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## **Organized and Their Consumers**

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## Themed book reviews: Organizations and their consumers

Stephen J. Frenkel, Marek Korczynski, Karen A. Shire and May Tam

*On the front line: Organization of work in the information economy*

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1999.

Andrew Sturdy, Irena Grugulis and Hugh Willmott (Eds)

*Customer service: Empowerment and entrapment*

Basingstoke: Palgrave. 2001.

■ Reviewed by Yiannis Gabriel, *Imperial College, UK*

The last ten years or so have seen a far-reaching reconfiguration of the dramatic personae that dominate the world of organizations. For much of its life, the study of organizations was dominated by two central characters, the manager and the worker, whose relationship with all its tensions, conflicts and accommodations unfolded within a broader environment of markets, governments, shareholders, social institutions, technological forces and so forth. For all the importance accorded to these factors, the spotlight remained firmly on managers and workers – what happened outside the organizational boundary ‘impacted on’ the goings-on inside, but remained very much outside. In the last ten years, however, there has been a substantial movement to change the two-actor show into a three-actor show, the organizational dyad into a triad. The newcomer on stage has been the consumer, a character whose whims, habits, desires and practices are no longer seen as ‘impacting on’ the activities of managers and workers from the outside but increasingly as defining them. At times the referee in the management–labour contest, the consumer is often called upon to take sides, declare winners and losers, but above all define the rules of the game.

‘Customer service’ and ‘consumer sovereignty’ are the labels that have come to stand metonymically for the incorporation of the consumer in the

world of organizations. Following early contributions in this area (du Gay, 1996; du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Knights & Morgan, 1993), this has now gathered pace, as increasing numbers of authors in the area of organizations seek to assess how the discourse of customers and consumers is reshaping the world of organizations. There are two important consequences to this trend. First, studies of consumption (see, e.g. Baudrillard, 1970/1988; Bauman, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984; Campbell, 1989; Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Ritzer, 1999; Schor, 1998; Winward, 1994), which mushroomed in their own right in the last twenty years, have become increasingly relevant to the work of organizational theorists – in disciplinary terms, some of the boundaries between marketing and organization behaviour have been eroded. Second, the study of state, voluntary and non-profit organizations has been brought closer to the study of commercial firms, as these organizations have increasingly espoused customer service strategies, addressing their constituents as consumers and customers (see, e.g. Ferlie et al., 1996; Gabriel & Lang, 1995).

One of the reasons why the consumer has been brought into the world of organizations is the increasing proportion of workers who are working directly with customers in service and other occupations. In sectors such as education, health, catering, tourism, retail, finance, transport, professional services, computing and so forth, large armies of employees are involved in 'front-line work' – dealing with customers, servicing them, advising them, keeping them happy. Front-line work makes different demands on individuals (both managers and workers) and groups from manufacturing or back office jobs, safely insulated from the critical gaze of the customer. Instead, front-line jobs emphasize the importance of the employees' emotional labour, social and verbal skills, appearance and demeanour under pressure. One would hardly use the metaphor of a theatrical performance to describe the behaviour of a metal-basher or a pen-pusher – yet, this metaphor becomes quite apt in capturing some of the qualities of front-line work, with its thrills, unpredictability and audience scrutiny.

All the books reviewed in this section are the products of this trend – to view the consumer as an organizational insider. Arguably, *On the front line: Organization of work in the information economy* is one of the most comprehensive, systematic and probing studies in this area. Based on a massive piece of field research in three continents involving over 1000 employees in front-line occupations and combining survey data with liberal use of vignettes and direct quotations, this study reminds me of some large-scale enterprises in the sociology of work from the past, like *The affluent worker* study (Goldthorpe et al., 1969). This is a highly sophisticated piece of research with a wealth of empirical data on front-line employees, their work organizations, conditions, workplace politics and the nature of their

relations with customers. Its greatest asset, in my view, is the fact that it dispels many convenient and fashionable generalizations about the nature of front-line work, the quality of control and resistance and the effects of the consumer. In this sense, it is an invaluable corrective to a tendency among many theorists of post-modernity or late modernity to identify a single pattern or structure that has replaced traditional organizations with bureaucratic hierarchies and Taylorist control strategies.

The authors studied 14 organizations in Australia, the USA and Japan, in the finance, computing and communications sectors. These are distinguished into three ideal types, depending on the nature of the principal workflow in each. *Service* or low-complexity workflows involved mostly call-centre employees, dealing with routine client queries. *Sales* or medium-complexity workflows are less predictable and rely on the sales-persons' tacit social skills, hard work and entrepreneurial flair to sell financial and other products. Finally, *knowledge* or high-level complexity workflows entail a high degree of customization as employees with specialist expertise seek to identify and address the clients' highly diverse problems. In this sense, the study is not unlike the classic works by Woodward and Blauner, in which technology was seen as a key independent variable upon which other factors (structure, alienation, job satisfaction) were contingent. Indeed, the authors of the present study propose three ideal types of employee relations which they then proceed to map against the workflows above – the *bureaucratic* type, relying on formal recruitment and training, and vertical career ladders, the *entrepreneurial* type, in which recruitment is through the external labour market, job security is low and pay is largely determined by results, and the *knowledge-intensive* (or network) type, which emphasizes lateral work ties, professional qualifications and the ability to apply specialist knowledge to one-off practical situations. Workflows matched employment relations fairly accurately, service workflows coinciding with an attenuated form of bureaucracy, sales with entrepreneurial and elements of the knowledge-intensive type, and knowledge workflows with a combination of the knowledge-intensive and the bureaucratic patterns.

This tripartite division of workflows and employee relations proves quite robust when findings in other aspects of work situation are examined. Thus, each seems to be accompanied by a consistent pattern of control relations, customer relations and co-worker relations. In every instance, the authors compare their findings with widely rehearsed scenarios from the social sciences, usually split up into optimistic and pessimistic, in order to argue that the reality is more nuanced, varied and unpredictable than currently popular accounts. Thus, for existence, they reject both the pessimistic scenario of increasingly regimented, surveyed and controlled workers

(the 'panoptic nightmare') in which employees virtually prostitute themselves and their emotions in the presence of customers, and the optimistic scenario whereby front-line employees are empowered to use learning and knowledge to control and enjoy interactions with the customers. Instead, they found that the routinizing logic in customer relations was not incompatible with service workers claiming to enjoy displays of affectivity towards the customers. Nor is performance-monitoring and evaluation used in a heavy-handed disciplinarian mode by management, but more often is seen as a means towards enhancing employee learning and improving service quality. Service workers, in particular, emerge as quite content from their interactions with customers, in spite of the routine quality of most such interactions. Nor did they seem to mind the ephemeral quality of their encounters with particular clients and the absence of permanent relationships.

The sales staff for their part found themselves part businessmen/entrepreneurs and part employee, enjoying considerable autonomy at work, but suffering from high degrees of insecurity, stress and interpersonal mistrust. The knowledge workers seemed to be the ones closer to the stereotype of the 'empowered worker' – yet, the absence of clear performance criteria made conflict among them more likely. Overall, the authors have little time for culturalist explanations and find no major difference in the patterns present in the three countries (with some exceptions, notably the higher degree of bureaucratization of Japanese cases, and the anomalies resulting from a highly gendered division of labour). Overall, the authors argue on the basis of their evidence that the customer is not always the adjudicator in the management-worker relationship. Instead, there are times when managers and workers unite in the face of rude, devious or recalcitrant customers and when controlling the customer takes precedence over control and resistance within the employment relationship. More generally, the authors argue against simple either-or dichotomies, forcefully putting forward the view that neither the increasing complexity of workflows (which represents their one unequivocal prognostication), nor the hybridization of organizations with network, entrepreneurial and knowledge-intensive features mark the demise of bureaucracy.

