In the introduction to this book Sandra Acker comments that the teachers in the study would frequently suggest that she write a soap opera or a novel about the events she witnessed rather than an ethnography. Whilst not taking them up on their suggestion the entertaining style of the writing is clear evidence of Sandra Acker’s ability to captivate her readers. This book provides a finely grained picture of what goes on in the daily lives of teachers and, as such, is of particular significance for those of us involved in the education of student teachers. The emphasis in publishers’ catalogues is towards books which tend to portray the teacher as a ‘technicist’ as evidenced in texts on management, assessment and teaching the national curriculum. The Realities of Teachers’ Work offers biographies of teachers at various stages in their careers and traces them over ten years thus providing an opportunity to explore with students what it really means to be a teacher.

Although the main data collection period took place before the full implications of major changes to the English and Welsh education system had made themselves felt, Sandra Acker takes care to contextualise the discussion. For example, when talking about the school governing body she identifies how it was composed pre-education reforms and how it subsequently changed. This careful handling of the data is evident throughout the book and the result is a story of a school which is located culturally and historically and which critically engages with a broad range of education literature.

The book is divided into four sections: Setting the Scene, Doing the Work, Crossing Boundaries, and Changing People and Places. The three chapters which make up ‘Setting the Scene’ introduce the themes which underpin the general discussion, namely work, culture and gender. Chapter 2 on Studying Teachers engages with some methodological issues which readers need to be aware of. Sandra Acker establishes and justifies her position as a symbolic interactionist and what that means in terms of this study of Hillview school. She begins this process by noting that what teachers do is shaped by many contextual features, including the labour market for teachers, traditions and demographic factors. Sandra Acker then goes on to look critically at the literature on occupational culture and observes that there is an assumption that cultures are predictable outgrowths of structures. However, there are problems in trying to jump from structure to culture both in terms of demonstrating empirical connections and generalisability. As Sandra Acker also notes, ‘if we move too quickly from overgeneralized accounts of teacher culture to over-individualized teacher narratives we may lose sight of another form of teacher culture – the culture of the workplace’ (p. 23). The only critical comment I have of this book is that where the author provides a reflective analysis of the methodological approaches taken in the literature on occupational culture her own position does not receive the same interrogation. Bridging the gap between (micro) theories emerging from the study of one institution and (macro) theories of society has been a continuing difficulty for symbolic interactionists. It would have been useful to have had some discussion of this in the same way that account was taken of the impact of postmodernism on her thinking. Other issues related to the methodology of the study appear in an appendix.
The second section, Doing the Work, is comprised of four chapters. ‘The Teacher and the Class’ makes the point that a major occupational hazard for teachers is negotiating and maintaining a working consensus in the classroom with pupils. Chapter 5, ‘Beyond the Classroom’ considers all the myriad aspects of a teacher’s work life which take place outside of the immediate job of teaching. Sandra Acker draws attention to how ‘teachers have an extensive life as a collaborative community, with and without the children present’ (p. 83). This involves meeting parents, contacting educational psychologists and other specialists, organising the library as well as the other obligations a teacher has, for example, attending staff meetings and undertaking playground duties. In chapter 6 the spotlight is turned on the work of the headteacher. This is an interesting chapter in that the increased intrusion of the government, which is threaded throughout the book, is particularly evident here as the extra pressures placed on headteachers through managing school finances and expectations of entrepreneurial expertise gain momentum. The final chapter in this section, ‘Colleagues, Cultures and Caring’, explores the links between women, teaching and caring.

Section three consists of two chapters; ‘School Boundaries’, which looks at the role of the support staff, the school governing body and the local education authority in relation to Hillview school; and, ‘Parents’. The fourth and final section ‘Changing People and Places’ contains an excellent chapter on ‘Teacher’s Careers’ which is not surprising given that Sandra Acker has written extensively in this field. Chapter 11 ‘Change at Hillview’ describes the major changes made to the educational system throughout recent years in general terms and then returns to the ‘story of Hillview’ (p. 169) to document the effects of the early stages of these reforms on the teachers’ workplace culture.

It is always amusing to see pre-publication reviews on the cover of books as they have usually been written by friends/colleagues of the author. This book is no exception and all the reviewers appear somewhere in the author’s acknowledgements. However, the glowing reviews on the cover of The Realities of Teachers Work are wholly justifiable. This is an excellent book.

University of Newcastle Upon Tyne  
CHRISTINE SKELTON

Gender and Power in the Workplace: Analysing the Impact of Economic Change
Harriet Bradley

In the last few years, there has been an exciting expansion of detailed studies of social relations ‘on the shopfloor’ in a variety of organisations: many of them published in this journal. Harriet Bradley’s new book is a welcome addition to this literature. In it she explores the relationships between gender and class in five organisations in the north-east of England, based on 198 interviews carried out with matched pairs of men and women employees in 1992 and 1993, as well as on discussions with trade union representatives and officials and with managers. The project began as an investigation of the significance of trade unions but metamorphosed into a more wide-ranging study of changes in working conditions and the effects of economic restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s as the author found that this is what her interviewees wanted to discuss.

Bradley’s main aim in the book is to allow her employees to speak so that the reader can ‘listen
to the play of voices and attend to their interweaving narratives’ (p. 8), but she is much less of a post-structuralist than this quotation seems to imply. Instead, she draws on a theoretical framework that she developed in greater detail in an earlier book (*Fractured Identities*, Cambridge: Polity Press 1996) in which the material and the discursive, structural relations of power and expressed meanings, are given equal weight. Before summarising this approach in chapter 3, an extremely brief account of the gender and class implications of economic restructuring is provided in chapter 2. Because it is so brief, the contrasting explanations of change and the claims about consequences tend to be overdrawn. On page 16, for example, it seems that both changes in the gender composition of the labour force and employment insecurity are attributed to globalisation which is an oversimplification of complex changes.

Chapter 3 is the theoretical heart of the book. Here Bradley sets out ‘a model for the analysis of gender and class along with a resource-based analysis of power (p. 36). After a succinct definition of class and gender as lived relations, Bradley outlines a set of changes in class and gender relations that she claims operates at the global level and which form the context for developments in specific locations. It is here that I have a fundamental disagreement with her approach. As the ‘locality’ school of geographers and sociologists have been at pains to demonstrate, it is incorrect to assume the local and the global map onto particular spatial scales. The global is not the context for specific or local changes, nor does a focus on local difference deny large-scale structural change. Rather, social processes interact at a variety of scales and so constitute the particularity of places, which both reflects and affects wider social processes. Similarly, the rejection of grand narratives by postmodern theorists for an analysis of specific events in certain settings does not, in my view, shift the focus from the global to the local, as Bradley argues (p. 20), but is instead a recognition of the complexity of the ways in which social processes at a variety of spatial scales constitute geographic difference. In this sense, therefore, despite our differences, I have a great deal of sympathy for a model which demands careful attention to local social practices and larger-scale economic change. Bradley’s model itself draws from an eclectic range of theoretical perspectives – Marx, Weber, Bourdieu and Giddens and Foucault are all referred to – but the reader with only a basic understanding of their work will find it difficult to understand exactly how and where Bradley agrees or differs with their arguments. The chapter concludes with a useful summary of nine dimensions of gendered power relations but it is not clear how these intersect with class-based power differentials, which recut a simple binary distinction between men and women.

The rest of the book is a fascinating analysis of the specificities of working lives in the north-east at the start of the 1990s in five organisations – four service sector firms (two private and two public) and, in a reflection of the region’s past, a manufacturing company. The interviews were undertaken in a clearing bank, a supermarket chain, a Trust group of hospitals, a regional branch of the civil service and a chemical firm. Bradley examines the continuities in gender segregation in these organisations but also reveals women’s sense of greater opportunities in what she designates a ‘climate of equality’ (p. 83) (all the firms had some form of Equal Opportunities policy) and the growing feminisation of the regional labour market. Some women are gaining managerial opportunities, but as many other workplace studies have demonstrated, women’s movement into managerial positions often coincides with the downgrading of these. Bradley also found some evidence that men were moving into previously female jobs – albeit bottom-end retail positions and line workers in factories, but also into nursing. Overall, however, she presents a somewhat optimistic picture of gender relations, concluding that the growth of women’s employment is a force for positive change not only in the workplace but also at home.

Optimism about gender relations is, however, muted by Bradley’s analysis of adverse changes in the class composition of the north-east, as identified in chapters 7 and 8. Stress, insecurity and powerlessness are common experiences for workers in all the organisations. ‘Market’ practices
were being introduced in the public sector and ‘flexibility’ into all the firms. The public sector workers were most vocal about the adverse effects of the changes, in part because the private sector employees were already more inured to the experiences of insecurity and intensification. In the final two substantive chapters, Bradley brings together her analyses of class and gender by examining women’s involvement in trade-union activities and then more general shifts in the exercise of power in the labour market by employees, unions and employers. In the conclusion, Bradley addresses wider questions about the ways in which globalisation and feminisation are related to changing class and gender relations, re-emphasising her relatively optimistic views about gender compared with her pessimism about class inequality. It provides a salutary reminder of the complex interconnections of dimensions of power, although I was left wishing that Bradley had addressed the interconnections more directly.

The book is a welcome addition to the genre of workplace studies. Its joint focus on class and gender is refreshing (and might perhaps have been reflected in the title). It will interest sociologists of work, and economic geographers and its clear style makes it accessible to undergraduate readers. Where it is perhaps less successful is in its theoretical ambitions and as a contribution to feminist scholarship. Partly because the book is rather short, the theoretical underpinnings of the book are inadequately developed. There is also too little acknowledgement of recent exciting feminist scholarship about multiple gendered identities and workplace cultures, perhaps reflecting the author’s own candid recognition of the long gestation of her book.

_The London School of Economics_  
LINDA MCDOWELL

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**Social Exclusion**  
**David Byrne**  

The present (New) Labour government’s rhetoric regarding policy towards the most disadvantaged in society is characterised by a number of key words or phrases. Perhaps the most ubiquitous of these is the term ‘social exclusion’. To some, use of this term represents an enormous advance on the dismal years of the previous governments which doggedly refused to acknowledge the existence of poverty or claimed it was not an issue for the UK. The present government, indeed, established a Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 which is nearing the end of its first (and possibly only) programme of work, a programme which has involved the production of focused papers and policy programmes for deprived groups (such as young people or rough sleepers) as well as the bringing together of policy advice from a wide range of sources into what, it is claimed, will be a comprehensive strategy for the regeneration of England’s poorest neighbourhoods.

