 33-35).

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