In everything they do, the authors of this book refuse to take off in wild flights of theorizing and remain firmly earth-bound. Undoubtedly, the book's major virtue is its level-headed analysis of its hard-earned data, its pursuit of detail and its clarification of difference. Following this book, arguments referring abstractly to the 'knowledge worker' or the 'network organization' run the risk of being shown to be over-generalizing. (Having said this, it should be remembered that large sections of front-line employees, such as waiters, bar-tenders, nurses, doctors and teachers are outside the remit of this book.) The book is solid, sensible and well-argued. The authors' penchant for

typologies, lists and schemes can prove wearisome at times and the presentation of the material involves some repetition. In all, the book may be criticized for being too much like a report and less like a monograph. This is maybe a reflection of the fact that much of the funding for their research (which must be remarkable by the standards of shoe-string budgets many social scientists work under) came from Andersen Consulting, who were keen to convert the research findings of this study into 'knowledge capital'. Is this the reason why the authors spend some time discussing old-fashioned or unpopular topics like job satisfaction? It would be interesting to know the extent to which the authors and their sponsors view the result of this project as 'capital' and, if so, what the opportunities for investing it may be.

The reader who is more interested in abstract theorizing than empirical research will find more to ponder in the collection *Customer service: Empowerment and entrapment*. This brings together a number of wide-ranging contributions on the effects of the ideologies and practices of customer service on contemporary workplaces. Several of the contributors have based their chapters on field work, many of them on call centres, which have emerged as the satanic mills or the assembly lines of the 21st century ('bright satanic offices') (Sturdy, 2001: 7). The anthology is excellently introduced by Sturdy whose encyclopaedic command of the field enables him to provide a set of uniquely illuminating frames for what lies ahead. These include the concept of 'colonization', whereby the hegemony of the consumer is seen as colonizing every nook and cranny of contemporary organizations as well as discourses about organizations. Inherent to this colonization is an element of obfuscation, whereby the effects of the cult of the consumer on subjectivity as well as organizational relationships go unnoticed. Contestation is another important frame – one whereby personalized service to the customer may be invoked by employees resisting management pressures for greater efficiency and cutting corners. Sturdy's introduction is imbued with a critical spirit, inviting the reader to question academic representations of customer service, and asking whether this book does not in its own way privilege service and consumption as an area of debate.

Sturdy's invitation is entirely appropriate and is taken up by some contributors. Academics, operating in increasingly commercialized environments (where students feature as consumers), run the risk of projecting their own fears, anxieties and fantasies onto other service 'workers', generalizing from highly parochial experiences and voicing their own concerns rather than the concerns of those they research. Thus, Edward Wray-Bliss starts with self-critical reflection on his own role as a service provider meeting the expectations of the book's readership. In particular, Wray-Bliss wonders whether in servicing academic audiences, authors of chapters like his do not violate

the voices of those they reluctantly claim to represent, namely service employees. He is critical of authors like du Gay and Salaman (1992) and Knights and Collinson (1987) for developing discourses which in their distinct ways silence resistance and recalcitrance and emphasize the employees' collusion in their own oppression. There is something heartfelt in Wray-Bliss's critique and it is not hard to see why management academics, reluctantly engaged in servicing the needs of MBA students, may make more of a meal out of customer service than it merits or why they hang on to authoritative single-voice narratives instead of examining ambiguities and pluri-vocality. This criticism could well be levelled at the authors of *On the front line: Organization of work in the information economy*, though I do not believe that it would be fair. It seems to me entirely appropriate that, like the authors of that book, researchers should seek to distinguish fact from fancy, and privilege voices which speak with knowledge and understanding over voices which seek specific effects, such as sympathy, admiration or disapproval. Not that these latter voices should be disregarded or silenced, but their effects should be kept separate.

In a book of this variety it is difficult for the reviewer not to privilege the voices of authors who struck a particular chord or triggered a particular understanding, creating the misleading impression that other chapters were without merit or originality. Doubtless, repeated readings of the book will reveal unexpected insights and foresights in many chapters. Thus, Rosenthal, Peccei and Hill underline the diverse meanings of the concept of the customer, each embodying distinct assumptions and representations – a most noteworthy enterprise which must certainly be taken into account henceforth whenever academics seek to place 'the consumer' inside organizational discourses – there is not one consumer but many (just as Frenkel et al. noted that there is not one front-line worker but many). In a not dissimilar way, Tyler and Taylor unpack two distinct discourses which cohabit with the discourse of customer service, one representing an ethic of justice and one representing an ethic of care – these generate a need for employees to juggle between the two, seeking to offer quality service while also meeting the managers' demands for efficiency.

These contradictions are further explored with great insight and clarity by Marek Korczynski, one for the authors of *On the front line: Organization of work in the information economy*. This may well be the most impressive chapter of the collection and (contra Wray-Bliss) it is a pleasure to read an author who can speak with authority and understanding on a topic he understands well. Korczynski uses some of the data from the larger study to develop a sophisticated ideal type of 'customer-oriented bureaucracy', a model which reflects the rise of the consumer ethos in today's societies. If

Weber's ideal type incorporates a single underlying assumption, that of rational-legal authority, customer-oriented bureaucracy seeks to accommodate if not reconcile two different principles, *rationalization*, with all the regimentation, intensification and impersonality that it entails, and *customer orientation*, which reintroduces diversity, affectivity and the human factor into the work process. Thus, within customer-oriented bureaucracy, 'Taylorism' (i.e. personalized service) coexists with Taylorism. Korczynski documents excellently the clashes between these dominant principles and the tensions they create for call centre operators. At the same time, against gloomy dystopia of McDonaldization of everything, Korczynski argues that operators create pockets of gratifying labour, often by playing one principle against the other, for instance resisting intensification by the need to offer genuine customer service, and resisting excessive servitude by invoking the prerogatives of efficiency.

The emotional dimension of employee resistance is examined in a chapter by Sturdy and Fineman who rightly denounce the absence of affectivity from many studies of control and resistance. They actually introduce a theme that could fairly be described as taboo in labour process theorizing of the workplace, namely that controlling others may not be simply the result of the demands of capitalist accumulation and labour process, but may be substantially fuelled by emotional demands of people, especially the need to dominate others, express aggression and assert selfhood. Political action is thus brought closer with the emotional life of organizational participants. Resistance itself is shown to be emotional as well as political, and three forms are identified, intra-psycho (e.g. stress, burn-out), mental distancing (cynical detachment) and open challenge (whistle-blowing, 'smile-strikes', etc.) Emotionalizing the labour process, including the holy shibboleths of control and resistance, is very much in its early stages and certain questions are still waiting to be asked, let alone answered. Is it possible that servitude offers masochistic pleasure to at least some employees? Could it be that guilt disarms the will to resist? Could it be that exploited and oppressed employees identify with the aggressor? Could stress be viewed not as a form of resistance but as an emotional claim to victimhood? Are there emotional rewards to be derived from being a victim?