However, the term social exclusion is neither new nor, as Byrne’s book makes clear, unproblematic. The term could be found in the 1950s within the French context when it was used in a robust and somewhat pejorative way to talk about groups at the margins of society; and became a more mainstream descriptor during the lives of the three European anti-poverty programmes. The difference between (relative) poverty – as a way of describing the condition of those without access to adequate material means for a decent existence compared with the norms of society – and social exclusion, which is certainly a much wider concept and incorporates
broader understandings of the meaning of deprivation, is that social exclusion offers a recognition that people are excluded by the actions of others: by structures, policies, mechanisms, processes or simply by pure prejudice (if that is not a contradiction in terms). But this is where the paradox begins to emerge which is explored in Byrne’s book: because the Social Exclusion Unit, whose brief in any case excludes it from examining such basic questions as the adequacy of benefits, focuses by and large not on the actions of those controlling those very same processes and mechanisms but on the poor themselves. This narrows the focus of its work into shaping the behaviour of organisations and of individuals – particularly the poor themselves. In Scotland, where they are increasingly doing things differently, at least they talk about social inclusion and mention the e-word – equality – as a goal of social inclusion.

Byrne’s radical analysis thus demonstrates that the term social exclusion in reality obscures as much as it clarifies as it has become a rather unthinking add-on to the language of most poverty campaigners. He offers, in the process, a sharper exposition of the political contradictions in New Labour’s programme, an exposition which is an elegant, if uneven, exercise in that old art of raising consciousness. His argument is that ‘advanced industrial societies are converging on a norm of social politics organised around a flexible labour market and structural social exclusion’ (p. 70) and that exclusion is not a property inherent in individuals but is ‘a necessary and inherent characteristic of an unequal post-industrial capitalism … with a systematic constraining of the organisational powers of workers as collective actors’, (p. 128). Seen from this perspective, one asks what is the focus on social exclusion attempting to do? Byrne’s answer is that it is an organised attempt by the state to incorporate people at the margins into this flexible – and increasingly global – labour market (characterised by insecurity, low wages and poor conditions), whilst providing little encouragement to formerly progressive movements, such as the trades unions, to organise for improvement. If, in the process, it proves necessary to move from encouragement to compulsion (increasingly reflected in the character of the New Deal), to classify and stigmatise the poor (as some Ministers are increasingly explicit in doing) and to improve incentives by reducing benefit levels (as the government is increasingly doing), then that merely shows the whole-hearted energy with which this government is pursuing its particular poverty policy agenda. Whether this agenda is – or might be – really much different from that of the previous one becomes an increasingly contested and contradictory question and we probably will not know the truth of this until, at the very least, Gordon Brown’s memoirs are published. The simple question then becomes clear: exclusion from, or inclusion into, what?: the answer, to a society characterised by structural inequalities which can only be addressed by determined political action.

Clearly, there are some tensions within the government; some Cabinet ministers are more pro-poor than others and some policies are having a measurable impact on poverty. The Treasury has signed up to a major reduction in the level of child poverty although there seems little clarity about how it expects to do this or how its success in doing so will be evaluated. Byrne’s analysis, however, suggests that these domestic differences are marginal to the wider agenda of a government which is unwilling to pursue an explicitly redistributive agenda for both electoral purposes and ideological reasons. In this, its agenda is a bi- or even tri-partisan one. Thus, whilst the Liberal Dahrendorf Commission on Wealth Creation concurred with one strong theme in the Social Justice Commission report, that people’s detachment from the labour market was the key issue, Byrne suggests that the big story in reality is ‘poor work’, whether to be found in call centres, big Macs (but with little wages), and indeed, in most areas of public service.

Byrne’s discussion includes some interesting reflections on the experience of eastern Europe, particularly Poland, where different answers have been sought to the question, if not state socialism, then what? The clear lesson from east of Poland is that unfettered market solutions provide what are merely exaggerated forms of phenomena now known the world over thanks to
the agenda of structural adjustment, equally enthusiastically pursued by this government as by its predecessor: concentrations of wealth in a few hands, backed up if necessary by those who are explicitly or implicitly brigands, and the immiseration of the mass of the population, facilitated by the direct and indirect undermining of mass forms of political organisation.

Byrne’s political answer is a call for a return to a solidaristic form of politics in which, slightly strangely, he sees the churches playing a key role. Whether this is because he is extrapolating from the role of the Liberation theologians of Latin America in facilitating local community action is not clear (although Freire appears not infrequently). There is an edge of desperation to the implied question, if not the traditional left – Old Labour and the unions – then who? Who can present a challenge to the increasing convergence between political parties in their stance towards the poor? Unfortunately, whilst his political analysis is strong and convincing – and true to a long career of structural analyses of so-called ‘inner city decline’ (another inherent feature of capitalist development and dedevelopment linguistically and conceptually misdescribed), his political programme brings the book to a rather faltering close. It would have been more appropriate to end with a similarly detailed and trenchant analysis of the equally ubiquitous term, community empowerment – but that’s perhaps worthy of another book.

University of Lincolnshire and Humberside

Gary Craig

Weaving Work and Motherhood

Anita Ilta Garey


How do women enact lives as both mothers and employees, given a social context that constructs these definitions of the self as oppositional? How do they manage complex routines that combine both these roles, in a culture that sees each as an all-absorbing life project? What resources are available to different women to combine the demands of work and motherhood? Garey’s book is a fascinating and largely successful attempt to answer these questions. Using the metaphor of weaving, she begins by rejecting the common assumption that the demands of home and work necessarily conflict with each other, instead exploring the interconnections between work and family in women’s lives.

Although she initially established the historical context to the employment of women outside the home, the bulk of Garey’s attention is devoted to the contemporary ‘working mother’ in the USA. Her research aims to remedy two weaknesses in previous accounts of the subject: firstly, Garey points out that in discussions in popular culture the ‘working mother’ is constructed as a woman employed in a managerial or professional position – a role which hardly corresponds to the experience of most mothers in employment; secondly, Garey critiques the ‘orientation model of work’ that has dominated academic accounts of mothers and employment.

To counter the first bias, Garey’s discussion is based on her study of thirty-seven women with children from a US hospital. She argues that the variety of female-dominated professions in this institution, from administrative staff to janitors to nurses, in addition to the assorted shift work and part-time opportunities, reflects the range of jobs and working arrangements adopted by women in employment in the USA. She further stresses that her sample was racially and ethnically diverse, and that the women interviewed were of a variety of ages.
On the second point, Garey rightly points out that the orientation model reproduces cultural assumptions about motherhood since it suggests that women are either ‘work oriented’ or ‘family orientated’. It is thereby implied that women can only be committed to one of these two sources of identity, in contrast to a ‘family man’ who can play out this identity through earning money to support his family. According to the orientation model, part-time employees who are also mothers are categorised as ‘family-oriented’, reinforcing the popular assumption that they are uncommitted employees, whereas women labeled as ‘work-oriented’ are implicitly condemned as less nurturing mothers. In place of this dichotomy, Garey is interested in exploring the different ways that employed women with children interweave work and family.

Garey suggests that there are many ways in which women can reconcile the apparently conflicting demands of work and family. For example, they too may describe work in terms of their ability to support their children financially, and may see their work outside the home as allowing their children to grow independently from their mothers, thus suggesting that their employment actually contributes to their mothering role. Moreover, there are a number of different employment strategies that they may employ: part-time work, either voluntary or involuntary; night-shift work; full-time, day-shift work; and sequencing (changing between the former possibilities over time) in order to combine both employment and mothering in their lives.

As Garey describes each of these employment strategies in turn, the reader is continually reminded of the complex interconnections between the different strands of a person’s life, whilst her emphasis on the dynamic enhances her ability to show the many ways in which women’s lives as employees and as mothers are entwined. Moreover, throughout this book, Garey uses her data to confound popular suppositions about mothers in employment. For instance, by describing the lives of her respondents she challenges the assumption that part-time workers are less committed to their jobs. She further shows how her interviewees felt judged by the standard of the 1950s idealised two-parent family, with a bread-winning father and a ‘stay-at-home’ mother. For example, ‘Mothers who work the night shift use the cloak of night to render their employment less visible. They do not deny the fact that they are employed, but they do try to implement strategies of being that highlight their maternal visibility. The night shift allows “working mothers” to appear to be “stay-at-home moms”’ (p. 138).

Women from a variety of cultural, ethnic and class backgrounds employ such strategies, Garey suggests, because they all face similar dominant cultural norms about motherhood. Similarly, women may adopt a variety of working patterns, but their accounts of mothering usually reflect their efforts to meet such norms. Garey’s emphasis on the salience of such norms to the women’s employment strategies is apposite, but it is perhaps a pity that she did not also research the hospital authorities to explore how women pursuing these different employment strategies were viewed by their employers.

The findings from Garey’s study cannot be seen independently from the US context where her data were collected, and where maternity leave provision is particularly poor. However, my own recent research suggests that her findings are no less applicable to employed British mothers. Garey’s work is strong on contextualising women’s decisions, for example the importance of the resources and support networks available to her respondents for facilitating various employment strategies. This book is extremely readable, and the pressures of the interviewees’ lives and the complexity of their family relationships are well-illustrated through the evocative case-studies.

University of Bristol

LUCY BAILEY
The Betrayal of Local 14
Julius Getman

The IP strike in Jay was like a stone thrown into a calm pond and Julius Getman’s gripping account is as concerned with the ripples as the splash. The walk-out touched the lives of the whole community of the small company town in Maine and brought US presidential candidates to speak at the Wednesday night meetings in the union hall. Getman’s story sees the national picture through the eyes of the local strikers and their families and what it lacks in perspective it makes up for in a powerful narrative.

The papermill in Jay employed generations of the town’s inhabitants. It had no history of union conflict and an old-style paternalism dominated its employee relations until the transnational International Paper Company (IP) started the pay negotiations. At the centre of the dispute were proposals that struck at the heart of the old paternalism: Christmas working was to be introduced and the Sunday premium rate abolished. In a community where the church was still a powerful influence, Sunday working had only been reluctantly accepted in the first place and Christmas was family time. The expected rounds of concession bargaining never happened and the new human resources manager, a much resented old-union man, just said ‘no’.

