

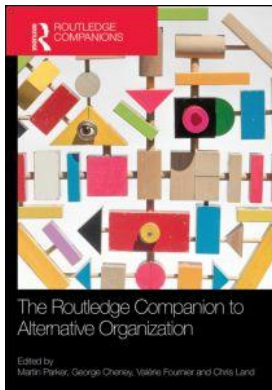
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Martin Parker, George Cheney, Valérie Fournier, Chris Land

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M. Parker

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Imagining alternatives

(with Geoff Lightfoot)

Introduction

It is fairly easy to point to the problems of the present, and suggest that we need new forms of organizing, as we did in Chapter 1. What is much harder is to systematically imagine what those alternatives might look like, to turn opposition and analysis into proposals. Colin Ward once suggested that anarchist organizations should be voluntary, functional, temporary and small (1966: 387). While this is a provocative beginning, it shows the problem with any attempt to state general principles as if they were truths. ‘Functional’ for whom? Could a temporary organization administer justice, or make computers? How small should an organization be, or how big can it get before we split it in two? Is slavery an alternative to capitalism? Is piracy, or the Kibbutz, or digging unused land for food? At some point, being critical of other people, economic ideas and institutions must turn into a strategy of providing suggestions, resources and models, but these themselves must be criticized. This is a really important point, because we wouldn’t want any readers of this book to think that what we are calling ‘alternatives’ are somehow new, pure or uncontroversial.

This is not a worked-out manifesto for a utopia which could be inaugurated tomorrow. As Chapter 2 showed, the world is more complex than that, with different histories and spaces running parallel to the rise of different capitalisms. Neither do we believe that there will be another world one day in which all our problems will be solved once its logic is explained, or humans can become innocent again, or a prophet will turn up with some instructions. As the chapters that follow this one clearly show, all forms of organizing are ‘political’, which is another way of saying that they are contested. They have upsides and downsides, and it simply isn’t possible to say that there are some arrangements that are unambiguously good, and others that are unambiguously bad. Markets can be hugely helpful forms of reward and distribution in some circumstances, and communes can be oppressive and narrow places which crush individuals. Hierarchies of authority can be helpful, too, on occasion, particularly for making quick decisions, while democratic and popular education could easily reproduce sexist and racist ideas. The key issue that we want to bring out in the book is an awareness of the consequences of particular forms, and to always understand that there are other ways of doing things. We have choices, individually and collectively, and we must never assume that ‘there

is no alternative' because of certain immutable laws of markets or organizing (Clegg, 1990: 58; Fisher, 2007).

This book is an attempt to articulate some general principles which might guide thinking about alternatives to globalizing capitalism and market managerialism at the present time, so it is incumbent on us to say just what we are 'for' and not just moan about what we are 'against' (Parker, 2002a). Consequently, this chapter outlines some key principles which seem to tie together the chapters which follow, and which might be read as a sort of manifesto for defining 'the alternative'. That is to say, it describes what we have decided to put in this book, and what to exclude on the grounds that it doesn't fit with our definition of what counts as sufficiently different from the present. In broad terms, we will suggest three principles which we have been guided by – autonomy, solidarity and responsibility – and that we think any reflection on the politics of organizing needs to deal with. To summarize very briefly, we wish to encourage forms of organizing which respect personal autonomy, but within a framework of cooperation, and which are attentive to the sorts of futures they will produce. This is a simple statement to make, almost a vacuous one, but it actually produces some complex outcomes, because gaining agreement on any of these ideas is very tricky indeed.

Before we do that, however, we want to show how these arguments about defining what lies inside and outside 'alternative' might work by using the example of microfinance. This is a method of providing capital for small businesses which seems to be both a way of contesting the power of big banks and big business, and also an example of the way in which global and financialized capitalism can seek profits from some rather unlikely sources. So, why haven't we included a chapter on it here?