The under-development of the emotional dimension in discussions of customer service is evident in a potentially insightful chapter by Nickson, Warhurst, Witz and Cullen, who in line with arguments by other researchers, such as Hancock, Tyler and Taylor (Hancock & Tyler, 2000; Taylor & Tyler, 2000; Tyler & Taylor, 1998), propose the existence of *aesthetic labour* (in addition to manual, intellectual and emotional labours) in many of today's organizations. Aesthetic labour entails a constant vigilance over one's



appearance, a preoccupation of 'looking good and sounding right', which the authors document with rather casual evidence from retail, hospitality and banking industries in Glasgow, a city that is 'currently reinventing itself' as a 'style capital'. The importance of appearance in many types of work can hardly be disputed, nor can it be disputed that maintaining a certain appearance involves 'work'. But does this constitute a distinct form of labour, from emotional or generally psychological labour? And if so, what is there to stop us adding an infinite number of other 'labours' which co-exist in today's organizations – what about, for instance, humour labour, political or resistance labour, leadership labour, moral labour, or indeed 'spiritual labour' which is currently being peddled as the supreme form of organizational labour by some. It seems to me that this fragmentation of labours is the product of a theoretical inability to identify the common feature in all of them.

The value of aesthetic labour is that it highlights the extent to which many of today's organizations do not merely rely on image but transact in image – for them the glamorous looks of their employees reflect the glamour of the organizational image. And, correspondingly, the glamour of the organizational image reflects the individual's worth and merit (Gabriel, 1999: 196). This generates many questions. Do employees resist this type of aesthetic control, by making themselves ugly? Or, more likely, do they derive narcissistic satisfaction from having passed a company's quality controls and being approved by the looks and style commissars? Could it be argued that such work attracts the narcissistic or exhibitionistic type of person? What kind of sexual fantasies simmer beneath the surface of service work?

The consumer has been drawn irreversibly into the world of organizations – the eternal adversaries of management and labour have now been joined by a curious, unpredictable and largely unmanageable creature who acts now as audience, now as referee and now as the spoils. We are still some considerable way from understanding all the consequences of this reconfiguration of the work process, but the two thought-provoking, probing books reviewed here, in their different ways make us appreciate how far-reaching this reconfiguration is likely to prove.

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Barry Smart (Ed.)

*Resisting McDonaldization*

London: Sage Publications. 1999. ISBN: 0 7619 55186. £18.99 (pbk), 261 pp.

■ Reviewed by Peter Case, *Business School, Oxford Brookes University, UK*

On seeing the title of Smart's volume, and thinking about the seemingly ineluctable tide of rationalization sweeping through higher education, one is prompted to muse: 'resistance! what resistance?' Yet one finds absolutely no grounds for political optimism in any of the arguments proffered in this collection. If not a complete misnomer, then *Resisting McDonaldization* is,

at the very least, a misleading title for this series of engaging critical responses to George Ritzer's popular analysis of (post)modern life, *The McDonaldization of society*. In view of the fact that most of the contributors are detractors of varying degrees of vehemence, it might more properly be called, *Resisting Ritzer*, or, *Resisting the McDonaldization thesis*. Smart's collection offers plenty to think about with respect to patterns of social life under late capitalism and, for that matter, plenty to be despondent about. If your sociological imagination needs stimulating or if you are interested in discovering ways in which Ritzer's thesis can be variously augmented, extended, applied or dismissed, then buy this book. However, if you expect to find in these pages anything resembling an analysis of *organized resistance* to capitalism's 'irrational rationalities' then you will need to look elsewhere.

With the exception of Beilharz, who addresses Ritzer's Bauman-inspired interpretation of the Holocaust (Ritzer, 1996), the contributors focus their critical attention almost exclusively on the first edition of *McDonaldization* (Ritzer, 1993). In that work, Ritzer uses the American fast-food company McDonald's as an iconic metonym through which to explore the explicit and implicit dehumanizing effects of formal rationality. Using Weber's four ideal-types – efficiency, calculability, predictability and control – as an investigative framework, Ritzer's account encompasses the rationalizing elements of both production and consumption. He thus sees McDonaldization manifesting in just about every aspect of contemporary social or cultural life, be it birth, death, family, food, work, leisure, media, education or politics. The contributions to Smart's collection are concerned to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and analytical potential of the McDonaldization thesis, while also discussing broader themes of American cultural and economic imperialism, increasing cultural commodification, globalization and rationalization in the late modern world.

Each essay is allowed to stand alone in a book that, despite the patterns and interrelationships just identified, appears to lack *overt* thematic structure. Smart's opening chapter is scholarly and communicates some incisive theoretical insights but it offers a less than adequate introduction to the contributions that follow. I imagine that few people will read this volume from end-to-end in sequence and will not, therefore, suffer the boredom of fourteen independent summaries of Ritzer's argument; but I do sense that more could have been done editorially to organize and introduce the collection.

Three of the fourteen substantive chapters offer a broadly sympathetic application or evaluation of Ritzer's thesis. Bryman and Fine adopt the four ideal-types from Ritzer's analysis and apply them in workman-like fashion to empirical studies of theme parks and folk arts respectively. We learn that Disney World evinces more or less paradigmatic characteristics of the

McDonaldization thesis, whereas the folk arts do not. Are we surprised by these worthy insights? Not entirely. As already mentioned, Beilharz takes one of Ritzer's later theoretical additions as a point of departure for a comparative discussion of fascism and McDonaldization, while the remaining eleven chapters adopt a more overtly critical and, on occasion, malevolent tone.

Several contributors (Smart, Kellner, Bender and Poggi) are eager to point out that, in failing to offer an adequate account of late modern political economy, Ritzer's thesis confuses cause and effect in the analysis of rationalization processes. The case for a Marxist over a Weberian perspective is most stridently made by Smart, for example, when he asserts that, 'the evidence offered, of both a sense of the intrinsic value of McDonaldization and its apparent compatibility with a range of other transformations in the organization of social and cultural life, in fact points to the underlying presence of *powerful material interests and forces*' (p. 7, added emphasis). A second and particularly telling line of attack is directed towards a fundamental inconsistency in the structure of Ritzer's thesis. Smart, Kellner and Weinstein and Weinstein each point to the manner in which the term 'McDonaldization' is used sometimes as a synonym for rationalization per se, thereby adding nothing to Weber's original critique of factory systems and modern bureaucracies, while on other occasions refers more exclusively to a critique of American-inspired fast-food industries. As Kellner puts it, Ritzer needs more carefully to, 'distinguish between McDonald's and the broader phenomenon of McDonaldization' (p. 187). There are also questions posed about the adequacy and accuracy of Ritzer's interpretation and extensive use of the Weberian 'iron cage of rationality' metaphor. Smart points to recent Weber scholarship that challenges the translation of *ein stahlhartes Gehäuse* as 'an iron cage', with its constricting and pessimistic connotations, and indicates that *Gehäuse* can also mean 'shell', as in the shell on a snail's back. The latter translation transforms Weber into a subtler thinker whose language points ambivalently to the manner in which formal rationality acts as both a burden and a protection to those living within complex industrial societies. In Chapter 15 of the volume, Ritzer is given an opportunity to answer his critics but offers only a weak and unconvincing response to Smart's detailed critique of this essential ingredient in the McDonaldization recipe.

