

## Introduction

'Moved by the god of song, I set out to commemorate the heroes of old who sailed the good ship Argo up the Straits into the Black Sea and between the Cyanean Rocks in quest of the Golden Fleece', wrote Apollonius of Rhodes (1971: 35) in the opening passage of his story *The Voyage of Argo*, telling of the adventures of Jason and his companions. It was one of the greatest epic tales of antiquity, though its protagonist differed significantly from those of its predecessors, for Jason was not a hero endowed with divine powers, but an ordinary man. He did not throw himself into a fight, but held back, relying on his better endowed companions to fight his cause. Jason was *amechanos*, one without resources, and knowing this, he was at times despondent (Rieu 1971: 15). However, he still went on with his mission and, despite his own limitations, was able to negotiate his fate with the help of his friends, his lover's witchcraft and, when necessary, by rejecting the code of honour, for which he was called an anti-hero (De Forest 1994). The protagonists of my book were given different derogatory labels, like undocumented migrants, petty traders, illegal workers or smugglers, but like the mythical anti-hero they were just ordinary people, *amechanos*, trying to make the best of the situation they were in. They were the pioneers of non-vertical social organization in the times before the virtual revolution, the expansion of cheap airlines and the opening of borders across Europe. Even before the fall of the Iron Curtain, they patiently and relentlessly crossed the world in search of economic betterment, political freedom, adventure and happiness, despite the Cold War, its borders, barriers and restrictive migration policies. They were the Argonauts of our time.

In Europe they travelled mostly by land, using the cheapest possible forms of transport, including train, coach, bus and bicycle, along time-worn, well-known trading routes. It was on the 'Middle Route' connecting Moscow, Warsaw and Berlin, past the industrial areas of the German Ruhr, the French Pas de Calais and going further on to London, that I realized the significance of the informal links developed by these travellers. It was a bitterly cold winter, the temperature having fallen below minus 30°C. I was sitting in a hall in an important rail hub in the west of Poland, waiting for a train from Moscow to West Berlin. The waiting hall was unheated, scruffy and dirty beyond human imagination, but since this was the only shelter, all the waiting travellers – about a hundred of them – had squeezed into this tiny room to escape from the biting wind. People were standing along the walls shoulder to shoulder, staying close to each other to keep warm, or sitting on the few benches, eating and talking to keep themselves from falling asleep. Several dogs were running around, begging for food. As there was no ventilation, the stench of dogs' faeces mixed with human breath smelling of onion, garlic and vodka was unbearable, but there was nowhere else to go. Two Russian-speaking men next to me, looking like close friends, were eating bread with fat, and I heard them complaining that because of the long delay, they would soon run short of food and drink. I offered them hot tea from my thermos, at which they laughed: it was home-made moonlighter about seventy per cent strong that they were running short of. I shared my food and Polish vodka with them, and they shared their stories with me. It appeared that one of them was a Russian, while his friend was a Chechen. They had met accidentally in Moscow as they were getting on a train and had travelled together all the way through Warsaw to the German border to sell their goods to Poles, who sold them to Germans on the Polish side of the border, and they were coming back home, only to return next month. 'But the Chechens hate Russians! How come you travel together?', I wondered, surprised by their friendship even more than by the sight of an alcohol-consuming Chechen. 'It's them in the government – they want us to fight each other, but when we travel, we normal people, we're all brothers', replied the Chechen. 'Yes, here we're brothers', laughed the Russian, hugging the Chechen.

Even though this brotherhood might have been to a great extent forged by the unsavoury liquor they were consuming, it was still there and was an observable social fact, for to drink together they had first to establish some sort of understanding, despite their countries being involved in a conflict which soon turned into open war. And in the cold and stench of the waiting room I optimistically thought that,

perhaps after all, one could find a formula for the social glue that was responsible for cooperation between social actors. The behaviour of these informal actors seemed to hold the answer to the question of how to overcome differences and link people across the dividing lines of conflicting interests. I thought that if the scholars of the social could include informality in mainstream research and, following the call of Nietzsche, the father of horizontal thought, stop judging its 'ugliness' and accept it as an inherent part of the human condition,<sup>1</sup> they might learn better the content of horizontal links.