Contesting microfinance (by Geoff Lightfoot)

Microfinance seemed to offer so much to so many and still holds a lingering promise of cost-free or even profitable poverty alleviation. Its modern development is typically traced back to Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh in the 1970s. He described his experience of lending a small sum of money (around \$27.00) to a group of women which enabled them to buy stock for their business of making bamboo furniture. The group was able to repay his money in full and make a small profit which, had they financed their borrowing from the local money-lender, would have been swallowed up by the interest on the loan. Such a tale, on its own, seems heart-warming but scarcely noteworthy as a global alternative. However, Yunus made the radical claim that the model was scalable: it could grow from an individual providing funds out of their own pocket to a professionally organized institution. Yunus demonstrated this by starting a project borrowing money from state and commercial banks to lend onwards to the poor. The project grew to include 28,000 lenders by 1982 and in 1983 was reformed as the Grameen Bank. By 2011, the Bank had 8.4 million members (borrowers) with over 75 billion Bangladeshi Taka (just under \$1 billion) in outstanding loans (Grameen Bank, 2012). This market – of tiny loans at reasonable interest rates – had been overlooked by traditional banks because the transaction costs (of arranging loans and monitoring repayment), coupled with a perception that the poor were more likely to default on their loans, suggested that such operations would always be loss-making. Yunus's insight was that targeted loans, primarily to groups of women, could actually achieve repayment rates that were higher than those for other borrowers and that this would make the model sustainable. Thus, a microfinance bank could be self-financing and, by dispersing money to the entrepreneurially minded poor, could help people to work their own way out of poverty. And, by directing loans to women, the project would help empower many who had been doubly disadvantaged – the female poor in a patriarchal society.

At this point, microfinance starts to look very interesting to a number of different parties. First, it appeals to charities, governments and other non-governmental organizations as a possible way of addressing poverty and hardship. It is particularly appealing, perhaps, because it brings the promise of seriously addressing poverty without spending money. As a consequence, governments in many less-developed countries, where poverty is widespread but government funds to address it are limited, have attempted to develop microfinance networks. It also has a strong ideological appeal – rather than creating a benefit or dependency culture, individuals assisted by microfinance appear to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial. Thus, many international bodies, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have become interested.

The second strong appeal comes with the suggestion that repayment rates are very high. High repayment rates minimize the risk and, if the returns are high enough, become potentially interesting investment opportunities. Of course, economic theory suggests that there is a correlation between risk and return – low-risk investments deliver a much lower return than high-risk – so when an investment promises high returns with low risks, investors pile in. As a consequence, there has been a wave of commercialization of microfinance which has seen both indigenous commercial banks enter the microfinance market and a surge in capital from global financial markets being directed into microfinance institutions. This increase has been strongly promoted by the World Bank through its International Finance Corporation, whose mission is ‘Private Sector Solutions for Development’ and which had, in 2012, a \$2 billion microfinance investment portfolio (World Bank, 2012). Indeed, the World Bank and other international finance institutions, as Bateman and Chang (2009) note, have forcefully argued that private sector, profit-oriented businesses are the *only* viable long-term solution for the microfinance sector.

The demands of private capital have, unsurprisingly, caused conflicts with the goals of poverty alleviation or empowerment. Arvelo *et al.* (2008) inadvertently give an insight into how the giant investment bank Morgan Stanley assesses microfinance investments: great detail in how to evaluate risk and return but at no point considering the mission of those institutions funded. Yunus himself argued (2008: 6) that ‘when institutions with a social mission move towards a commercial mission, the commercial mission will take over and the social mission will get lost’. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced by Rosenberg (2007: 4) who argued that the financial success of Compartamos in Mexico came from ‘the very high profitability of the institution based on interest rates that were around 85% per year plus a 15% government tax’. These rates are often defended on the grounds that they ‘are far below what poor people routinely pay to village money-lenders and other informal sources’ (CGAP, 2006) or that the marginal utility to the poor is far higher than for other borrowers.

Whether justified by comparison with money-lenders or not, we can see that commercial microfinance results in higher interest charges to the poor than other borrowers. The possibilities of poverty reduction through commercial microfinance seem very distant indeed. But it would be a mistake to simply suggest that non-commercial microfinance would work much better. Milford Bateman’s (2010) comprehensive critique argues that microfinance creates barriers to successful development by directing labour to marginal enterprises that do not have the potential for generating sustainable growth and diverting funds away from institutions that more effectively promote development. Adopting a wider perspective, he suggests that countries which have strong microfinance networks have remained resolutely poor, while growth in rapidly developing economies owes little or nothing to microfinance. Ultimately, for Bateman, microfinance works to maintain poverty rather than resolve it.