Ritzer is accused by certain contributors of giving too much weight to the structural constraints of formal rationality and of thus failing to explore sufficiently well the social and cultural semiotics of McDonaldization. These essayists contend that his argument would benefit from being augmented or complemented by postmodern theories that deal more adequately with the *subjective* constitution, micro-narratives, social history and ethnographic variability of consumer responses to the McDonald's phenomenon. The food

sociologist Joanne Finkelstein, for example, takes us on a selective journey through the history and anthropology of food rituals, pointing up many instances where attempts to engineer tastes and social values have been resisted, thwarted or accommodated. Ritzer is too quick to condemn fast-food technologies as leading inexorably towards greater globalization and homogenization of cultural practices, she maintains, and fails to appreciate the degree of social innovation they engender. Similarly, Münch argues from a Critical Theory perspective that the proliferation of 'inauthentic' cultural practices associated with McDonaldization is matched equally by a corresponding increase in the availability and access to 'authentic' multicultural experiences. The commodification of culture cuts both ways as, 'Urban middle-class culture disintegrates and makes room for a global network of amusement centres' (p. 135). Respective contributions from Jary and Denzin focus on the postmodern semiotics of the sports and leisure industries, contending that these areas of cultural activity offer exemplars of rationalizing processes whose complexity Ritzer fails fully to grasp. Jary is more persuasive in his detailed deconstruction of Ritzer's thesis than he is in developing an alternative, semiotically enriched account of the globalization of sport and leisure. By comparison, Denzin is arguably more successful in his attempt to extend the McDonaldization thesis. His close reading of a series of advertisements featuring Denise Hopper points to the way in which Nike has contributed to 'the creation and maintenance of a conservative racial order in post-Reagan American popular culture' (p. 182). In their various ways, then, these contributors attend to the emotional, personal and inter-subjective semiotics of McDonaldization and explore the diversity of responses that result from encounters with rationalizing social processes.

Two further essays attempt theoretically to augment Ritzer's account of rationalization. Weinstein and Weinstein employ concepts drawn from Heidegger and Simmel – 'standing reserve', 'challenging forth', 'objective culture' – to complement a Weberian account of the tyrannical effects of complex social structures. By contrast, Bryan S. Turner uses Beck's concept of risk society to inform his own ironic speculations about how the instrumentality of McDonaldized interactions might be a useful template for a radical new form of political (dis)engagement within the world system. 'Modern societies', he suggests, 'probably need cool cosmopolitans with ironic vocabularies if they are to avoid the conflagration of nationalistic versions of political authenticity and membership' (p. 99). The stage is set for the rise of the McCitizen, whose cool 'tolerance' will form the functional basis of *global* political interaction. How remarkably anachronistic and misplaced Turner's remarks appear in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001. Interestingly, Turner's 'ironic' optimism is mirrored by a countervailing political nostalgia

in Bender and Poggi's essay in which it is asserted that, 'Resistance can only come from nation-states which retain and/or regain the capacity to exercise political domination by means of international agreements and arrangements' (p. 38). Well I, for one, am not holding my breath.

Some of the most incisive, and one has also to say antagonistic, contributions to Smart's collection accuse Ritzer of promoting and perpetuating the very rationalizing processes that he is at such pains to expose (O'Neill, Jary, Tester). In a wickedly acerbic chapter entitled, 'Have You Had Your Theory Today?', O'Neill berates Ritzer for indulging in the production of what he disparagingly terms 'McText', a form of parochial and populist American sociology whose evangelical success, 'injures the mind as much as fast-food injures the soul's body' (p. 54). O'Neill's concluding warning is, 'ONLY YOU CAN STOP TEACHING/READING RITZER!' (p. 55, original capitalization). Likewise, Jary indicates that raising public consciousness about McDonald's through populist sociology may, paradoxically, do more to promote that company's interests than undermine them. In the same critical vein, Tester, whose chapter on the ethics of vegetarianism offers the only *practical* resistance strategy in the entire collection, argues that Ritzer's account of McDonaldization is as morally vacuous as the rationalizing processes of capitalism it describes. Indeed, the McDonaldization thesis should be understood as an *effect* of the very phenomenon it seeks to expose. Each of these reflexive arguments is extremely telling and it is little wonder that, in his rejoinder, Ritzer puts up a spirited defence to the charges levelled by these contributors.

For my part, I think O'Neill's emotive and powerful indictment of American agribusiness and fast-food industries stands head-and-shoulders above any of the other contributions in terms of its logic and rhetorical force. It reads like a condensed version of the appropriately savage and disturbing exposé of the fast-food industry offered recently by Schlosser (2001). I do wonder, however, whether O'Neill needs to throw quite so many punches beneath Ritzer's belt. Entertaining though this certainly is for those with a taste for *schadenfreude*, one senses that in places O'Neill's rhetoric appeals to the lowest common denominator and thereby blunts the acuity of his otherwise slick prose and intellectual wit. It also never ceases to amaze me that, amongst the intelligentsia, expressions of anti-Americanism bordering on outright racism seem perfectly acceptable, whereas similar remarks directed toward just about any other nation would rightly attract the severest censure. As to Tester's attack on Ritzer, this, too, is ultimately unjustified but for very different reasons. To accuse Ritzer of completely lacking ethical purpose is simply not born out by a reading of *The McDonaldization of society*. However much one might question the intellectual basis of Ritzer's

thesis or disapprove of his individualistic politics, he is out to condemn the immorality of processes that dehumanize and debase. To that extent, at least as far as this reviewer is concerned, his intentions are worthy.

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George Ritzer

*Enchanting a disenchanted world: Revolutionizing the means of consumption*  
London: Pine Forge Press. 1999. ISBN 0 76198 511 5. 258 pp.

George Ritzer

*Explorations in the sociology of consumption: Fast food, credit cards and casinos*  
London: Sage. 2001. ISBN 0 76197 120 3. 267 pp.

■ Reviewed by Marek Korczynski, *Loughborough University Business School, UK*

George Ritzer's *Enchanting a disenchanted world* is an important book, which has far-reaching implications for understanding the organization of consumption and production. Written in a typically accessible style, the book offers an engaging analysis of how organizations seek to structure consumption in an age characterized as on the cusp of modern and postmodern times. Unlike the other book reviewed here, *Explorations in the sociology of consumption*, which is a collection of Ritzer's writings on a range of topics, it presents a tight, holistic analysis of the topic at hand. In this review I first give a summary of the key arguments contained in *Enchanting a disenchanted world* (henceforth *Enchanting*), before drawing out related arguments present in the other book. I then argue for some key strengths in Ritzer's arguments and suggest some ways in which these strengths may inform future studies of consumption and organizations. Finally, I highlight some elements in Ritzer's analysis which I perceive to be weaknesses.

In *Enchanting*, Ritzer puts forward an analysis of one important set of the 'structures' (p. 218) of contemporary consumption. He focuses on what he calls the new 'cathedrals of consumption', such as casinos, shopping malls,

theme parks, themed restaurants, cruise ships and athletic stadia. He argues that these cathedrals of consumption serve to enchant consumers with the aim of encouraging more and more purchases to be made by these consumers: 'in order to attract ever-larger numbers of consumers, such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume' (p. 8). Drawing centrally on Campbell's rightfully renowned *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism* (1987), Ritzer argues, contra Weber, that the development of rationalization within capitalism has not meant the death of enchantment. On the contrary, organizations in capitalism systematically seek to enchant consumers to encourage further consumption, and hence further revenue generation and profits. An early example of a large-scale systematic corporate promotion of enchantment was the French department store of the nineteenth century which created enchanted, glamorous 'dream worlds' for consumers. For Ritzer, the past few decades have seen a revolutionary, accelerated development of this large-scale systematic enchantment of consumers – particularly in the USA. But this large-scale and systematic approach to the promotion of enchantment brings with it, in true dialectical fashion, the conditions for its own potential dissolution. The promotion of enchantment on this scale and the efficiency needed for profit generation necessarily involve a considerable degree of rationalization – the ordered queuing in a theme park or a restaurant, the predictable quality of the fare on a cruise ship. The systematic possibility is that these elements of rationalization which are part of the new cathedrals of consumption, will serve to disenchant consumers: 'efficient systems have no room for anything smacking of enchantment . . . anything that is magical, mysterious, fantastic, dreamy and so on is apt to be inefficient' (p. 96).