Bargaining was in the hands of Local 14 of the United Paperworkers International Union and its relationship with other union branches and the national leadership is central to the story of the seventeen-month strike that followed. A strike in which the original dispute is often lost sight of in the whirl of organising, arguing and emotional turmoil. It is the lived activity of the strikers that is the core of the book and which Getman handles best. He draws on an extensive collection of contemporary sources that includes videos of meetings, newspaper archives, some personal involvement towards the end of the strike and a series of taped interviews. This does not attempt to be an objective account but the voice of the scabs is heard alongside the strikers, their partners and other people from the town. This allows the complexity and contradictions, characteristic of any long dispute, to come through the narrative. The inspirational early period of the strike dominated by urgent action, invigorating solidarity, a common enemy and a sureness of purpose is well told. Disputes such as this change people’s lives and there are verbatim accounts from the shy and introspective who find themselves eloquent speakers on public platforms, the women with no interest in the union who suddenly become the mainstay of the organisation and individual stories of people whose politics are radically turned around. Individual acts of kindness illuminate the community’s strengths with a family of nine finding themselves with four turkeys on Thanksgiving and a $100 nailed to their front door. The focus of the dispute becomes the Wednesday night union meetings which are opened up to all and provide the key elements of communications and reinforcing solidarity; it is hardly surprising that Getman adopts the analogy of the religious revival meeting.

Alongside the local activities the strike has to be organised, the national union involved and the company bargained with. What is interesting to the UK reader is both the parallels and differences to similar UK disputes such as those in the Liverpool docks or at Magnet in Darlington. For example, the union both locally and nationally at different stages in the dispute directly employed staff to organise with them. In particular, they recruited corporate campaign strategists to discredit International Paper and highlight environmental issues. The town council was used as a vehicle to put pressure on the company and an ‘outreach campaign’ was launched to involve other IP plants and trade unionists. The major tactic for the national union was to refuse to sign collective agreements at other plants to try to coordinate pay settlement dates and bring them into
the ‘pool’. Two nearby mills took strike action and workers were locked out at another but the dispute never spread as the strikers hoped. Getman’s portrayal of the aftermath of the dispute is particularly poignant and there is a twist in the tail as a vote for union derecognition faces the strikers with the dilemma of recruiting the scabs to Local 14 to try and win the vote. They lost the vote, the strike and, in many cases, their jobs. Getman does not try for a wordy, detailed and objective assessment of the dispute but he is left to confront his own title: who betrayed Local 14? There is a critical account of the national leadership and the manipulative use of the strike by the union president in his re-election campaign. Getman clearly suggests that the betrayal lies there but it is not a simple account of the leadership selling the rank and file down the river. Complexities are not avoided and the difficulties of organising other workers when they have no dispute or running a campaign which cost, according to the union president, $17 million are recognised. If the plant was not to close or to be run for ever by the scabs there would have to be a negotiated agreement and that was always going to be a no-win outcome for the union nationally. The weakness in Getman’s account is the absence of the company. It is surprising that Getman managed any interviews at all with IP but the key actors did not talk and we are left to ponder on IP’s tactics. In particular was the decision to take on Local 14 a corporate mistake, a sequence of events that got out of control or a carefully planned strategy? There is some evidence of the company planning for the strike but little analysis of the reasons why it chose to do so. In the United States of the 1980s we might assume that the company was bent on a union-busting campaign but why this union at this mill?

Getman has a good story to tell and he does it well, particularly when we hear it through the voice of the participants. The absence of a serious analysis which would also require a critical assessment of the strikers themselves is just a little disappointing.

University of Northumbria

John Stirling

Reclaiming Work. Beyond the Wage-Based Society
André Gorz

Let us make no mistake about this: wage-labour has to disappear and, with it, capitalism. (p. 77)

Towards the end of this provocative and polemical book Gorz notes that many will see his work as being ‘utopian’. This is a critique that he is unafraid of. Gorz notes that the function of utopias is to provide us with sufficient distance from the current state of affairs such that we can judge what we are doing in the light of what we could or should do. Gorz presents us with a clear and lucid, if controversial, account of the current state of work and the problems that ‘wage-based society’ currently faces. Taking as his starting point the decline of standard forms of employment due to the exodus of capital and the creation of new forms of work in the 1970s, we are led through a rapid account of the rise of post-Fordism, non-standard work, deregulation, globalisation and the end of economic nationalism. Gorz notes the paradoxes of post-Fordism with exceptional clarity: that we are exhorted by employers to be more independent and autonomous, to be flexible specialists, to be part of a corporate family and to mould our identities on the corporation whilst at the same time demanding even greater subjection than that of Fordist forms of production.
In post-Fordism it is the whole person who is subjugated with the whole of the person being put to work, and at all times and in all places. Rather than producing more autonomous workers, post-Fordism produces less autonomous workers: lean production has created the social and cultural conditions that enable capital to control the autonomy of living labour. The ‘traditional’ relationships between employer and worker no longer apply: we are not simply selling our labour power in return for a contract, we are selling our whole selves to be part of a system that sees us all as being the vassals of the overlord corporation. In post-Fordism, modern social relations are replaced with pre-modern ones. We find employment conditions worsening with the introduction of zero-hours contracts, new forms of self-exploitation and the job insecurity on a massive scale. The rise of techno-science, the centrality of information and communication systems in work and production and the use of the skills of everyday life in the workplace have served to make capital all-pervasive and almost all-powerful.

In this account of a history of the present the reader may at times be frustrated with the ways in which terms are deployed. Gorz spends little, if any, time investigating the nature of concepts such as globalisation, nationalism and, ironically, work. The lack of empirical studies that could illustrate wider aspects of the perspective being offered is telling, particularly in the light of the strong emphasis Gorz places on science and technology as transformative factors in the rise of post-Fordism. One wants to ask ‘which science?’, particularly when Gorz’s enthusiasm for futurology gets the better of him, most notable in his use of the American guru of nanotechnology, Eric Drexler. Having spent the last two months working in a nanotechnology research laboratory I can assure Gorz that the promise of a ‘nanofuture’ is much further away than some cheerleaders would have us believe.

Yet despite these inconsistencies, Gorz succeeds in providing us with an incisive and critical reading of work in contemporary industrialised societies and succeeds, as far as this reviewer is concerned, in convincing us of the need for radical change. It is the elucidation of this task that comprises the final third of the book and it is here that those familiar with Gorz’s work will find the most surprises whilst, at the same time, finding reassuring consistencies with Gorz’s previous works reappearing.

Our contemporary problems are caused not by a shortage of work, although it is true that work is becoming scarcer, but with a failure to distribute wealth. The solution to the crisis in work is to reorganize society around multi-activity and culture and to do this we require radical change in the way that work is understood and organized. Not surprisingly Gorz calls for a reduction in working hours and uses a range of contemporary examples to illustrate the benefits of this. More surprisingly, Gorz abandons his long espoused policy of paying a guaranteed income based upon the individual’s necessary contribution to an agreed total of socially necessary work in favour of a grant that would provide a ‘sufficient, universal and basic income’ (p. 91). For Gorz we must move to a society where the centrality of work is removed: no longer should involvement or potential involvement in work be the basis for rights and security. In addition, we must change the urban landscape around us to promote self-activity, change the attitudes people have to work, and alter attitudes towards remuneration: Gorz provides an analysis of current LETS schemes as an exemplar of future possibilities. Overall, Gorz’s vision of a possible future presents a great deal of food for thought without allowing too many hostages to fortune.

Gorz is unafraid of being labelled a utopian for another and, perhaps, more compelling reason. The world that we live in today is being re-inscribed as a utopia by the powers of capital and the institutions that represent it. We are faced today with a kind of unreality that surrounds all aspects of our lives, a ‘virtual’ world in which time, place and resistance have no meaning and in which everyone is everywhere in a place that is never their own. ‘U-topia: a dematerialised,
decentred world’ (p. 77). Surely it is better to choose our own utopia than to remain stuck in this one that is being forced upon us?

University of Birmingham

Mark Erickson

Organisation and Representation: Work and Organisations in Popular Culture

J. Hassard and Ruth Holliday (eds.)


Interestingly the title of this book is not ‘representing organisations in popular culture’. The use of two nouns might suggest that the field the editors decided to tackle was as much concerned with issues in representation as with the representation of organisations. This is not how it has turned out in practice although in different contributions both representation and organisation are used in interestingly different ways. In fact the range of contributions is so diverse – particularly in relation to the ways in which organisation has been conceptualised – that I am not at all clear about how the editors did go about their business of approaching possible contributors and giving a framework for what they might do. Although I found several of the pieces rewarding and the constant development of the use of organisation stimulating, I was never quite sure during my first reading of how it all hung together. On re-reading, the book makes more sense but I still have doubts as to whether it has a distinctive market niche.

The editors’ introduction largely hinges on the undeniable contrast between the representation of significant social practice in both organisation theory and popular culture dramas: ‘where organisation studies present rationality, organisation and monolithic power relations, popular culture plays out sex, violence, emotion … and disorganisation upon its stage’ (p. 1). The editors clearly side with culture in this clash of perspectives and in some respects seem to offer the possibility that we could use culture as a lens through which to re-think the practice of organisational life. Some examples are their own citing of television’s use of institutional dramas, such as series on hospitals and the police, to present a distinctive slant on structures of relationships; and O’Neill’s study of the representation of the saloon/brothel in some Hollywood films as a type of workplace organisation mediating between savagery and civilisation (chapter 6); and McDowell’s report of how workers in financial institutions use cultural stereotypes to make sense of alienating work situations (chapter 9).

In general though a more persistent theme is an idea that in popular culture organisations are (usually? – it is unclear) taken as a symbol or metaphor for modernity, so the motivating contrast in representation is between the sociality of personal experience and the impersonality of organisational life (a contrast that they take on board to the extent that they slip into the extraordinary confusion of saying: ‘the vast majority of people work in jobs that are ultimately boring and have few possibilities of social interaction’ (p. 4)). I think it is this idea of representing modernity that helps to make sense of the first section on realism and representation that largely consists of two chapters on aspects of documentary practice. Initially anomalous these historical accounts of the documentary movement do provide a structural contrast with the last section on
organisations in the future where three chapters are concerned with the representation of the
promise of technology. What this promises might be is understood in interestingly different ways,
in that Parker and Cooper (in a structurally innovative piece, chapter 11) initially emphasise the
contrast in science fiction films between soul-less organisation and defiant individualism. On the
other hand Smith (chapter 12) exposes how the prophets of new freedoms in virtual reality ignore
how that ‘space’ is generated by the organized predictability of mathematics.