The present book is the result of longitudinal research into the informal networks of migrant petty traders and informal workers, during which I have shared their quotidian lives and observed their informal transactions. I have travelled with them on their trading routes, visited them in their homes and shared their hardships, sorrows and joys. I have observed how these ordinary people glued Europe together, reshaping its social space and creating the transnational and trans-ethnic links along which, apart from goods and services, they redistributed knowledge, wealth and power in a horizontal way, even before the rise of the 'virtual community'.<sup>2</sup> I witnessed their resourcefulness, resilience and sheer joy of life, despite their hardships and often dire circumstances. I came to consider myself as one of them – not a scholar, but just a human being. And I came to understand that the normative distinctions that allow 'wrong' informal actors to be differentiated from those who were 'right' were not necessary valid, for I saw that those who were deemed 'right' were as much involved in informal activities as the stigmatized others. And since the actors described in my book belong chronologically to the 'primitive' social reality before the virtual revolution, understood as the switch to the internet and satellite-based technologies of communication,<sup>3</sup> their horizontal organization precedes the horizontality of the virtual society. By chance, and thanks to the persuasion of Georg Elwert, then a professor at the Institute of Ethnology in Berlin, who convinced me to pursue this fieldwork, I had a rare opportunity to observe informal networks in slow motion, when the horizontal links were still being made mostly through physical action, through the actual movement of bodies, through travel and migration, rather than expanding within a remarkably short span of time via virtual contacts.

The research method was fieldwork with participant observation. My first observations of informal networks started in 1980 in the southern border area between the then East Germany and Poland, formerly part of the medieval *Via Regia*, and continued later on the so-called '*Kolo*' (ring), a circular trading route running from Poland through

Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria to Turkey or Greece, and back to Poland through Yugoslavia, Austria, West Germany and finally East Germany. Since 1987 I have conducted systematic research on the so-called Middle Route, en route between different locations in Poland and West Germany, as well as in these locations. Among other research activities, the fieldwork involved regular train journeys (up to two weekly) between West Berlin and different locations across Poland for six years, as well as car and coach journeys from a small town in western Poland through East Germany to West Berlin, and after 1990 also to the area of Frankfurt am Main. In a period of eighteen years, over 2,000 informal interviews were conducted, plus numerous group discussions regarding the presence of Poles and other migrants in Germany. The research in Germany was regularly updated until 2005, when a year of participant observation began in Spain, involving Russian, Ukrainian and Polish travellers, as well as migrant communities in tourist towns on the route from Przemyśl on the Ukrainian–Polish border to Murcia in the south of Spain. The research in the UK started in 1995 and has continued until 2012. It has included fieldwork in several medium- and small-size towns in England and Scotland, together with regular coach journeys between London and a small town in the west of Poland (up to twice monthly) until March 2005. From 2006 fieldwork was carried out on the planes of cheap airlines and at airports, mostly in the London vicinity, as well as en route to different destinations in Poland. A similar number of interviews (about 2,000) and group discussions were conducted in the UK as in Germany.

The empirical materials used in this book come exclusively from my own fieldwork: other materials were used only where I could verify them by my own experience. The empirical cases I quote come from a period before the current regulations regarding ethical standards were in place, though the highest ethical standards have been adhered to. Since the theme of the research was the informal activities of the actors involved, for ethical reasons which will be discussed in the chapter on methods, the names of the locations in Poland, as well as any information that might identify my informants, including dates, have been changed or otherwise kept confidential. No identifying data have been revealed: pseudonyms have been used for the names of both persons and places, with the exception of large metropolises such as Berlin, Warsaw or London, where the probability of a person disguised under a pseudonym being identified through a description of his or her circumstances is limited. Also, following the best practice of informal economy research, as represented by Gerald Mars (2013), for ethical

reasons the publication of findings regarding activities hidden from the state has been postponed by up to twenty years.

As already mentioned, my first observations in the early 1980s were not systematic, and the notes were not taken *in situ*, but *a posteriori*. However, when, a few years later, I started systematic research into the subject of informal networks employing the standard methods used in academia, including taped interviews, I found that these methods were obstructing my research, for I learned much more about informality in the earlier phase. By making my own mistakes, I discovered that to observe informality I had to go back to the informal methods I had been using at the earlier stage. Also, in looking for a suitable theoretical framework, I discovered that informal social relations have been under-theorized and often wrongly conceptualized. In the discursive space of the social sciences of that time, there was surprisingly little place for the horizontal dimension of phenomena. As with the research methods of the time, the theories were specific to research into verticality, hierarchies, structures, patterns and human groups with definite numbers of members and criteria of belonging. Such works as Manuel Castells' *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Sallie Marston et al.'s 'Human Geography Without Scale' (2005) and Mark Falzon's *Multi-Sited Ethnography* (2009) had not yet been published, and there was no specific guidance for those who were looking for the horizontal aspects of social life. Therefore, I decided to continue my research without any theoretical perspective to guide me and to bias my observation. And when, after over twenty years, I finally decided to finish my research and to write up the findings of my fieldwork, I uncovered a disparity between theory and practice, as if I were doing my research on a different planet from that described by the theoreticians of the social.