Ritzer draws on postmodern concepts of spectacle and simulation to suggest the next phase in this dialectic of enchantment–rationalization–disenchantment–re-enchantment. He argues that 'the cathedrals of consumption must be re-encharmed if they are to maintain their ability to attract a sufficient number of consumers' (p. 104) and the key way that this re-enchantment is enacted is through the creation of spectacles which often involve the use of simulations. For the corporations owning the cathedrals of consumption, the genius of the spectacle and the extravaganza are that they serve to conceal the rationality of the system at work. Spectacles to re-enchant consumers become ubiquitous and are informed by everyday simulations, not least in the roles undertaken by front line service workers employed in these cathedrals of consumption: 'most of the people we encounter in the new means of consumption are simulations, even if they are not wearing costumes . . . the blackjack dealer at a Las Vegas casino, the



ticket taker at Disney World, . . . the counterperson at McDonald's . . . are simulations' (p. 116) conducting simulated interactions with consumers. The use of spectacles to re-enchant consumers also typically involves an implosion of time and space with consumers increasingly entering environments in which they are apparently liberated from the constraints of time and space.

In *Explorations in the sociology of consumption*, Ritzer has drawn together some of his writings of recent years that have covered the topics of McDonaldization, credit cards, and the changing nature of consumption affected by the new cathedrals of consumption. It is in this final area that Ritzer offers his most significant contribution to contemporary sociology. (I presume that Ritzer's work on the McDonaldization of society is already well known. For discussions of his McDonaldization thesis, see Smart, 1999 and Korczynski, 2002a, Chap. 3. Ritzer's analysis of credit cards is more fully and adequately put forward in his 1995 book *Expressing America: A critique of the global credit card society*.) In the collected book he adds a little extra depth to the analysis of consumption and enchantment put forward in *Enchanting*. Namely, he considers how the process of (re)enchantment connects to globalization, to the work of Thorstein Veblen and to the theorizing put forward by the French Situationist school.

In the concluding chapters of both the books reviewed here Ritzer makes explicit the dangers that he sees as emerging from the operation of the new cathedrals of consumption. First, the corporations who own and run these cathedrals of consumption are strengthening their control and exploitation of consumers. Indeed, Ritzer argues that there is an analogy between Marx's concept of the owners of the means of production exploiting and controlling the workforce, and the way in which the owners of the means of consumption exploit and control consumers. The means of consumption here is taken to mean 'the settings or structures that enable us to consume all sorts of things' (p. 6). Within this definition, the new cathedrals of consumption constitute important parts of the means of consumption, and the owners of them become the controllers and exploiters of those who consume in them. Further, not only is the control and exploitation of consumers heightened, but the social relations of consumption become transformed, with consumers increasingly finding themselves alienated and isolated from each other. There is also a tendency towards sanitization and homogenization within consumption. Arguing that 'the shopping mall has replaced the factory as the defining structure of the age' (p. 172), he states that Weber's production-based metaphor of the iron cage of rationality is no longer able to capture the essence of contemporary times. In its stead, Ritzer offers the metaphor of the cathedrals of consumption as a series of minicages forming a 'consumer archipelago' (p. 191). The consumer may be 'free to hop from island to island

(from mall to mall, for example) but on each of the islands the consumer is constrained' (p. 191).

The key strength of these books lies in the way they place the process of enchantment central to the analysis of contemporary consumption and production. For too long, too much of our understanding of these important spheres of social life has been implicitly structured by Weber's argument that rationalization would drive out enchantment in social life. Ritzer's books should contribute significantly to the removal of these Weberian blinkers. Perhaps, an analogy can be made to Hochschild's (1983) groundbreaking book on emotional labour, *The managed heart*, which so effectively highlighted the importance of emotions within organizations. Hochschild allowed us to see the academic community's unstated acceptance of Weber's image of the ideal type of bureaucracy unsullied by 'love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements' (Gerth & Mills, 1958: 216). In the same way, Ritzer, building on the pioneering work of Colin Campbell, allows us to see our lack of attention to the process of enchantment in consumption. With the argument so plainly stated by Ritzer, we can pause to see that, of course, the process of enchantment is central to consumption. Indeed, strains of this argument have been present, in a relatively marginal way, in the past. For instance, Daniel Bell's (1976) thesis concerning *The cultural contradictions of capitalism* existing between rationalized production and autonomous, hedonistic consumption contained within it seeds of the idea. The process of enchantment in consumption, within the cultural contradictions of capitalism, was even more plainly spelt out for us on the movie screens in *Saturday Night Fever*, where the John Travolta character, alienated in the rationalized, belittling constraints of his dull, grey job, became alive in the enchanted realm of the night club. Enchanted by the music, as a response to the lack of enchantment in his job, he eloquently danced out the cultural contradictions of capitalism for us on the screen. It is to Ritzer's great credit that he looks at the screen, without the conceptual blinkers that have hindered us in the past, and speaks to us clearly about the process of enchantment that is occurring.

Ritzer also implicitly takes the thesis of the cultural contradictions of capitalism further through his brilliant concept of a dialectical interplay between enchantment and rationalization. The successful promotion of enchantment leads to the process of enchantment becoming rationalized. But this rationalization of the production process behind the process of enchantment in turn threatens to undermine enchantment. The management of consumption, therefore, involves dealing with a series of systematic dilemmas. The process of the rationalization of enchantment clearly has echoes of Weber's discussion of attempts to routinize charismatic authority. There may

be much to be learned by returning to Weber's analysis, but Ritzer's analysis, arguably, has more resonance because he allows us to see how and why this process is ongoing and central to the functioning of contemporary economies.

Ritzer's work forces us to take the process of enchantment in consumption seriously. It can be seen as a key starting point for a fuller analysis of this process and its implications, not only for consumption, but also for the organization of production, and the organizational life of those involved in promoting enchantment. There are already signs that scholars are beginning to take up implications of Ritzer's analysis. For instance, Alan Bryman's (1999) argument concerning the Disneyization of society has much in common with the concept of enchantment. In my own work, I have analysed the consumption that is promoted in service/sales interaction in terms of what I have called 'the enchanting myth of customer sovereignty' (Korczyński, 2002a, 2002b). These should be seen as just the beginning of an exploration of the process of enchantment. Many questions appear worth exploring. Regarding consumption some key questions are: How far does the process of enchantment suspend or work alongside rational decision-making among consumers? Does the journey from ever-heightening enchantment to ever-lowering disenchantment among consumers allow us to understand the increasingly significant social phenomenon of consumer 'rage'? What are the main modes or bases of enchantment? Ritzer's discussion of enchantment is necessarily broad ranging and he tends to stress the similarity in enchantment put forward by often quite different 'cathedrals of consumption'. There is a need for analysis to unpick potentially significant differences in modes/bases of enchantment. Questions also arise regarding the organization of production. Can the increasing significance of emotional and aesthetic labour in front line work be understood in terms of the increasing promotion of enchantment by management in service firms? What does an understanding of the sphere of consumption as involving enchantment imply for the experience of organizational life, still subject to a considerable degree of rationalization? People often both work in organizations and then consume, and analysis of one of these spheres should have implications for the analysis of the other sphere. Is there any sense in which internal aspects of organizations are becoming realms in which the enchantment of employees is promoted? Important books do not just answer questions but also throw up important new ones to be asked. The questions that have been and will continue to be raised by Ritzer's books are testimony, therefore, to the importance of Ritzer's work.

This is not to say that Ritzer's books are without weaknesses, of course.