Bateman’s bleak conclusion is not unwarranted and leads to the question as to whether there is anything that can be salvaged from microfinance. Possibly not, if we look at the

effects in general terms. Once sucked into the maelstrom of global finance, with the demands of ever-increasing profitability, microfinance will inevitably work to suck money from some of the poorest people in the world to deliver it to some of the richest. But at a micro-level, as Yunus's original tale demonstrated, small interventions make a difference in everyday lives and if microfinance is to deliver any hope, it has to remain local and essentially charitable.

The means and ends of organizing

As we have just seen, it isn't always easy to decide what is 'alternative'. There are almost certainly many people who would disagree with the analysis of microfinance which Geoff Lightfoot provides above, but in this book we eventually decided that microfinance simply wasn't alternative enough. What seems to have happened in this area, as Muhammad Yunus suggested, is that the goal of poverty reduction has become displaced by a business logic, the logic of capitalism. Even if we discount this form of economic determinism, another possible explanation is that, as the sociologist Robert Michels suggested with his phrase the 'iron law of oligarchy', those who become powerful within an organization are often motivated by self-enhancement, self-preservation and the consolidation of power (Georgiou, 1981). This means that organizations often just keep on doing whatever it is that they do, like zombies that move but have no consciousness or heart. As Cheney (2002) notes, organizations don't self-destruct, regardless of whether their ends have been corrupted, or their means are still appropriate.

This means that we always need to be wary about organizing, even organizing that looks like it is 'alternative', such as microfinance (though see the chapters on complementary currencies and credit unions in this volume). Part of the problem here rests on making some judgements about the inseparability of means and ends. That is to say, is it enough to decide that a particular form of organizing aims at an end that we deem to be 'good'? We might well say that it is, and consequently that certain ends justify almost any means. So, if a big bank is making money, but people are being lifted out of poverty, then we might be satisfied. Or, if a very hierarchical form of managerialism is being used in a company that manufactures organic foods, then we could agree that this is still a good organization. Of course we can also play these arguments in reverse, and suggest that the means are the evidence that we should use in our judgements. So if an organization was cooperatively owned, but engaged in a particularly cruel form of factory farming, we could perhaps discount the means in some way. Or perhaps we could imagine a form of community currency being used to exclude 'outsiders' from engaging in certain kinds of financial transactions. In these cases, it might be that our care for animals, or for certain sorts of humans, means that the ownership of the organization or the origin of the medium of exchange is pretty irrelevant to our final judgements.

As should be pretty clear, the distinctions we are making here are very troublesome, and could well create some rather paradoxical outcomes. In fact, we believe that any argument about a separation between means and ends should be treated with extreme scepticism, because we do not think you can make a judgement about one in isolation from the other. The distinction between the two often makes us assume that we have no choice but to use particular methods, or to attempt to achieve particular goals. Max Weber captured the difference rather nicely in terms of his distinction between the instrumentally rational action which in modern times he saw as characteristic of bureaucratic organizations (*zweckrational*) and value-rational action which was aimed at a particular ethical, political or spiritual goal (*wertrational*) (Weber, 1922). But though they may seem different, the key issue for Weber is that they are both 'rational' in the sense that they are explanations that can be used to justify

forms of action and organization. So the question is not whether one way of thinking is irrational, or less rational, because every form of life is underpinned by a certain sort of rationality. We can't simply disentangle the question of how something is done from the broader issue of why it should be done, and neither do noble ends justify the use of any means necessary.

Take, for example, the question of the university. Can we detach 'how' something is being taught from why it is being taught? Many policy makers and students might argue that the university should be relevant to the economy, which seems to be a way of saying that it should prepare students for jobs. In which case, the university is merely a means to get a degree certificate. But it is very difficult to argue that the end of certifying potential employees is the *only* purpose of the university, simply because the means are crucial in order to achieve the end. The process of learning is what we learn, and the certificate you get when you leave states that you have undergone that process, not simply that you have learnt certain facts and can repeat them when poked. Hypnosis or smart drugs would be more effective if this was the case, and we wouldn't bother with books like this one, and Informa would have nothing to sell. Indeed, in some sense the educational means are the end, unless we argue that a university is only there to award degree certificates in return for money. To use a different example, we sometimes walk because we want to get to somewhere in particular, but we also go for walks because we like walking, and it makes us fitter, and we can talk with our friends and see interesting things. Which is the means and which is the end?