I observed human relationships developing in long chains stretching from Beijing via Berlin to Chicago, with links appearing and disappearing spontaneously, without obvious structural reasons, without regard to the boundaries of class, status, professional group, sector, nationality or ethnicity. An uneducated Polish woman from western Poland, who I met on a train, would lead me through her egocentric network to a Russian dignitary in Moscow, an American businessman in Chicago, a native Indian chief in Toronto, an Italian priest in Rome and a Turkish shopkeeper in Berlin. And the extensive network of this single person was only a minor fragment of the whole, of the never-ending network chains. There were no endpoints to such network chains, and each person contributed his or her own connections to the whole. The dignitary in Moscow and the businessman in Chicago each

had their own egocentric networks containing multiple connections, which they were able to activate should this woman need a favour, as did the Indian chief and the Turkish shopkeeper. These chains crossed state borders, ethnic boundaries, class and status distinctions, and they ran across faith groups and occupational sectors; they had no stable structures, nor any distinguishable pattern, and yet they existed empirically. However, I could not find a theory that would account for their unpredictability, the spontaneity of links or the infinite character of the chains of relationships, nor their wide geographical scope. At that point I realized that informal social relations were perceived through the exclusive prism of vertical notions that did not allow their horizontal dimension to be observed, since the whole academic machinery of the social sciences has been constructed for research into forms and hierarchies. The axioms were fixed so as to exclude whatever had no form and no structure; the social space itself was regarded as polymorphous – that is, one assumed the existence of a plurality of forms, thus leaving out the very possibility that amorphous phenomena might occur.

Then I started to investigate the theoretical possibilities of a niche that would accommodate these phenomena in the discursive space. It seemed logical to place the non-forms within some kind of horizontal theory. A horizontal perspective would allow me to theorize both the infinite dimension and the lack of pattern. If one could forget about structure and hierarchy of any sort, one would be able to observe a smooth flow of information, goods, services and emotions along the links between the 'nodes'. But there was just one problem: absolute horizontality does not exist in the empirical world, for horizontality is just a heuristic device. Once we introduce it into our analysis of social space, we also introduce verticality, and the two must somehow be reconciled. Moreover, in the scholarly practice of textual production, even a degree of horizontality is hard to achieve, for, as has long since been discovered (Chomsky 1957, Dumont 1980), human perception and language are both constructed vertically. Thus, a social theory that is purely horizontal does not exist: once we start observation of the empirical world, we automatically start ordering vertically whatever we see, and we continue this process while describing what we have observed. In fact, the horizontality of any horizontal theory is compromised in the very act of formulating this theory. Therefore, any horizontality we would be able to achieve in a scholarly description would be relative. And even if we were to move towards a radical horizontality and assume that there exist social relations which are absolutely horizontal and not related to structure(s), we would still have to reconcile

this assumption with the fact that the actors themselves have to relate to structures, simply by virtue of living in a nation state.

Thus, to research the horizontal dimension of social relations, all we can do in practice is to restrict verticality as much as possible. Therefore, rather than attempting to follow the unattainable ideal of Nietzschean horizontality, I decided to construct a theoretical framework, which I called Restricted Verticality Perspective (RVP), and which offers a pragmatic solution to the theoretical and methodological problems connected with research into informal social relations. The RVP allows the vertical bias to be partly removed from our perception, thus creating a conceptual space for the horizontal dimension of phenomena. Verticality is here restricted by changing assumptions and adjusting analytical tools – that is, controlling the choice of analytical categories which *a priori* organize discursive space in a vertical way. The RVP is based on the assumption of the heterogeneity and continuity of social space that is endlessly produced by social actors. Thus, rather than speaking of segments of social space or of multiple spaces, we assume here a single space with plural attributes that need not be mutually exclusive. Social phenomena can therefore have informal and/or formal attributes. Moreover, in contrast to current theoretical perspectives, where the informal is considered to be a deficient form and thus a subcategory of the formal, the RVP does not assume any priority of formal over informal phenomena. The assumption of a heterogeneous social space implies that forms continually shape and dissolve within the infinite continuum of this space, suggesting that they should be conceptualized as subsets of the infinite universe, not the other way round.