Here I would like to highlight Ritzer's tendency to portray consumers as alienated, passive, relatively easily manipulated, and as subject to intense control and exploitation by large corporations. Some quotations from Ritzer should get this idea across:

Like racoons, people are attracted to shiny things.

(*Explorations*, p. 189)

Individuals find themselves alienated from each other and subordinated to the spectacle . . . isolation, alienation and subordination to the spectacle characterize other cathedrals of consumption as well.

(*Explorations*, p. 185)

People want, *or at least are led to think that they want*, all of those goods and services.

(*Enchanting*, p. 30, emphasis added)

Similarly he quotes with approval writers who put forward arguments concerning the manipulation of consumers. Thus Ewen's (1976) work on *Captains of consciousness* is called upon, as is Galanoy who asks with a breathtakingly elitist sneer, 'which is the real plastic – your Visa or MasterCard or you? Like those cards, you are being formed, shaped, plied, impressed' (quoted in *Explorations*, p. 72). In these instances, which are too frequent in the two books reviewed here, Ritzer is dangerously close to sounding like an unapologetic Herbert Marcuse. As a range of writers have made clear (e.g. Gabriel & Lang, 1995), our analysis of consumption needs to move beyond such a position. Perhaps there is some excuse for Ritzer in that his unequivocal focus is upon the structures, rather than the agency, of consumption, and so it becomes easy to lose sight of the relationship between the two. And yet there is also less excuse for his portrayal of an 'over-determined' consumer. This is because his pivotal concept of enchantment should, if used sensitively, have an understanding of the active agency of consumers written into it. One of the attractions of the concept of enchantment is that it seems to necessarily imply the active agency of those being enchanted. A story-teller can never enchant a passive audience. Enchantment involves the activation of fantasies and imaginations among people. Indeed this aspect of enchantment is central to Colin Campbell's analysis in *The romantic ethic*. Although Ritzer draws heavily on Campbell's book, this aspect of enchantment is unfortunately lost in his own work.

Despite these reservations, Ritzer's books, particularly *Enchanting a*

*disenchanted world*, are essential reading for those interested in understanding consumption and its implications for organizations.

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Zygmunt Bauman

*Work, consumerism and the new poor*

Buckingham: Open University Press. 1998. ISBN 0 33520 155 5. £16.99, 106 pp.

■ Reviewed by Andrew Sturdy, *The Management School, Imperial College, University of London, UK*

This is a good book. As one might expect from an author of such authority, it is elegantly written, accessible, well informed and addresses one of the most important social issues of our time. Selectively drawing on a range of literature, as well as general observations, a powerful commentary and cogent moral argument is constructed. In keeping with the aims of the 'Issues in Society' series, of which it is a part, it applies social scientific analysis to historical developments and future practical and moral possibilities. It does this in a broad-ranging exploration of poverty and how it relates to work, social welfare and, more recently, consumption. It blends together and sometimes challenges central debates in industrial sociology, history and social policy especially and introduces the notion of the new poor as 'flawed consumers'.

At the risk of over-simplification, the argument is as follows. In the first of three parts, the focus is on a shift from the (re-)emergence of the work ethic to an '*aesthetic of consumption*' – from a society of producers to one

of consumers. In what might otherwise be seen as familiar ground, Bauman argues that the introduction of the work ethic with factory employment was not so much to instil *new* values in lazy workers, but '... an attempt to resuscitate basically pre-industrial work attitudes under new conditions' (p. 6). This ethic gradually gave way to influence from the contrasting US tradition of ambition and enterprise, although this transition is not fully discussed. Here, instead of the 'sermon' and the 'stick' providing motives, order and system reproduction, the 'carrot' of monetary rewards (e.g. scientific management) began to shape human value and dignity whereby motivation and freedom were to be achieved through consumption.

The next chapter develops this argument in setting out the making of consumers whereby the restless '*compulsion*' to consume is felt as free will and stratifies social divisions as occupations had done before. Indeed, the prospects for lifelong (paid) work-based identity (i.e. career) have, for the majority, collapsed with the rise of 'flexible' employment. Rather, multiple identities are more appropriate and also better suited to the realm of constantly churning consumer goods. Here, consumers are guided and integrated by aesthetic interests not ethical norms – sublime experience, not duty well done. This transition means that work too is judged solely on the basis of intrinsic satisfactions rather than any notions of human dignity (see also du Gay, 1996). Thus, most have to be compelled to fill 'boring jobs', while a minority may enjoy, or be addicted to, 'entertaining' jobs and only the elite retain any sense of vocation. As a result of this shift to instrumentalism and consumption, the locus of poverty has also changed. As previously, poverty has physical dimensions (e.g. health) and is exclusionary. However, now, the poor are 'flawed consumers', inhabiting a culture contrived for those with money, but unable to participate and increasingly so.

In Part Two the theme of poverty and the work ethic continues, but the focus shifts initially to the welfare state (WS) and the change in (party) political consensus from support of universalism towards deregulation and continued means testing. Accounting for such a transition is not reduced to the growth of neo-liberal ideology, although this is significant. Rather, emphasis is given to changing patterns of labour demand from capital. The welfare state had provided 're-commodified' labour cheaply, but corporate economic growth has come to rely less on local labour and more on capital investment and cheaper, more compliant overseas labour. At the same time, many of the electorate – Galbraith's 'contented majority' – have begun to withdraw their support for the WS despite (or because of) benefiting from it. They are either more confident to manage their own affairs or, more likely, aware of the falling standards of provision. Moreover, the growth of consumerism has elevated 'choice' and 'difference' to the extent that collective,

standard services are perceived poorly regardless of their actual quality. Such an observation has clear implications for the UK government's recent investment in the NHS. Indeed, despite some shift in WS debates since the publication of this book, it remains highly relevant, not least in relation to various forms of means testing. Nevertheless, more might have been made of the connection between consumption and public services, especially given that the 'poor' are principal users.

The emphasis then moves towards those often excluded from the WS, the 'underclass' and their invention as a classification through a resurrection of the work ethic and the notion of the 'undeserving poor'. The original role of the work ethic to fuel economic growth through labour supply is, again, seen as no longer relevant in the West, where downsizing and technological substitution, not increasing employment levels, are seen as signs of economic health. Thus, its re-emergence needs to be explained. Through somewhat functionalist arguments, the role of the work ethic is presented as assuaging the guilt that arises from casting many of the population to permanent redundancy. Separating the 'problem of the underclass' from the 'issue of poverty', it is asserted, normalizes poverty (the 'deserving poor') and excludes, criminalizes, blames and pathologizes the otherwise heterogeneous underclass – the new (post-cold war) 'enemy' or, perhaps, 'flawed consumers' of public services. However, linking poverty and crime in public discourse is seen to help relieve a sense of moral obligation from the majority towards even the 'deserving' poor. More generally, the full extent of poverty in the world (i.e. beyond hunger) is downplayed in the media and the contemporary work ethic continues to denigrate the dependency of the poor and prescribe duties to them.

The concluding chapter (Part Three) explores the future prospects for the new poor. This is an integrative chapter that charts the practical and discursive exclusion and 'self-marginalisation' (p. 85) of the poor historically through the construction of order and the benevolent and violent power of the norm(al). By inducing both fear and a sense of virtue in others, the poor serve a function of reproducing order elsewhere in societies and prompt programmes of treatment, to prepare them for work. However, the key difference in a society of consumers, where labour is a burden to capital, is that this preparation is no longer economically necessary – the work ethic is now simply a 'cover-up' (p. 90). Consequently, the poor have no bargaining power to promote the WS and 'for the first time in recorded history . . . (they are) . . . purely and simply a worry and a nuisance' (p. 91) whose place is out of sight, off the streets, in prison and deported, as 'deprivation' is translated into 'depravity'. The cost of this approach, like other rational and indifferent solutions, is not simply borne by the poor themselves, but is the 'humanity' of us all (p. 94; see also Sennett, 2000).