I have so far suggested that organisation in this collection is partly understood to be
symbolised by certain stereotypes of bureaucracy, and partly by an extrapolation from these
stereotypes to symbolise modernity. There are, however, other senses of organisation which hint at
a more fundamental continuity between organisation and representation. For example Grey’s
study of series written for children (chapter 7), that is the Jennings books, the Famous Five books,
and the adventures of the Swallows and Amazons (none of which would seem to be about
organisations conventionally understood), treats organisation as an accomplishment. He
therefore sees these children’s perennials as guides for each generation on making adult settings
functional. In a structurally similar but very different argument there is an element in the Parker
and Cooper chapter which I think is suggesting that cinema is an organisation of perception
through a prosthetic use of technology.

In these usages then organisation is a form of representation which can be read ideologically,
that is as promoting certain and effectively denying other interpretations of personal experience.
It is this move which it seems to me makes sense of the inclusion of some of the other chapters in
the collection such as those by Brewis, Holliday, O’Neill and Munro. I do not wish to imply that
otherwise these contributions are pointless – they are in differing ways studies of the
representation of problems such as homophobia or prostitution in Hollywood films using, very
loosely, an employment organisational setting – but they are versions of ideology critique in
which the nature of organisation is relatively peripheral. Of course, as is common in ideological
readings of popular culture ‘texts’, the issue of the realism of the representation in conjunction
with the extent to which it determines audience perceptions or understandings is also necessarily
addressed. This might in turn be another interpretation of the concept of organisation but it is not
followed up in any detail.

I have tried to pull together the various strands in this collection to suggest that it is more
interesting than the rather deceptive title might suggest. I have, however, struggled to find any
coherence between the different elements in the book. I think it will be used selectively by scholars
but it is difficult to think of a teaching context in which it can be easily or straightforwardly
employed.

University of Durham

DAVID CHANEY

Contemporary Capitalism: The Embeddedness of Institutions

J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Robert Boyer (eds.)


‘Beyond markets and hierarchies’ has become something of a slogan in economic sociology and
institutional economics. It represents a belief that the institutional forms of modern economies go
far beyond markets, firms and the state, extending to networks, associations, clubs, clans,
communities and supra-national organisations. Conventional economics, and supporters of the
doctrine of laissez-faire either ignore these or regard them with suspicion as interferences in the free working of markets and as limitations on free competition and efficiency. By contrast, the contributors to this volume regard them in a mainly positive light, conducive not only to growth and innovation but relative stability and security too. Many papers criticise neoliberalism and suggest or allude to alternatives involving a more thickly embedded capitalism.

The book represents a valuable stock-taking of progress in this area, benefiting from insights from a range of disciplines. It provides a useful overview and typology of the different forms of institutional arrangements and ‘modes of coordination’ in modern economies. There is some overlap between the contributions in this large volume and rather than attempt to summarise each of them I shall just pick out a few that appealed to me.

The editors introduce the concept of ‘social systems of production’ to refer to the various forms of embedding of economic activities in terms of industrial relations and training systems, the internal and external relations of firms, financial structures, state structures, and norms, customs and moral-political values. The concept of embeddedness refers to both the material and the symbolic grounding of economic activities. Though not to be reduced to a functional requirement of the latter, the institutional arrangements in which economic activities are embedded certainly make a difference.

The first part of the collection represents a series of commentaries on institutional variety in contemporary capitalism. This kind of work stands in opposition to much of the literature on markets, but one of the problems of that literature is not only that it idealises markets (in both senses of ‘idealises’) but that it slides between different concepts of markets. Particularly notable here is Robert Boyer’s critical discussion of both the limitations of ‘really existing markets’ and of the multiple meanings of ‘markets’ in economic literature, demonstrating the dependence of the former on non-market institutions and arrangements.

The second section deals with how and why social systems of production change. Wolfgang Streek develops the argument that constraints on firms can help rather than hinder them in the long run. At one level this is an old point, noted for example by Marxists in the case of the effect of legislation limiting the length of the working day in forcing capitalists to compete through process and product innovation rather than labouring but Streek shows how it continues to apply in contemporary economies. By reference to examples from Japan, Germany and the USA, Hollingsworth shows how tendencies such as ‘Japanisation’ can only be limited as the integrity of social systems of production prevents elements of them being imported and imitated without major adaptation. The old mass production-flexible specialisation dualism or ‘binary history’ looms large in several chapters in this section though most authors attempt to qualify and diversify the schema, for example by adding ‘diversified quality mass production’.

The third section deals with spatial levels of coordination and embeddedness. Here Paul Hirst and Graeme Thompson rehearse their critique of globalisation, providing a sobering antidote to much of the literature in this area, while Philippe Schmitter examines the likely effects of European integration on the varied forms of national and regional embeddedness within Europe, in terms of pressures to deregulate and reauthorize.

Responding to their contributors’ papers, the editors argue that there is no ‘one best way’ of organizing social systems of production at any time, since what is appropriate for one society or industry is not for another (though this fits uncomfortably with the common characterisation of the previous period as an era of the dominance of mass standardised production alone). There is therefore unlikely to be any convergence towards a single kind of (post)industrial society. As internationalisation proceeds, there is no clearly structured global order emerging but rather an increasingly multi-scale, complex and messy pattern of networks, institutions and regulatory frameworks.
There is a good deal more on typologies of the various kinds of embeddedness than there is on what happens as a consequence of such embedding, that is on what actors actually do when they are in networks, associations, etc. For example, business associations may be little more than drinking clubs or they may play an influential steering role in an industry. The emphasis on form rather than process not only gives some of the papers a rather dry tone but also leads to a lack of convincing accounts of the relationship between institutional embeddedness and economic outcomes, in which ‘trust-building’ is expected to bear a great deal of explanatory weight. Ultimately empirical research on process is needed to find out just how economic performance depends – for better or worse – on embedding. However, this shortcoming is not unique to this volume but is common in the whole research area. Overall the collection represents a powerful weapon in the critique of neoliberal ideology both as description and prescription.

Lancaster University

ANDREW SAYER

Women’s Health at Work

Asa Kilbom, Karen Messing and Carina Bildt Thorbjörnsson (eds.)


For those of us who have had an academic as well as political interest in the field of occupational health and disease, the ‘invisibility’ of women has been a noticeable feature of the different discipline-specific literatures, policy and legislation and occupational health practice. This book takes this ‘invisibility’ as a starting point also, but argues that this is only one component of gender-sensitive research so needed in the occupational health field. Such a gender sensitivity requires a re-conceptualisation of, for example, biological and psychological differences between the sexes; but also a consideration of differences in terms of work, career, social relations, home and family. It is emphasised that the continuing gender segregation within the workplace remains a crucial element to consider. Not only does this segregation result in men and women having different work tasks, work environments and work experiences, but may also be a consequence of differences in values, ambitions and priorities in life. All such factors can have consequences for work-related well-being.

After an initial chapter which sets out the parameters of considering gender and work-related ill health in the context of a changing labour market, work and work organisation, chapters 2 – 6 provide general background in the form of literature reviews on women in the workplace (mainly using Swedish materials), sex differences research in relation to socialisation, psychological and biological factors, and problems in measuring health. In each the author(s) draw attention to the particular implications for work-related ill-health. The value of this section of the book in my view would depend on the particular readership or audience. Since it does seem that the expertise employed and the material examined is multidisciplinary, some of this material would be very familiar to many readers. The main arguments could have been summarised briefly in another over-view chapter, especially as the common conclusion seemed to be that existing research is contradictory and inconclusive.

My assessment of these early chapters relates to what I felt were the more useful chapters which followed. These looked at specific health consequences: cardiovascular disease,
musculoskeletal disorders, dermatological problems and psychiatric morbidity including job-
stress. I would have liked more. These chapters also comprised comprehensive literature reviews of
research-based knowledge about such conditions in relation to work. Here, according to the
introductory chapter, the approach was to use specialists, and to take areas where ‘information was
missing’ (p. 12). Given the origins of the book, the specialists were in the main Swedish (except
Karen Messing a women’s occupational health specialist from Canada) and drew extensively on
Swedish and other Nordic studies. This approach led to important, although deliberate, exclusions
such as cancer, and some chapters early on focused almost exclusively on Sweden. Equally, it might
be argued there has been a stronger policy context around working environments and conditions
and health in the Nordic countries, and it is valuable to summarise these for wider audiences.

In putting forward an often detailed set of prescriptions for research in relation to a number of
specific fields, it is evident that a gender-sensitive research agenda requires an approach that is
more sophisticated in its methodological conception that has hitherto been the case. For example,
in chapter 11 entitled ‘Men also are Gendered’, the author, Kjellberg, notes that in men’s health
work and working conditions have had little attention compared to values and lifestyles, and when
work and health has been studied, gender has not been seen as relevant to analysing the health
risks men confront; rather men have often been considered as a background for the problems or
obstacles encountered by women. So while at the outset the scarcity of information about women
workers, and the lack of gender sensitivity when they have been studied, as well as a need to focus
on health problems specific to women and the affects of differential exposure is what is
emphasised, the book orients the reader to think about both women’s and men’s work in tackling
these questions. The gendered nature of work-related risks to health must be investigated
alongside the consideration of domestic roles and family responsibilities, and even the role of
leisure, is repeatedly stressed. Equally, we are reminded of the need to be aware that bringing
gender in may result in losing sight of the importance of within category distinctions. We must
avoid an assumption that ‘gender rather than men’s or women’s specific working conditions is
responsible for an effect’ (p. 215). The differences between women and between men may be greater
than between women and men, and in specific occupational groups the work duties of men and
women can also vary markedly.