When we now use informality as the analytical category, it is no longer understood as a deficient form, but defined as the total social space minus whatever is controlled by the state or has form. This definition solves a basic conceptual difficulty connected with informality as defined by economists, where, after Keith Hart (1985), it is understood as activities hidden from the control of the state. Here, the problem consists in the inability to differentiate between casual, unreported economic activities and organized crime. However, under the proposed definition, since criminal organizations do have form, they do not belong to the category of informality, even though they are hidden from the gaze of the state. Also, it becomes more visible that informality is not necessarily connected with breaking the law, nor with economic transactions – it is not contained within a ‘sector’ or a group, and it is not some deviation, corrupting the desired form.

Another axiom which differentiates the RVP from theories currently used in research into informal social relations is the assumption

that the relations of actors to actors and between the informal and the formal are mediated through individual actors' negotiations based on common sense, which cannot be researched using mathematical methods, as distinct from the current assumption that these relations are determined by rational choice, which can be researched by these methods. Also, in the RVP we want to learn about links between actors so that we can further explore the possibilities of human cooperation; therefore, we choose the Eliasian concept of *homo apertus*, a complex being emotionally dependent on other people and driven by rational and irrational choices alike, in preference to the notion of the selfish and rational *homo economicus*. For the purposes of informality research, we assume that the essence of the human condition is the pursuit of happiness and the search for acceptance by other humans, rather than mere competition and fighting for survival.

In order to follow the horizontal dimension of the links we want to research, we need to keep our perspective relatively flat. Therefore, the RVP assumes the priority of synchrony over diachrony. However, since the perspective is pragmatic and does not claim absolute horizontality, it also assumes that synchrony will be relative. For example, if we mark time on the vertical axis and space on the horizontal, we can research how networks develop in space in a given, fixed interval of time, as if it were a layer of a geological rock (full synchrony would be achieved if it were a fraction of a second). Thus, we do not deny the existence of diachronic processes, but we concentrate our research on the synchronic developments, with time assumed as given and space as variable. We do not deny that processes develop in time (although admittedly, in the case of virtual networks, this time can be very close to what we understand as instantaneous), but for the purposes of informality research, we do not analyse this change in order not to lose the horizontal dimension from sight. We do not research phenomena as a function of vertical variables; instead, we map the chain of events in physical space, which is the *locus* of actors creating the social space and therefore also of the interfaces between informal and formal phenomena. Another step in the horizontal direction for the RVP is to restrict context in order to approach as close as possible to the isometry of the social landscape, as advocated by Bruno Latour (2005). But rather than eliminating it completely and replacing it with several layers of thick description, as in Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT), I propose to restrict contextual information to one layer of thick description, necessary to understand the content of the link. Following Latour, this restriction also applies to theoretical excursions and intellectual genealogies which invite context and increase diachrony.



Since the RVP restricts verticality, but does not deny its existence, it needs to reconcile the horizontal and vertical dimensions and explain how the informal and formal interface with each other. In the RVP, we assume that the interfaces between the formal and the informal are individual actors. Therefore, if we want to follow our habitus of tracing patterns, without simultaneously destroying informality itself, we need to place these patterns in the physical world, the *locus* of actors' bodies and technological devices, and not in the relations of actors to actors, which are form-free by our own definition.

To eliminate the vertical bias as much as possible from the very research methodology at the stage of observation, as well as the description of amorphous and continuous phenomena, the RVP proposes to control the analytical categories themselves, avoiding those categories that are marked for value and are thus inherently vertical (which can be done using a simple tool borrowed from Chomsky's transformative grammar). Thus, against our habitus, in observing informality we should be looking for those relationships which need not be defined in terms of class, status or power. We should also abstain from using mathematical methods, which are per se vertical by virtue of the incremental increase in natural numbers. In the RVP we are not looking for some alternative universe, but applying a different filter to our perception of the same social reality, trying to remove the vertical lens from what we see.