Our choice of how to address this is discussed in the closing four pages of the book. Here, the work of Claus Offe is cited and emphasis is placed on challenging what is taken for granted in social arrangements (e.g. efficiency and economic growth as good) and, more specifically decoupling income entitlement from earning capacity (cf. means testing and assessing willingness to work) and work from the labour market (paid work). Such an approach represents a shift from an 'ethic of work' to an 'ethic of life' and 'workmanship' (p. 97) in keeping with what is seen as natural human creativity and with humanity. Surprisingly perhaps, there was no place in this, albeit brief, discussion for the possibility of related ethics of service or care. This field, which is of growing interest in critical studies of customer service, can open up another route to explore the work–consumption interrelationship.

Thus, a range of debates and issues are drawn together in this volume, making important connections which are often neglected in the furrows of different social science disciplines and policy agendas. Indeed, individually, students of work, welfare and culture are likely to be familiar with the issues raised and summarized. There is then, a feeling of familiarity with the content, however well expressed. Moreover, while such a wide-ranging account must cut corners to have an impact, detail, novelty and subtlety were sometimes lost at the expense of polemic and repetition. First, given the book's focus, consumerism was treated as a largely monolithic activity, reduced to an unregulatable aesthetic, rather than diversified and problematic. Indeed, the consumer and his/her activities were largely invisible beyond abstract and economic categories. Similarly, except in the sense of elite jobs assuming an aesthetic value to be consumed, the site where consumption meets work is neglected. Rather, consumption is seen to contrast with work in being essentially an individual, solitary activity. The interactive and social nature of the service encounter is thus ignored, along with the role of the vast ranks of public and private sector service workers.

Second, work as an unpaid activity was absent from the account and yet formed one of the two pillars of policy prescription at the end. Third, it was not clear to what extent the account was meant to be concerned with the UK or western economies generally. References were sometimes made to the latter, yet most debates were focused on the UK, in relation to its welfare system especially, without acknowledging important variations across societies.

Such criticisms may seem harsh for a book making general and important arguments which are necessarily diluted if detail and qualification are introduced unduly. However, the criticisms do weaken the rhetoric, even for a supportive reader. More generally, some would take issue with a clearly essentialist view of the human subject, not least because of the importance attached elsewhere in the book to the growth of multiple identifications. For



example, and echoing early Marx, creativity is central (p. 97), along with the 'human passion for dignified life or motivation towards self-assertion' (p. 15). Other concerns arise from overemphasis. In particular, Bauman asserts, reasonably, that his argument is one of a shift in primacy, not one in which consumers completely replace the role of producers. However, in emphasizing the plight of the new poor as 'flawed consumers', unable to participate in the 'normal' activity of consumption (and thereby left feeling bored and inadequate), the continuing importance of work as a source of identity for the *majority* is denied. Even 'uniformly abject and worthless' jobs are existentially valued by employees. Indeed, in the case of 'dirty jobs' they may be especially important. Similarly, the seduction of consumption is exaggerated. Taking the argument to an extreme case, those (independently wealthy) who participate in full-time consumption may well feel as bored as the unemployed poor. Similarly, declining job/career security might be seen to promote a continued, not reduced, existential connection with work, occupation and organization, albeit a more fleeting or conditional one. It is not sufficient to dismiss the practices of managers to secure such connections (e.g. organizational commitment and culture initiatives), by saying that they don't really expect success (p. 35).

In summary, the book is worthy of reading by many, not just in the social sciences, but also business where I have used it in teaching to provide insight and provoke debate. Its key contribution is to fuse and, to a lesser extent, develop central moral and political issues in a powerful way. In particular, it presents the poor in a new light – as flawed consumers – and challenges the modern role of both citizens and welfare systems as primarily suppliers of labour to capital. It does this with an authoritative and readable style that is rightly explicitly moral in its call to reflection and action. In setting such an agenda in this way, it is, perhaps, for others to refine, develop and connect what is lost in a broad sweep and condemnation of our treatment of the poor in society.

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George Cheney

*Values at work: Employee participation meets market pressure at Mondragón*

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1999. ISBN 0 80143 325 8. xviii + 190 pp.

■ Reviewed by Martin Parker, *Keele University, UK*

This book is dedicated to the radical notion that work ought to dignify rather than diminish the human experience.

(Cheney's dedication)

George Cheney is concerned with one of the most important issues facing those interested in organizing in the present age. Can alternatives to market managerial organization survive and prosper? It is common enough nowadays to assume that the 'convergence thesis' of the 1960s has developed into fully blown globalization. Whether economic or cultural, the idea is that one best way of organizing has emerged and is (and also should be) spreading across the world. Rabid managerialists and vapid politicians seem to agree on this inevitability and together conspire to tighten the regulated deregulation which is the World Trade Organization's new End of History. There have already been quite a few recent attempts to condemn the self-interested hypocrisy that legitimates itself as trickle-down economics on a global scale, the corporate takeover of public institutions, the false promises of marketing, or the atrophy of the organizational imagination (for example, Frank, 2001; Klein, 2000; Monbiot, 2000; Parker, 2002). And over the years there have also been many explorations of small-scale alternatives – communes, co-operatives, Utopias and so on (for example, Bennholdt-Thomsen & Mies, 1999; Ekins, 1992; Irwin, 1995; Marshall, 1993). However, there have been few studies that have considered the empirical details of contemporary, large-scale and profitable organized alternatives and their potential to resist that which is seemingly inevitable. This is hardly surprising, because there aren't that many to choose from.

Cheney's study begins to fill this gap. Only 'begins', because it is too thin to be an engrossing ethnography, too careful to be an inspiring manifesto and too narrowly theorized to stretch the reader very far from liberal humanism. In other words, I wanted more from this short book and was a little disappointed that a certain dutiful scholasticism (and some poor editing) will probably consign an important study to the long loan parts of larger university collections. That being said, George Cheney is one of those rare North Americans who has made a sustained attempt to read non-US materials, and his nods towards European organization theory are most welcome. So too is his sustained attempt to understand alternatives to market managerialism as

matters of both culture and structure, as 'organizational' issues in both the narrow and broad senses of that term.

The central question for the book is expressed well enough by the author himself. 'Can an organization dedicated to serving people really maintain its social values and its basic integrity, despite growth, bureaucratization and market competition?' (p. xiv) And what better place to test such a question than the Mondragón co-operatives? Cheney visited Mondragón in the Basque Country of northern Spain in 1992, 1994 and 1997 and was hence in a good position to tell a story about how a successful alternative organization managed the turbulent 1990s. What is now the Mondragón Co-operative Corporation (MCC), an association of over 150 co-operatives, began as a heater firm in 1956. By 1998, it employed 42,000 people and had annual sales of more than seven billion US dollars. This is a remarkable success story, but such growth has not been without its costs. A discussion group originally founded in 1941 by a Basque priest, José Maria Arizmen-diarrieta, has become a conglomerate with interests in banking, R&D, manufacturing and retail, as well as a growing number of non-Basque and even non-cooperative businesses. Perhaps unsurprisingly, an increasing number of employees are not full *socios* (member-owners); pay rates in the *cúpula* (MCC's strategic centre) have drifted further away from initially agreed ratios of 1:3 to 70 per cent of market average; key decisions have been taken away from local units; and democracy has become increasingly procedural. For some co-operatives this has been too much, and in 1992 the ULMA group split away from MCC to follow its own course independent of its giant neighbour. At the same time, the quasi-union KT began to voice increasing discontent about the policies of MCC technocrats such as, for example, the increasing adoption of quasi-Japanese 'lean production' techniques. For older members, there is now a clear nostalgia for the days when local solidarity was strong, and the political commitments of co-operative work (such as membership of the assembly) were actively and passionately engaged in.