Think about the idea of making a decision. Within conventional organizations, decisions are made by those with power and status. We could say that a decision is a means to an end, and having 'managers' to make those decisions is a means that ensures that getting to the end is more speedy and efficient. Perhaps, but as many anarchists, feminists and socialists have argued, we could treat a collective form of decision making as an end in itself, as an art of cooperating, and not simply a means to some end (Lovink and Scholz, 2007). If the intention of the organization's members is to take decisions slowly and democratically, then the very process of organizing in a particular way becomes its own reward, as well as a process by which other goals might be achieved. As Maeckelbergh's chapter later in this volume on the alter-globalization movement shows, such organizing is 'prefigurative', in the sense that it attempts to bring into being new forms of social relationships. A distinction between means and end, cause and effect, which seems quite secure in common sense begins to look rather suspicious, and politically loaded, in the context of alternative organization.

So we are suspicious of arguments which suggest that any means are acceptable to achieve certain ends, just as we are about suggestions that only certain means are 'efficient' or justifiable. Allowing big financial institutions to make money from the poor is a useful example, because excluding microfinance from this book is not to say that we are against poverty reduction, simply that we do not think that any means are justifiable. (And in any case, there might be better means than these.) The whole point of a book like this is to show that we can, and should, treat all arguments about means and ends as political ones. We should always be suspicious if someone tells us that there is no alternative, no choice, and that we should be 'realistic'. The end point of many arguments against change is that things have to be like this because of 'the market', or 'the bottom line', or 'human nature' which, as we showed in Chapter 1, are usually assertions that suit pro-capitalists. In fact, we think that almost no particular forms of human organizing are inevitable, and that there are always choices about means, ends and the relations between them. For example, if we imagine the university as a mechanism for producing the future, then perhaps it can produce different futures, and different sorts of people to inhabit those futures? The only other position is that history has

ended and there are no alternatives, in which case books like this are exercises in futility. The attitude of cynical fatalism which this requires is one we do not share.

Three principles

However, opening up the politics and possibilities of organizing like this doesn't solve our problems. It makes things much more difficult because we can longer admit to any arguments about inevitability, and instead have to justify our individual and collective choices on the basis of what forms of rationality we wish to encourage. These will have to be reasons which encompass both means and ends, both processes and purposes, and rest upon some sort of idea about the kinds of society and people we wish to encourage. This means that visions of a better form of social order, ideas about utopia if you will (Parker, 2002b; Parker *et al.*, 2007), are central to the judgements we might make concerning what is alternative and what is mainstream, about the difference between finance and microfinance, fair exchange and appropriation. We should not assume that we will ever know the 'one best way' to organize (to borrow Frederick Taylor's term), and might instead encourage debate about ideas that are different to the way that we do things now – whether old, new, marginal, hidden, possible or imaginary.

Having said that, it seems fair to try to explain the general principles that we think tie together the ideas and practices in this book because we are not suggesting that 'anything goes'. As we noted in the previous chapter, there are many 'alternatives' to the present, including fascism, feudalism and slavery, but we are not advocating any of these here. So what are the themes that bring together the twenty substantive chapters in this book? As we noted briefly above, we think there are three broad orientations, values, logics or principles at work here – autonomy, solidarity and responsibility – and in this section we will explore them in a bit more detail.