This leads to methods of gathering empirical materials allowing us to make observations in a way which permits the closest access to the milieu without distorting actors' behaviour. So as to avoid the Hawthorne effect, the recommended method is participant observation, which should be covert, with notes made *a posteriori* and, following the good tradition of Franz Boas' ethnography, possibly recreating the dialogues (Bernard and Gravlee 2014) and meticulously describing the details of observed situations. The covert research method complies with another axiom of the RVP, namely the inclusion of the observer in one and the same epistemological category with the observed, which is one of the principles of Nietzschean horizontality. Thus, the researchers themselves are not excluded from the researched space, nor from the common-sense principles governing it – there is no etic–emic distinction. Also, such fieldwork should not be bound by locality so that we can observe relationships developing across large distances and not within the boundaries of territories, like states, districts, towns, villages or neighbourhoods. Similarly, the analysis of findings should not be closed within one territorial unit, which is important for research into informality, because it is defined in opposition to the state and thus

*a priori* 'condemned' to methodological nationalism. In calling for a site-less (rather than multi-sited) ethnography, the present work represents an attempt to move beyond the hierarchical and localized concept of culture that has prevailed in the social sciences to date. Following James Clifford's call for the continuity of ethnographic observation and for a research method that will not divorce the journey from the site (Clifford 1997), in this book the journey is itself the site where human interactions happen and are observed, and not, as Claude Lévi-Strauss expressed it, a necessary evil and a nuisance, one of the 'vain expenditures', with 'the dead weight of weeks or months wasted *en route*' (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 17) to the research site. But also, the route of the journey is different, for its endpoint is not always known in advance, at the start of the journey, but realized while following the individual actors. Thus, the route and the site are dynamic, and with each new actor in the network they develop like a picaresque novel.

Yet another problem connected with researching informal phenomena is the structure of the academic text. Not only do we have to deal with the verticality of language itself, but also with the vertical structure of presentation, which is imposed by academic standards. The basic difficulty here is how to actually present the large bulk of fieldwork findings, typically collected over a period of several years, while avoiding diachrony and, moreover, without excessive reference to the vertical categories conventionally used in the social sciences. To apply the rules of the RVP in practice, the text has to be written across the material, rather than making an in-depth study with a rich context provided for each case, all presented chronologically and discussed against the failures or achievements of other authors. And although the idea itself is not unknown in the social sciences – flattening the social landscape is recommended by Actor Network Theory – 'surfing' on the surface of the social instead of 'digging' is not a common practice of academic texts (Falzon 2009). In my case the surface to be described had a depth of up to thirty years, for the period being discussed started and ended before the virtual revolution, inviting diachrony and thus tempting a generous use of historical context. In the present book, the conflict between the naturally occurring diachrony and the necessity of 'streamlining' the text in order to preserve at least a degree of horizontal dimension was solved by abandoning chronology and structuring the book as an intellectual journey. The journey starts in the scruffy waiting hall somewhere in western Poland and continues in a logically ordered sequence of six chapters, each discussing one aspect of informality research and describing social reality in the least vertical way possible, that is, with as little reference to standard vertical categories like class,

status, power or social capital as I was able to make without rendering the text meaningless for the reader, whose habitus is to perceive the social reality through them. The text represents interdisciplinary research, using ideas from philosophy, linguistics, social anthropology, sociology, economy and human geography. Hence, given the mass of literature in each separate discipline, only the most relevant sources have been chosen as references, and there is no ‘in-depth’ discussion of other authors. This itself is consistent with the requirement in the RVP, already mentioned, to reduce the construction of intellectual genealogies. The purpose of this book is not to assess the work of others but to explore the possibilities of the new theoretical perspective in researching informal phenomena.

Thus, Chapter 1 presents theoretical considerations connected with existing conceptualizations of informal social relations in the social sciences generally and (im)migration studies in particular. It discusses the concepts of network and informality and the main problems in applying existing theoretical approaches to research into informal social relations. Following this discussion, it presents in ten simple steps the RVP as a pragmatic solution to the problem of investigating and describing the horizontal dimension of social space. It then discusses the concept of horizontality and positions the RVP in relation to the social theories of Elias, Giddens, Bauman and Castells on the one hand, and on the other hand to the Nietzschean idea of absolute horizontality, the ideas of synchrony and diachrony of the Kazan school of structuralists and the newer social theories which followed Nietzsche’s idea, such as Latour’s Actor Network Theory, Deleuze’s concept of the rhizome and DeLanda’s Assemblage Theory.