So while the book is not particularly sociological in its orientation or content, there are
aspects sociologists will find familiar and of interest. There are also pointers to where a
sociological contribution might be made. For example, in many areas the literature reveals that
epidemiological and clinical research have been the dominant modes of inquiry, and various
authors in their chapters call for more qualitative studies, especially given the complexity of the
interacting factors in work-related disease and health. Sociologists might also bring their
conceptual tools around gender, the changing nature of labour markets, work organisation and
the work people do, so that gender is no longer a variable to be controlled out, but is made integral
to the analysis. It is clear that much of the research in the various disciplines, and in policy and
practice, remains wedded to outmoded and flawed assumptions and are thence of limited value in
disentangling the complex factors that might be implicated in health. There is still, as nearly every
chapter argues, much to be done to address the many questions remaining, and to fill gaps in
knowledge that can provide a basis for prevention of ill health in all workers. Sociologists can and
should join the challenge.

University of East London

BARBARA HARRISON
The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family?

Angélique Janssens (ed.)

The particular value of this collection, which originated as a supplement to the *International Review of Social History*, lies not so much in the answers it provides as in the questions that it throws up. It achieves this by lifting the debate about the male breadwinner family out of the geographical and temporal confines by which it has hitherto been bound. The anthology significantly widens the north-west European focus of the debate by including case studies located in France (Michael Hanagan), Spain (Lina Galvez-Muñoz), the two post-war Germanies (Christine von Oertzen; Almut Rietzschel), and, perhaps most importantly, Bengal (Samita Sen).

In her introduction, the editor competently surveys and critically assesses the state of the debate, urging the need to move beyond the ‘grand theorising’ which has attributed the rise of the male breadwinner variously to capitalism, patriarchy, or specific blends of both. Instead, she calls for case-studies, such as those assembled in this volume, which allow the interplay of multifarious economic factors in the emergence of the male breadwinner to be analysed. Despite the large degree of variation presented here, all contributions point to the central role played by the family in responding to external economic constraints by constructing gendered patterns of breadwinning.

In the only contribution dealing with Britain, Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries demolish the belief that the male breadwinner was one of the outcomes of industrialisation. Rather, as their analysis of 1,360 household budgets for the years 1787 to 1865 shows, for many families, dependence on a male earner preceded industrialisation, without, however, dispensing with the need for women and, particularly, children to contribute to family income, at least at certain stages of the family life cycle.

Likewise in Bengal, the emergence of the male breadwinner was not linked to industrialisation, but to the intervention by benevolent sections among the colonial authorities. Aspirations to a male breadwinner wage were furthered by its ability to be incorporated into family survival strategies that hinged upon the preservation of female domesticity and dependence.

The study of the Stéphanois, a region in south-eastern France, demonstrates how the demand for a ’family wage’ united male workers whose families’ access to paid employment varied with conditions in the local labour markets. Thus, a breadwinner wage would have ensured the survival of those families dependent on a male earner alone, while also benefiting those with more of its members in employment. At no state was the demand linked to any attempt at banning married women’s employment.

In East Germany, adherence to male breadwinning fused in intriguing ways with official policies aiming at large-scale female employment as the centrepiece of women’s emancipation. Leaving the gender division of labour intact at all levels of society ensured that women, conceived of primarily as family carers, remained consistently subordinate in paid employment in a way strikingly similar to West Germany, where male breadwinning was explicitly endorsed by the state and the people alike.

The Spanish case of female breadwinners in Seville undermines the dominant conception of the breadwinner as male. Though female cigar-makers were paid consistently less than their male colleagues in the tobacco factories, the stability and tenacity of their employment turned their wages into the mainstay of family maintenance.

In the least satisfactory contribution, Lena Sommestad compares nascent welfare policies in
Sweden, which was to develop into a strong welfare state which paid scant regard to male breadwinning, with those in the US, a residual welfare state centrally organised around private, male breadwinning arrangements. Ignoring any but the economic dimension of the problem, she attributes this divergence in fairly deterministic fashion to differences in either country’s economic capacity for reproductive investment and the specific reproductive challenges it faced. The much higher per-capita income in the US, combined with a steady influx of immigrants, made it possible to leave responsibility for reproduction with the individual male. Sweden, by contrast, was comparatively poor and suffering depletion of people in those age-brackets with the highest earning potential. In order to counter these conditions, a strong welfare state emerged.

Doubtless, economic independence is a necessary, but not sufficient precondition of any shift in the gender distribution of power. This consideration provokes a number of questions. Surely, male breadwinning forms the basis of a variety of degrees of male dominance in the family, vide men in the Stéphanois demanding a family wage without a ban on wives’ paid work. What difference in terms of personal autonomy does it make for a woman to be economically dependent upon one individual man as compared to the welfare state, as in Sweden? What are the long-term implications of transferring the gender division of labour in the family to the employment sector by paying women to carry out the manifold caring tasks performed elsewhere by women in the family? Does economic independence necessarily undermine the gender division of labour in the family as well as in society? The examples of East Germany and Sweden appear to deny this. Why were the women cigar-makers of Seville unable, or unwilling, to use the relevance of their wages to family income as a lever to extract help from their husbands? The whole issue of women’s complicity in, or resistance to, the male breadwinner family is only as much as touched upon by Samita Sen.

Though this volume achieves a great deal in clarifying the economic conditions shaping the emergence of the male breadwinner family, the latter’s internal power relations remain underexplored.

University of Hannover

JUTTA SCHWARZKOPF

Challenging Women: Gender, Culture and Organization
Su Maddock

Organisational culture is now generally acknowledged by academics and practitioners alike to be an important obstacle in the paths of women managers in organisations, and this book is a welcome addition to the recent publications which have focused on the topic. The strength of the author’s work comes from her experience as a change consultant in the public sector and her understanding of the complex organisations in which her sample of women managers work.

Su Maddock chooses the term gender cultures when she discusses the impact of organisational cultures on gender relations, and she also refers to male cultures and traditional female cultures. Whilst many of the cultural barriers discussed in the book may pertain to women managers in the private sector, the author’s own research comes from her consultancy work in the public sector. Her own prescriptive vision of what constitutes good management and her belief in the advantages of collaborative cultures pervades the book and it is the thwarted transformative potential of women managers in the public sector on which she dwells. In particular she deals with
the changing management practices in the public sector and the ways in which radical and visionary women are marginalised and undervalued in their organisations. It is refreshing and positive to see the idea of women as challenging innovators promoted, although by linking their transformative capabilities with their gender it is harder to separate out whether they are marginalised because their ideas are a threat or because they are women.

The first chapter discusses and critiques various management innovations and notes that public sector management differs from the private sector in that it needs to juggle social objectives, multiple stakeholders and changing financial priorities. This third way – balancing social and business needs – is something the author thinks that women are particularly suited to precisely because of their socialisation and emotional work within relationships. What worried me throughout the book was the linking of women with a particular way of managing – the good, open and social way. Whilst the author tries to avoid any essentialism, by saying that women had been socialised into prioritising relationships, and that not all women were the same, this rather essentialist line slips in at points throughout the book. Chapter 2 discusses leadership and management style, but leaves the discussion on women’s different styles to a later chapter. The next chapter outlines the author’s theoretical stance on individuals as determining change agents and the relationship between individuals and society. She links this with organisations and an individual’s ability to affect change, which is important to her theory of women as innovative change agents. Chapter 4 discusses resistance to women. The chapter starts with a round up of studies about senior women in management and moves on to the more specific example of hospitals and medicine detailing the experiences of some women doctors. Later chapters give far more detailed accounts of resistance from her own data than this one does.

Chapter 5 deals with gender cultures, tactics and strategies and provides the first mention of what culture is – ‘culture provides a backdrop to the power relations and influences which galvanise or constrain people in their interactions and performance at work’ (p. 85). Given that there are numerous definitions of organisational culture in academic literature I think that a more substantial definition of what culture is and what makes it a gender culture would have been helpful. The author does briefly discuss her earlier work on gender cultures, as well as Gherardi’s work, Marshall’s description of high and low trust cultures, and Trompenaar’s global cultures. There are plenty of good examples of the ways in which style and language can marginalise women. The subject of same/different is discussed in Chapter 6 on gender narratives.

I found that apart from the first chapter on innovation and the third chapter dealing with agency and the individual, the other four chapters lacked some coherence. There is a bit of everything on women managers in each one, without any obvious demarcation on subject matter.

Chapter 7 heralds a much more confident and coherent piece of writing. The author discusses British public sector reforms with great authority and conviction and starts to use her own research material to illuminate her points in an interesting way. It is obvious here that the reader is in her territory and from here on the book flows much better. In the next chapter Maddock demonstrates how innovative women are stereotyped, silenced and shows the intransigence of male cultures even through big organisational changes and after the influx of many women managers. She links the emphasis on service delivery with a more open style of management which ultimately Maddock argues women are better at and more comfortable with than men. Using quotes she shows that women themselves appreciate the importance of equal opportunities being on the organisational agenda even if they do still have problems. One important finding in the work is that the innovating women were most often found in middle management where they did not always have the power to affect change. Women in senior roles were more likely to adapt to the male norm of management.

The book provides a fascinating profile of the public sector, the recent structural changes and
the difficulties faced by women managers because of the intransigence of a male culture. It is of interest to academics, human resources personnel and consultants alike. It is also refreshing to see a book which promotes women as challenging and in a positive role even though some may find that the ‘women are better than men’ verges on the essentialist at times.

Independent writer and consultant
SARAH RUTHERFORD

Spinning for Labour: Trade Unions and the New Media Environment
Paul Manning

It seems that wherever one turns these days one comes across Charlie Whelan, erstwhile press officer to Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown. In 1998 he became the centre of national attention as the alleged source of the leaked information about Peter Mandelson’s unconventional mortgage arrangements and was forced to resign his post. Since leaving the government, however, Whelan has amassed a portfolio of different jobs: football columnist for The Observer; presenter on Radio Five Live; panellist on Radio Four game shows; and even political tipster for the New Statesman magazine. In the midst of all this media exposure it is easy to forget that before working for the Labour Party, Whelan first made a mark as a press officer for the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), a role in which he was apparently much admired. According to Paul Manning, in his new study of the relationship between the trade unions and the media, ‘discussions with journalists and labour correspondents confirmed that Charlie Whelan was almost universally regarded as one of the best union press officers. “Quick”, “sharp”, “professional”, “an eye for a good story” were some of the phrases invoked … in support of this view’ (pp. 116-17). Indeed, while still at the AEU in the early 1990s Whelan himself provided some examples of his media technique in an interview with Manning: ‘It’s (sic) easy. My old granny could do it! I just write pieces as I would like to read them in the newspaper!’ (p. 120).