Cheney expresses this drift in terms of a weakening or changing of central values. As a professor of organizational communication, he treats words like 'democracy', 'quality', 'customers' and 'markets' as expressive of value commitments. These are not things in themselves, but matters that are talked into existence through communication. And so, he reports with some sadness, it seems that there is in MCC 'an almost supernatural conception of the market' together with increasingly hegemonic assumptions about customer service as 'a reason for being and a way of reconceptualizing every organizational activity and every employee' (pp. 69–70). The outcome? That growth, hierarchy and internationalization are seen as inevitable responses

to signals from the market. That solidarity becomes less important than personal consumption and relative pay rates. That co-operation becomes translated into the empowerment of the total quality worker, participation is planned rather than demanded, and a diversity of opinions is subsumed within an imposed corporate culture.

On balance though, Mondragón still has much to commend it. There are active forms of local governance and bottom-up communication; pay equity is much greater than in comparable firms; and philosophical and social education in the meaning of co-operativism is still funded and attended. There seems to be a genuine concern for the individual, and it is still possible for workers to call their supervisors a *chorizo* (sausage) without reprisals. And they are making money. This is all excellent news, and a remarkable counter example to 'one best way' forms of managerialism. However, the economic and cultural distinctions among non-members, *socios* and the *cúpula* seem to be widening; there is an increasing emphasis on financial and technical training; and corporate communication and decision-making is becoming more centralized and top-down. Further, meaningful dissent is both formally and informally de-legitimized. As a general manager put it – 'What we can't afford is a diversification of opinions (. . .) if we don't agree on a common goal, the market will kick us out.' (p. 108) Democracy is here being reinterpreted as customer-oriented and market-driven. With a twist of logic that would be clear to Kant, a concern for individuals as ends in themselves becomes a means to an end. This results in a state of affairs that Cheney neatly terms 'commodified empowerment' (p. 150).

Now this might be straightforward realism. If MCC doesn't attend to its bottom line it may simply disappear. There is little point in being romantic about such matters. Yet as Cheney argues, there is a real danger of mistaking words for things here. After all, Mondragón makes its market too, just as it defines efficiency, co-operation, responsibility and so on. To a greater or lesser extent, these are local constructions, not determinations that emanate from some place beyond the Basque Country. Institutional isomorphism and the degeneration of co-operative values are not evolutionary forces beyond agency, but an active borrowing of concepts by particular people. If these concepts are market managerial in their origin, then the outcome will be a predictable one. But perhaps, Cheney is suggesting, it doesn't have to be that way. So ideas such as 'value' and 'the market' are not simply contradictions because markets express values and values are expressed through markets. If anything, what is happening at Mondragón is that the values of humanization are increasingly being entrapped within a hegemonic and global set of assumptions about what humanization can be made to mean. The task then, is not to refuse markets as such, but (at a local level) to enlarge what

empowerment, participation and democracy can mean and use those words to re-construct understandings of markets.

There is often something a little sad going on when critics look at commercially successful 'alternative' organizations such as Ben and Jerry's, The Body Shop, or even Semco. It seems that when the Achilles' heel is discovered, which it always is, then a certain smug *schadenfreude* sets in. This book doesn't fall into that trap. Cheney is smart enough not to assume that perfection can be found on earth, but rather that 'just because a social ideal is unachievable in its entirety doesn't mean that it cannot serve as an inspiring point of reference in our step-by-step realization of important values and goals.' (p. 6, see also Fournier, 2002). Utopias easily become historical footnotes, but actually existing and profitable co-operatives are different creatures altogether. For anyone interested in alternatives to market managerialism, the tired phrase 'more research is needed' really does apply here, and this book is an important beginning. I'll be looking out for more of George Cheney's work in the future.

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Marek Korczynski

*Human resource management in service work*

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A few years ago, I was entertaining a visitor at the senior staff restaurant at the university where I worked. My visitor ordered the steak au poivre. 'I'll have it medium done' he said. 'I think that's how it comes out of the packet, love,' the waitress replied.

As this anecdote illustrates, we expect more from service workers than that they efficiently inform us about and deliver a product. We expect them to enchant us, to help create illusions about products that increasingly do come out of a packet and we are taken aback when the mask drops and they tell us the truth.

Korczynski starts from the assumption that service work is different from many other types of work primarily because it cannot be understood by just focusing on the management–worker dyad. In front-line service work, the customer is ever present. Managing service work is about managing the tensions between efficiency and rationality (which deem that it is better to provide pre-prepared steak au poivre from a packet) and the irrationality of the customer (who wants to believe that the steak is specially cooked to his specifications although not necessarily to wait or pay for that privilege). This book rejects the main arguments of the new service management school that assume relationships among customers, workers and management are harmonious and self-correcting. It also dismisses the most critical perspectives of service work from Ritzer and Du Gay. The focus instead is on ambiguities of service work; on the ways customers can be simultaneously sources of pain and pleasure; on the ways in which service workers can find spaces to develop genuine relationships with customers; on the fine lines that workers have to tread in their relationships with customers.

This book has many strengths. For anyone researching or studying service work it provides a clear map of a complex area. Chapters include a critical analysis of the new service management school, reviews of hospital-ity work, call-centre work and healthcare work, a review of empowerment on the front line, a review of research on emotional labour, a research on gender segregation and disadvantage and a review of trade unions in service work. All are well-researched and clearly written and, whilst all of the material is available elsewhere (as would be expected from a text), it is really useful to have it all brought together. The emphasis is on understanding the nature of service work and the author particularly favours research which uses an ethnographic approach. Although I am personally very comfortable with this approach, I am less sure that the cover description of the book as ‘a text on human resource management in the service sector’ is helpful. This is definitely not a text on how to manage human resources in the service sector and generally I felt the sections on human resource strategy and practices were weaker than those on work behaviour. Perhaps what were lacking were the voices of the managers of the service workers to set against the voices of the service workers themselves and this probably represents a gap in research rather than an omission by the author. This is also not a text that makes any concessions to a student readership through the use of questions,

boxed examples, etc. Korczynski acknowledges the input of his second-year students in the development of the book. I can see how one could design an engaging and interesting unit around the material but I think my second-year students would find the book itself quite heavy going. It will be more useful for academics, researchers and more advanced students.

Organization theorists have been slow to discover service work. Korczynski calls the service worker the forgotten figure of modern times, pointing out that most of us do not remember that Charlie Chaplin, negotiating his way through *Modern Times*, was employed as a singing waiter as well as an assembly line worker. Now, when call-centres seem to have replaced car factories as the focus of every other paper at research conferences, it seems that the service work is no longer in danger of being ignored. Yet call-centres represent only one way (the most factory-like) of organizing service work. Korczynski argues that 'the study of front-line work tells us much about the nature of our times, about production and consumption, about the contradictions of modern work and about the dilemmas of how to manage it' (p. 193). Hopefully, the book will convince some new researchers that the study of shop workers, waiters, bar staff, nurses and sales staff is at least as relevant and interesting as the study of knowledge workers.