The theoretical assumptions of the RVP are then applied while interpreting the empirical data from my fieldwork in the remaining chapters of the book. Chapter 2 discusses the methodological aspects of informality research, namely problems of conducting empirical research on informal phenomena, resulting from the logical contradiction in methodology itself. Although informality cannot be researched by formal methods – for, in the very moment of recording informal phenomena, we attribute form to them and their very nature is destroyed – the use of formal methods is required by highly bureaucratized research institutions. The chapter discusses the ethical and institutional problems connected with this requirement and quotes ethnographic cases to show examples of the common faults committed during fieldwork on the informal social activities.

In Chapter 3, in turn, examples of successful fieldwork are presented, discussing best practices in fieldwork, finding the ‘right’ networks

and accessing them. The problems of fieldwork on informal phenomena discussed here include practical advice on what to use instead of recording *in situ*, how to manage emotional involvement, how to endure disturbing stories and how to actually 'go with the flow'. The examples include a typical day from my fieldwork diary, showing how, thanks to the avoidance of the emic-etic dichotomy, the RVP permits better access to the milieu being studied. In this perspective one is not concerned with hierarchy, therefore the usual power or status distinctions between the members of privileged elites, ordinary people, smugglers and prostitutes do not apply: nobody is considered a 'sensitive' case to be approached with particular care, for they all are included in one category, together with the researcher.

Chapter 4 discusses the relationship between the informal economy and informal networks. Thus, while informal networks are instrumental for the existence of the 'informal economy', they are not restricted to or by the economic activities of social actors. Hence, research into these networks has to go beyond economic activities, as well as beyond the analytical concept of a 'sector'. The shortcomings of the idea of sectors used in research into informal activities are discussed using examples from my fieldwork. The quoted cases, from the textile industry, building and house care, demonstrate the instability of hierarchies and the blurred boundaries between formality and informality themselves, as well as between 'occupational sectors'. Exiting the logic of sectors and looking at the whole, rather than analysing the economy segment by segment, the RVP allows the social to be described in a more realistic way, without forcing the researcher to choose between *homo economicus* and *homo sociologus*.

In Chapter 5 the problem of segmented social space is discussed further, this time with reference to ethnography of informal phenomena, which needs to be open-ended and not constricted within economic systems, zones, countries or sites. While empirical research is usually conducted on smaller units which are strictly defined localities such as vicinity, city, village, neighbourhood or household, thus making it impossible to embrace informality as a continuum, the RVP makes it possible to observe the informal flow of goods, information and services along the links created beyond the boundaries of the territorial units. The cases quoted from fieldwork show social actors with several identities, who are involved in numerous chains of egocentric informal relationships extending beyond the borders of systems and localities. To describe their lived experiences, the limitations of the very concept of a 'site' can be escaped by making the ethnographies site-less.

The last, sixth chapter discusses the problem of interfaces. Although the RVP seeks to investigate the horizontal dimension of social relations, it does not claim that vertical relationships do not exist. Since formal and informal phenomena do not occur in parallel universes, but within the same social space, and since every social actor has both informal and formal experiences on a daily basis, the relationship between the formal and the informal is mediated on the level of the individual actor. Hence, the interfaces between the two occur in the physical space, the actors' *locus*, which makes them traceable. The chapter discusses the *loci* which are significant for researchers interested in finding the 'patterns' in physical space, as distinct from patterns in social relationships. The empirical examples include a description of the *Koto* trading route and of the Middle Route between Moscow and London, as well as examples of the Yes-Places, in which multiple chains of networks come together.

Presenting a pragmatic approach to informality, defined in ten points, as well as empirical data on informal networks, together with practical advice on how to conduct fieldwork on informal social phenomena, I hope that both the theoretical and methodological contributions of this book will be useful for future studies of the horizontal dimension of the social space.

## Notes

1. 'I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse ... some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer', wrote Friedrich Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1974: 223).
2. A virtual community is understood, after Rheingold, as 'People who use computers to communicate and form friendships' (Rheingold 2000).
3. The simplistic concept used in the present study is derived from Manuel Castells' famous but not precisely defined concept, 'Information Age', understood as an organizational switch to the technological paradigm constituted around 'information/communication technologies and genetic engineering'; see Castells 2000: 5–6, 9–10.