Such insights into Whelan’s early career as a ‘spin-doctor’ provide some of the few highlights of this disappointing book. The changing nature of the relationship between the trade unions and the media is worthy of investigation for two reasons. First, there has been a recent growth of interest among organisations generally in the importance of establishing and sustaining strong corporate communications, particularly given the increasing significance attached to the manipulation of symbols as a source of competitive advantage. Second, related to this the choice of the trade unions as a case study, and the extent to which they have sought to improve their external communications, is of potentially great interest given the decline in union power during the 1980s and 1990s. Manning begins by outlining the principal focus of his investigation: can the use of effective media strategies be of benefit to the trade unions? Or, as the ‘structural pessimism’ thesis seems to imply, are the national news media, and individual journalists, to be regarded as enemy agents of the capitalist state? Based on interviews with a selection of trade union press officers and national newspaper journalists, Manning explores the nature of the relationship between them. In doing this he also provides some insights into the role and work of the trade union press officer and an account of the rise to prominence, and subsequent decline of labour and industrial journalism in the UK.
Although this is a potentially very interesting area, Manning’s account is very weak indeed. For one thing, for a book published in 1998 it seems rather dated. Although a reference to the ‘present Conservative government’ (p. 164) might be regarded as a trivial slip-up, or even as an ideological statement, the lack of coverage given to important recent developments is rather less forgiveable. Among the most notable instances of effective trade union media work were the campaigns against Post Office privatisation and highlighting boardroom greed in the mid 1990s (remember Cedric the Pig?). Manning mentions the former in passing and the latter is not included at all. A whole chapter of the book is devoted to a case study of the 1989-90 ambulance workers’ dispute based on the way in which it was presented in the national press. Notwithstanding the repeated reference to the importance of the health unions’ ‘interpretative frameworks’, the analysis rarely strays from the purely descriptive. Moreover, Manning makes no use of his interviews with labour correspondents and trade union press officers, some of whom must surely have been intimately involved in covering the dispute, to flesh out his account. His history of labour and industrial journalism in the twentieth century is also problematic. Although Manning acknowledges the danger of mythologising about the ‘golden age’ of the labour and industrial correspondent his account, which is based largely on self-serving memoirs and the recollections of journalists themselves, seems designed to reinforce it. For the student of the trade unions, little in this book will be of interest. Despite highlighting the tension that can exist within unions between the presence of multiple sources of power and the imperative for simple, compact messages to be given to the media, Manning – frustratingly – does not pursue this theme.

Manning argues that effective media work can bring benefits to the unions and that the ‘structural pessimism’ thesis underestimates ‘the extent to which, in particular circumstances, unions can secure some tactical successes through effective press and broadcasting work’ (p. 357). Yet how surprising is such a conclusion? Apart from the example of the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984–5 miners’ strike Manning provides little evidence that the ‘structural pessimism’ thesis has ever held much influence in the essentially pragmatic British trade union movement. Finally, this is perhaps the most poorly presented book I have ever come across. The extensive repetition, the numerous factual errors and typographical mistakes, and the leaden, and occasionally unintelligible prose style indicate not just that the text has not been edited, but that once it was placed on the page it was not even read.

University of Portsmouth

STEVE WILLIAMS

Creative Technological Change: The Shaping of Technology and Organisations

Ian McLoughlin


One of the strengths that Ian McLoughlin brings to the debate over technological change is his continued enthusiasm for the subject as an area of research. This shows through in this thoughtful, well-crafted exploration of the various theoretical approaches to the relationship between technology and organisation. The result is a concise and highly readable book that competently summarises past and present academic analyses.
Chapters 1, 2 and 3 cover well-trodden territory: the early ‘classic’ studies of technology and organisation, innovation studies and the debate over production paradigms. However McLoughlin reviews and summarises them adeptly and establishes some of the main debating points that are addressed in the rest of the book. For example, one of the central themes inscribed into the chapters is the perpetual question of the determining influence of technology. Consequently, throughout the subsequent chapters McLoughlin demonstrates how objections to the proposition that technology is a ‘given’ exogenous factor have developed incrementally from socio-technical thinking, through the consideration of organisational politics, to various social construction perspectives. It seems that all other concerns (such as, defining, analysing, using, or adapting the technology) flow from this central problem and consequently we are presented with a rich, theoretical exploration of the meanings of, and approaches to, technology and organisation.

Chapter 4 brings together the strategic choice and organisational politics approaches to technological change in a concise and integrated manner. The importance of power as a link between these perspectives works effectively and the commonality of stance, (although not approach) is elaborated convincingly. It also allows McLoughlin to raise the issue of the moderating effect of technology in constraining or enabling choices within the political processes. It is a theme that permeates his own research and is one of the first clues to his preferred perspective.

The most impressive chapter is the first of two that deal with social constructivist approaches to technology (chapter 5). McLoughlin distinguishes between the social construction of technology (SCOT) and Actor Network Theory (ANT) and his explanation of the latter is particularly worthy of note. The clarity with which he disentangles the elements of ANT from the sometimes unnecessarily dense expositions of ANT’s leading theorists is exemplary. Furthermore he usefully outlines points of convergence between these two approaches.

In chapter 6 he evaluates the arguments of several commentators who differ in their analyses of technology but might broadly be categorised as social constructivists. Several well-made swipes at the extreme constructivist position reveal more of McLoughlin’s own views – although he is consistently fair in ensuring all perspectives have their say. Thus he explores how the tension between the technological determinist and the strategic choice/organisational politics perspectives is irrelevant to the social construction approach.

Whereas chapters 5 and 6 are characterised as explorations of theories that ‘work outwards’ from the technology, chapter 7 explores approaches that ‘work inwards’. These are categorised as ‘social shaping’ perspectives and explore social, economic and political influences. In several respects they represent theoretical approaches that merge socio-technical thinking with organisational politics although, as McLoughlin notes, they take a wide variety of forms.

Clearly Ian McLoughlin realises that implicit in the construction of the book is the danger that each theory has superseded the previous in terms of its explanatory power. In order to overcome this difficulty he argues that the different theoretical approaches can be seen as representative of various metaphors, all of which reveal different aspects of technology and organisation. This is a device (following G. Morgan, Images of Organization, London: Sage 1986) that is noted in the introduction and is taken up in the conclusion (chapter 8). Unfortunately it is the weakest aspect of the book and, in my opinion, unnecessarily clutters the discussion. It adds nothing to either (1) the conceptual clarity of the book or (2) the analytical utility. On the first point, I was able to skip the occasional flirting with the idea of metaphor that littered the chapters without it inhibiting my understanding of McLoughlin’s careful exploration of the issues. Indeed, not only did some of the metaphors more resemble similes, but they were often used (appropriately) as simply a linguistic device.
On the second point, McLoughlin’s argument for metaphor as an analytical tool was unconvincing. Chapter 8 applies some (but not all) of the metaphors to three case-study organisations. However, the use of metaphoric analysis as a way forward presents huge problems. Since metaphors are socially and culturally bound, their use is questionable in work settings with an increasingly diverse range of employees – unless, of course, the meanings of metaphors are always negotiable. But there is a deeper problem in that the ‘way of looking’ associated with a particular metaphor may reflect a particular epistemological and ontological stance that is simply irreconcilable with a competing metaphor. The metaphor will reflect the conceptualisation of ‘the problem’ in radically different ways that far from producing convergence and consensus, simply exposes difference and conflict. Accepting different ways of looking is not the same as accepting different ways of thinking.

Even if one accepts the multiple metaphor approach as a useful way of looking because it exposes differences, it provides no consequent framework for a way of acting. McLoughlin is therefore obliged to return at the end of the book to the non-metaphoric schema of a blend of the social shaping and organisational politics approach to propose a way forward. In this respect the book ends convincingly. Overall, this one weakness should not detract from a meticulous and conceptually comprehensive book.

De Montfort University, Leicester

MIKE NOON

Music Genres and Corporate Cultures
Keith Negus

Once again Keith Negus has produced a clearly written and thoroughly researched book. Whilst, in many ways, this book is an extension of Negus’ previous work it is still a useful addition. Negus concentrates on one particular area that he has only mentioned in passing before. The book is predominantly an exploration of the relationship between music corporations and five of the recognised musical genres: rap; country; salsa; international music; world music. In order to facilitate this exploration Negus has done extensive research on the corporate side of music production and marketing. This book is not about musicians, or even audiences, it is about the companies and their business strategies.

He talks about the uneasy interaction between economics and culture: one of the key themes of the book is that not only does industry create culture, but also culture creates industry. By which Negus is arguing that whilst the ‘culture’ industries provide us with artefacts which support certain aspects of popular cultures, at the same time the culture that we live in fosters the production of certain kinds of industry. That is not the end of this particular argument however, Negus feels that the culture industries (music, cinema, TV, etc.) are not the only industries that create culture, but that all industries are involved in cultural production and reproduction. All artefacts however practical or seemingly neutral are actually moulded by the culture that they are produced within, and, at the same time, all artefacts influence the culture that they are consumed in.

This view is reflected in Negus’ representation of the complex interplay between business practice, music production, the production of new technology and its availability to musicians,
and practices of consumption. He is looking at an intricate matrix of reciprocal, multifaceted and multilayered relationships. As far as Negus is concerned all of the different areas interact with each other, and, all of the relationships are, at least, two way. For example, he looks in some detail at the problems of portfolio management (the preferred method of management in the music industry). This is where the company is deliberately fragmented into divisions that compete for resources. These divisions are based on the genre of the music that the department is supposed to be producing (including classical music). Funding is partially based on an internal market system, but also some genres are privileged over others.

Negus gives a chapter each to rap, salsa and country music, comparing attitudes to, and treatment of, these genres within the large music companies. He also looks at the negotiations between small specialist labels and the larger corporations over access to distribution networks. Each of the aforementioned genres is handicapped within the system. Country seems to suffer because of the fact that it is based away from the major decision making centres. It also has a genre culture which is particularly fan and 'family' based which makes it an easy target for cultural snobbery. Decision-makers based in New York (which appears to be the music capital of the world) do not always make the best decisions for country music. Nonetheless, country is not the music genre with the greatest problems.

Negus implies (indirectly) that at least part of the problem for salsa and rap is the unacknowledged (and possibly unconscious) racism of some managers and management practices within the business. Artists may be handled by managers who have little understanding of the culture that rap is rooted in. This allied with the perception, both within and outside of, the music industry, of rap as being a voice of (black) protest leads to a less than enthusiastic reception in the board room. Rap has the added problem of using a great deal of sampled material. Managers tend to see this as shortening a track’s shelf life, but also making the whole product less profitable (because of additional licensing that must be paid for).

Whilst salsa is also frequently associated with resistance against mainstream white culture its major problem is that salsa artists are dealt with through the international division of the larger companies, even when they are native to the country. This is exacerbated by most divisional offices being based away from New York. Salsa is not the kind of music that international divisions tend to specialise in which means it is seldom prioritised.

Negus contrasts the experiences of international music and world music. From their names many people would assume a degree of overlap between the two genres, but as Negus explains international music tends to be a selection of big names who are thought to have international appeal because they are so popular in certain markets (usually America). This is a particular style of music (predominantly melodic ballads) which is assumed to have mass appeal regardless of the culture that it is being introduced into. Whereas world music is music from various countries around the world that is assumed to be of interest to certain sections of the music-buying public in Western societies.

The issues that Negus raises are of interest to any scholar of the sociology of music. They also add illumination to identity creation, the survival of racism and cultural imperialism. Personally I would have liked greater detail and evaluation of what Negus refers to as genre cultures. In his desire to acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of identities, both genre related and corporate, he avoids some of the difficult aspects of what he is discussing. For example he is very reluctant to talk about the racism that he refers to indirectly (most of the time). Nonetheless, while this is not a ground-breaking book full of breathtaking new insight, it is a worthwhile book which is well written and well presented.

University of Bristol

HELEN DITCHBURN
Gender, Choice and Commitment: Women Solicitors in England and Wales and the Struggle for Equal Status

Hilary Sommerlad and Peter Sanderson


Using perspectives from feminist jurisprudence and sociology of the professions, this book examines women's experiences in the solicitors' profession in England and Wales. The account includes both historical research and contemporary data from postal questionnaire surveys and interviews with women practitioners. The authors explore this material to analyse women's experiences and the structure and culture of the profession. The account is thorough, detailed and persuasive, though one or two issues require comment.

The book begins with two quotations (from Martin Mears when President of the Law Society and Catherine Hakim) which assert that women are agents who make work and career choices. These quotes set the context for the authors' critique of what they call the voluntarist perspective. The voluntarist perspective consists of the interpretation that women's own choices and preferences are the principal influences on career destinations, rather than structural constraints, cultural inhibitions or the direct discriminatory behaviour of others. The book challenges this interpretation and asks 'how free are women in reality to make choices in the labour market as it is currently structured?' (p. 2).

The second chapter examines the literature sources for the theoretical framework. A number of concepts are identified which include public/private worlds, the gendering of work, segmented labour markets, social and cultural capital and social closure. These are seen as underpinning the structure/agency or determinist/voluntarist interpretations. Yet despite a plea for theories in the middle range which could avoid the twin dangers of determinism and voluntarism (p. 46), nevertheless there is a clear emphasis on structural and cultural inhibitions and a relative neglect of choice and preference components. Also, no statement is given of the different principles underlying the concepts of structure and culture in determinist explanations, though they clearly are different. In essence we are told that choice is adaptive and hence determined and a serious examination of agency, stripped of its biological components, is not undertaken.

The next two chapters examine the history of the entry of women into the solicitors' profession in England and Wales. The period up to 1919 is explored in chapter 3 which includes an account of the gendered character of the common law, particularly in respect of married women, and of the pursuit of formal equality through legislation as when the formal bar was removed and women became persons. Chapter 4 continues this history from the ending of formal exclusion, through the fifty-year period when women's participation remained below 10 per cent, to the expansion during the 1980s. The chapter also includes a statistical picture of the distribution of women in the profession and outlines the characteristics of the authors' sample. These chapters contain a lot of interesting detail about the transformation of the profession itself as well as the expansion in demand for legal services and in services funded by the state. The authors claim to provide a factual account (p. 12), though the account is persuasively interpreted as women's struggle against structural and cultural blocks and barriers.

The next chapters, 5 and 6, delineate the structural and cultural contexts of the profession within which women's choices are made. The emphasis in on the cultural contexts of the legal workplace and of the partnership position, though the cultural and structural are never clearly differentiated. The claim that gender bias is eroding in the legal workplace is disputed. Instead the authors demonstrate the development and reproduction of gendered legal specialisms (crime and commercial law for men; matrimonial and conveyancing law for women) with associated prestige.
differences. They also illustrate the networking and sponsorship, the relational and cultural capital, necessary to achieve partnership positions. This includes the development of salaried partnerships in many legal firms as a gendered strategy of accommodation.

In order to demonstrate their interpretation, the authors use extracts from their own interview data. This method of ‘exampling’, whereby a quotation from one of the respondents is used to illustrate the authors’ point, is widely used by one problem is that there is never any indication given of the extent of agreement or disagreement within the sample of respondents. Also, this technique results in a tendency to overgeneralise and hence to minimise variety and variation in women’s experiences as well as in organisational complexities. Some of this diversity in the women’s career experiences is suggested in chapter 7 on the meaning of the career break. However, the occupational characteristics of both marital partners, and particular of women solicitors married to solicitors, might be important differentiating factors in women’s experiences, but these are not explored.

The conclusion begins with a summary and evaluation of theoretical concepts (such as segmented labour markets and social closure) explored throughout the text. The idea of individual agency re-emerges but is dismissed since ‘it is the properties of the social field in which agents are located which structure that individual agency’ (p. 258). This is followed by a brief assessment of the various ways in which a more equitable occupational culture might be achieved. The context and scope of change in the profession itself is seen to be fundamental. This has resulted in increasingly diverse forms of association, legal specialisms and relations with organizations external to the profession. There has also been the emergence of mega legal conglomerates accompanied by corporatisation and bureaucratisation. Such changes have created a more kaleidoscopic image of the lawyer in which women’s position is being accommodated. The authors assess the splintering of the professional monolith as a first and vital step towards accommodating women on truly equal terms. This is seen as more likely to have a lasting effect than strategies which aim to transform the prospects of individuals.

In general, then, this book makes an important contribution to our understanding of some of the constraints facing women developing careers as solicitors in large, commercially orientated, law firms. The general processes, as well as those specific to law, are illustrated and examined. Further exploration of the agency dimension for women and men, as well as of the essential differences between structure and culture as different kinds of determinant, remains to be undertaken, however.

University of Nottingham

JULIA EVETTS

‘Other Kinds of Dreams’: Black Women’s Organisations and the Politics of Transformation

Julia Sudbury


‘Other Kinds of Dreams’ opens with a foreword by African American activist and scholar Angela Davis, who sets the stage for Sudbury’s compelling ‘womanist’ discussion of the transformative possibilities as well as the limits of African American feminist theorising as it pertains to the knowledge production and lived experiences of African, Caribbean and Asian women in Britain. Through an empirical study of black women’s organisations in Britain from the 1970s to the
present, the author moves within and beyond the ‘“the grand narrative” of the “black woman’s experience”’ (p. 18) towards a recognition of black women’s collective political work as heterogeneous in process and dynamic in nature. Moreover, her corrective analyses resituate black women’s organising in their proper place alongside other new social movements whose broader global political projects include the eradication of social injustices and the fight for human rights.

The introductory chapter provides an important historical backdrop reminding us of the myriad ways in which the collective agency of black women has been omitted from mainstream scholarly discussions of the male-centred Pan-Africanist and Black Power movements and the white female-centred feminist movement. Chapter 2 offers a ‘womanist methodology’, which challenges Eurocentric and Afrocentric social scientific claims to objectivity and absolute truth. In so doing, Sudbury argues: ‘black women activists engaged in black women’s organisations are also engaged in everyday acts of theorising … as thinkers and knowers’ (p. 34). Chapter 3 demands a redefinition of the political to include extra-parliamentary forms of black women’s ‘invisible activism’ such as the empowerment of self, family and community.

In chapters 4 and 5, the author pinpoints two important and unresolved tensions within feminist discourses in general and black womanist/feminist discourses in particular – that of the unitary politics of inclusion and the fragmentary politics of difference. First, she acknowledges the fact that in the 1970s and 1980s, across ‘races’, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, classes and sexualities, British black women’s collective political activities emerged from shared experiences of imperialism, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. However, in the 1990s, it is the different lived experiences of ‘black’ female subjugation that have called into question ‘black’ as the key symbol of collective political struggle. Second, compounding the contested issue of unified gendered black identification is the issue of class. In chapter 5, Sudbury assesses the extent to which the widening economic stratification between and within African, Caribbean and Asian communities impacts the potential for collective political mobilisation.

Chapter 6 on black women building coalitions across ‘races’, classes and gender is the most interesting section of this comprehensive book. Here, the author takes time to tease out the various strategies deployed by black women organisations who build alliances across racialised, gendered, sexualised, economic and religious differences while at the same time maintaining their autonomy. In particular, Sudbury identifies three potential sites for coalition building: black men, white feminists, and the Labour movement. Accompanying a pointed discussion of each is a truthful assessment of the ideological, social and historical barriers preventing complete solidarity between black women and black men, between black women and white women and among supporters of the Labour party. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, the joint struggle to eradicate racism, united black women and black men. At the same time, sexism manifested itself as black male hostility towards black women’s autonomous political activity. However, the author suggests that in the 1990s, a new kind of black male political activism emerged which focuses on the specificity of black men’s experiences while at the same time including on equal footing the specific and different realities of black women.

In the concluding chapter, the author enumerates four paradigm shifts which include: recognising black women activists as political agents, acknowledging the important role of what Chandra Mohantey among others have theorised as ‘the politics of location’, understanding the simultaneity of gendered, racialised, economic and sexualised oppressions as they impact the everyday lives of black women, and retaining the political designation ‘black’ as ‘an oppositional act’ (p. 226). Sudbury claims that this analytical framework is ‘highly flexible and could be equally applied to other groups and contexts’ (p. 226). The two very different examples she names are the study of black masculinity in Britain and the political mobilisation of multinational women factory workers in Indonesia, Taiwan and Philippines (p.227). One perhaps could argue that in
different ways both groups are victims of global capitalism. However, in using such broad analytical strokes to incorporate the second ‘non-Western’ ‘women of colour’ research cohort within a ‘Western’ ‘womanist’ ethno-methodological perspective, Sudbury needs to be mindful of the potential for reproduction of the same forms of Western ideological imperialism she so forcefully critiques throughout the text.

Overall, Sudbury accomplishes the ambitious task of locating original empirical research on black women’s organisations within the vast theoretical contexts of British and North American feminist studies, sociology, race relations and politics. In so doing, *Other Kinds of Dreams* makes an important contribution to the burgeoning literature on new social movements in general and an appropriate tribute to black women political activists in Britain in particular.

*University of East London*  
JAYNE O. IFEKWUNIGWE

The Human Firm: A Socio-Economic Analysis of its Behaviour and Potential in a New Economic Age  
**John F. Tomer**  

Economic theory has long grappled with the nature of the firm. Remarkably, until recently, few mainstream economists looked inside at the workings of the firm at all. One rare exception was Ronald Coase’s famous 1937 paper. However, it was not until Oliver Williamson published his *Markets and Hierarchies* in 1975 that there was much discussion among economists of the internal organisation and activities of firms. Instead, the firm was treated as a unitary actor. The internal workings of the firm were then regarded as an area of enquiry for sociologists.

Today, however, much has changed. Especially since 1975, there is now widespread discussion by mainstream economists of the nature and internal structure of firms. Economists have built links with organisational and legal theorists and the result is a huge literature on the nature of the firm. This material is taught and developed in both economics departments and business schools. It is into this context that John Tomer has launched his book. To some degree, the book synthesises and develops material that he has published in journal articles. The result is a complete statement of a distinctive and important view of the role and nature of the firm.

In the work, Tomer challenges mainstream economic analyses. He views economic actors as ‘partially embedded’ in society. Accordingly, the narrow view of the ‘rationally striving’ economic agent is rejected. Instead, individuals are seen to be subject not only to economic incentives but also to ‘social influences’. For Tomer, the economic agent is not a wholly selfish maximizing atom, but a complex, socially located, human being. Accordingly, the firm is not a machine built up of optimising units — with a single, optimising outcome — but a human and socially located entity. The mainstream theory of the firm, Tomer argues, ignores the human dimension.

Tomer goes on to embrace concepts such as ‘organisational capital’ and ‘organisational learning’. He freely uses material from disciplines outside economics, such as sociology, psychology, and business studies. He looks at corporate policies and examines ways in which firms can make a fuller contribution to society. He addresses the ‘new economic’ age of knowledge-intensive production and the ‘learning firm’. The result is a book that will be of interest to all scholars addressing the nature and behaviour of the modern corporation. Credit must be given to Tomer for saying many sensible things about the way that firms work, and for casting doubt on
those that understand firms purely in terms of the actions of optimising individuals. To put it bluntly, there is more here about real firms than in any standard economics text.

Having considered the virtues, I must dwell on the defects of the volume as well. It must immediately be added that the methodological and terminological weaknesses in this book are paralleled elsewhere, including in mainstream texts. Tomer is no worse. But sometimes he is not sufficiently better.

One of my complaints is a loose use of terminology. Key concepts are sometimes not defined or used with sufficient clarity. The concept of ‘embeddedness’ for example is defined on one page (p. 20), and there by reference to the famous work of Karl Polanyi (1944). This reference is problematic, however, because Polanyi attempted to argue that under capitalism the market was disembedded in society. Bernard Barber (1977) and other have rightly criticized Polanyi for his use of the concept of disembeddedness, arguing that, even under capitalism, markets are interdependent with their social and institutional context. I would criticise Tomer for an inadequate definition and discussion of this concept.

I have other niggles with concepts such as ‘human capital,’ ‘social capital’ and ‘organizational capital.’ Tomer uses them liberally. I am strongly of the view that they are more trouble than they are worth. I agree with Joseph Schumpeter (1954, p. 323) when he explained that:

\[ \text{capital} \ldots \text{came to denote the sums of money or their equivalents brought by partners into a partnership or company, the sum total of a firm's assets, and the like. Thus the concept was essentially monetary, meaning either actual money, or claims to money, or some goods evaluated in money \ldots} \]

What a mass of confused, futile, and downright silly controversies it would have saved us, if economists had had the sense to stick to those monetary and accounting meanings of the term instead of trying to 'deepen' them!

By applying the word ‘capital’ to non-monetary entities, Tomer can be accused of perpetuating the unidimensional and exclusively pecuniary thinking from which he wished to distance himself.

Tomer also perpetuates the common mistake of regarding the evaluation of the rationality postulate as one of empirical correspondence or non-correspondence with real world behaviour. His scepticism of the postulate hinges on the proposition that human behaviour is not as narrow and unidimensional as described by the model of the rational actor. I would take the opposite view. The problem with the rationality postulate is not that it is too narrow, but that it is too broad. It can encompass any conceivable human behaviour. The problem is not that it fails to fit the facts: but that it can fit them all. Lawrence Boland (1981) argued this convincingly long ago. The rationality postulate is non-falsifiable. Those engaged in debates concerning the adequacy of the rationality assumption would be well advised to read Boland’s article. In consequence, the problem with the rationality assumption is not that it is wrong, but that it is over-general, and thus emptied of any institutional or cultural specifics.

I would also criticise Tomer’s volume for failing to engage sufficiently in current debates concerning the nature of the firm. I refer in particular to the debate between transaction cost perspectives on the one hand, and the competence-based perspective on the other. Although, Tomer’s work fits more neatly into the competence-based perspective, there is no reference to the work of seminal competence-based theorists such as Edith Penrose (1959) and Richard Nelson and Sidney Winter (1982).

My conclusion on reading this book is that the debates on the nature, organisation and performance of the firm are unlikely to develop much further unless all sides pay heed to methodological and terminological issues. Tomer has made a substantial contribution to this debate. But it must be admitted that he has left more issues open, and susceptible to critical scrutiny, than he has closed.


REFERENCES


University of Hertfordshire

TELLING WOMEN’S LIVES: NARRATIVE INQUIRIES IN THE HISTORY OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION

Kathleen Weiler and Sue Middleton (eds.)


The least satisfactory thing about this book is its title which does little to give any sense of what the book is actually about. The nine original essays, specially written for this book, all deal with histories of women as teachers, mainly in schools, across three continents – three from the USA and one from Canada; two from New Zealand and one from Australia; one from Portugal and one from England and Wales. The period is predominantly twentieth century, although some pieces cover both nineteenth and twentieth-century histories. The editors see their purpose as being to add to the process of discovery of lost histories, but also to ‘reflect the impact of poststructural and postcolonial theory’ (p. 2) which has had such an effect on more recent history telling. They also wish to ensure that historical research is not neglected in feminist education studies.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one ‘Reflections on memory and historical truth’ contains four essays all of which might be said to be about historiography, while part two ‘Narrative Inquiries’ has five essays which might be collectively seen as histories of women teachers, although all nine essays are reflective about methods, sources, interpretive strategies and how subjectivities of race gender and class influence readings and meanings. The book as a whole also addresses/is constructed around two contradictions. One is ‘the oppressive structures that maintained a patriarchal order while at the same time affirming that women were not the passive victims of that oppression’ (pp. 1 – 2). The second comes out of the Foucauldian approach which is used by many of the writers, that of subjection versus freedom. As a collection the book also explores, in a variety of ways and contexts, the tension between seeing women teachers as workers or professionals.

GEORGE M. HODGSON
The first two essays by Marjorie Theobald and Alison Prentice are semi-autobiographical pieces (in line with the current fashion for ‘memoirs’) as they look back on their professional lives as historians. Theobald makes clever use of fictional portraits of Australian women teachers as found in novels by Christina Stead and Sylvia Ashton Warner, and reveals how those negative images discouraged her from starting her research into twentieth-century women. Prentice shows how personal circumstances affected her choice of topic: nineteenth-century Ontario State archives which were near to hand when she was at home with young children led to her work on female state teachers; her husband’s membership of a physics department led to university women scientists in the inter-war period. Kathleen Weiler, less autobiographically, reflects on how archival sources in rural California depict women teachers according to cultural mores of time and place, while Linda Tuhuiwai Smith provides a fascinating account of how her Maori students reacted to historical accounts of Maori women of the past century, often with outrage.

The second part provides five original accounts of the lives of women teachers, using a variety of sources including oral histories and archival sources as well as interviews. Sue Middleton and Helen May select from material which they have used elsewhere to explore how progressive educational ideals affected the work of both women and men teachers in New Zealand, both between the wars and in the post-war period and make connections between feminist and progressive ideologies, while Kate Rousmaniere analyses the life of Margaret Haley, who was a union activist in Chicago up until her death in 1939, in terms of the conflict between her different roles – labour leader, feminist, educational professional and her personal life as a working-class Irish American. The three remaining essays are those which may be of most interest to the readers of this journal in that they are all concerned with how women teachers were both workers and professionals, and trapped in contradictions between their gender and their work. Alison Oram expands on her 1996 book *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics 1900–1939*, by looking at the way in which the marriage bar in England and Wales led some women teachers to conceal relationships, at great personal risk, or to adopt the role of dedicated daughter in preference to the stigmas attached to both spinsterhood and lesbianism. Helena C. Araujo gives us the oral history testimony of five Portuguese women teachers, born between 1899 and 1910, living at subsistence levels in rural communities, struggling to combine teaching, motherhood, and economic support for family members. Finally, the account which I found the most memorable, is that of the work of the Jeanes teachers in the southern USA as described by Valinda Littlefield. My fascination was doubtless mainly due to my total ignorance about these teachers, named after Anna T. Jeanes, a white Quaker woman who established a fund in 1907 to ‘encourage the rudimentary education of Colored people residing in rural districts’ (p. 131). The Jeanes teachers travelled far and wide, often devising ingenious modes of transport, encouraging a variety of self-help activities from Home Maker’s Clubs to grow and preserve food, to fund-raising to pay for communal kitchens. Anyone working in community development today in areas of social exclusion would gain both inspiration and useful ideas from these energetic women, showing that history is not just about the past.

University of Bristol

ELIZABETH BIRD