First, we think that any alternative worth exploring must be able to protect some fairly conventional notions of individual autonomy, that is to say, to respect ourselves. This is not a controversial or novel idea, but one that underpins most conservative, liberal and libertarian political philosophy (Mill, 1859; Nozick, 1974). Words like liberty, diversity, dignity and difference are more often honoured in the breach rather than the observance but still gesture towards the radical proposal that individual freedoms really do matter. When we feel that we have been forced to do something that we don't want to do we are diminished in an important way, and any social system which relies on coercion, of an economic, ideological or physical form, is not one which we can support easily. This means that we do think that individuals should have choices about some of the most important ways in which they live their lives. If there is no autonomy within a given social system, only rules, then we are justified in calling it totalitarian, uniform and intolerant of difference. For most of the readers of this book, this will be an easy principle to establish, because (as we argued in Chapter 1) it underlies so much of the ideology which supports neo-liberal capitalism, and yet we also want to argue that it contains a radical core which must lie at the heart of any robust 'alternative'.

Our second principle reverses the assumptions of the first, and begins with the collective, and our duties to others. This could be variously underpinned with forms of communist, socialist and communitarian thought, as well as virtue ethics, and insists that we are social creatures who are necessarily reliant on others (MacIntyre, 1981; Marx and Engels, 1848/1967; Mulhall and Swift, 1992). This means that words like solidarity, cooperation, community and equality become both descriptions of the way that human beings are, and prescriptions for the way that they should be. On their own, human beings are vulnerable and powerless,

victims of nature and circumstance. Collectively – bound together by language, culture and organization – they become powerful, and capable of turning the world to their purposes. Perhaps even more important than this is the way in which we humans actually make each other, providing the meanings and care which allow us to recognize ourselves as ourselves. In the most general sense, this is what ‘social construction’ means (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), the making of the human through and with other humans in such a way that it becomes impossible to imagine even being human without some conception of a society to be oriented to.

Let’s pause a moment before thinking about the third principle, because it’s fairly clear that one and two are at best in tension with one another, at worst contradictory. How can we be both true to ourselves, and at the same time orient ourselves to the collective? How can we value freedom, but then give it up to the group? Our answer to these problems is that we need to understand both principles as co-produced. For example, when we speak of being free, we usually mean ‘free to’, in the sense of being free to be able to exercise choices about where to go, who to vote for, what to buy and so on. This is precisely the idea of liberty that we are very often encouraged to imagine as being the pre-eminent principle around which our lives *should* be organized within a consumer society. But a moment’s thought also allows us to see that ‘freedom to’ is only possible if we also experience ‘freedom from’. As the political philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, put it, ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ liberty are not the same things, even if they appear to be aimed at the same goals (1969). The individual freedom to be who we want to be rests on our freedoms from hunger, dislocation, violence and so on which can only be pursued collectively. We, as individuals, can only exercise our autonomy within some sort of collective agreement, a social contract if you like, which provides us with a shelter against events. So ‘freedom’ is an entirely abstract concept unless it is embedded within some sort of institution. Otherwise, we might as well talk about being free to starve or pay high interest rates on loans, or at liberty to become a refugee or political prisoner. This is what liberalism so often misses. In its entirely credible and modern defence of individual autonomy against despotic exercises of power it tends to have an allergic reaction towards the institutions which are needed to ensure that we can eat well and sleep safely in our beds.

The reverse is also true of course. As the history of the twentieth century showed very clearly, just because a social system claims to be collective (whether communist, nationalist, capitalist or national socialist) it doesn’t mean that it is. Even if it is supported by a majority, there might be compelling reasons not to support certain dominant norms, to stand out against the mass (Arendt, 1963). Often enough, loud claims to be representing others are actually providing a warrant for the powerful to do what they want. The suggestion that individual preferences should always be dissolved in the collective, and that any dissent from the dominant line is heretical, is one that we find in a wide variety of flavours. Liberty is usually suppressed in the name of a greater good – ‘the corporation’, ‘the people’, ‘the state’, ‘the nation’ – but what is common is that it requires conformity, fear, exile or death to enforce it. There is not such merit in being collective that the destruction of all liberties is necessary in order to achieve it. Indeed, as Zygmunt Bauman has argued, the impulse to create the perfect collectivity is itself something to be distrusted (1989, 2007). The idea of creating the ideal human within the ideal city is one that requires that people and things which don’t fit are ‘weeded’ out, and that all the contradictions and politics of real people in real places are reduced to a ‘year zero’ from which we can begin again. It is because of such assumptions – often enough wielded by feudal kings, generals and bishops – that assertions of individual liberty matter.

That being said, the dichotomy between the individual and society is not quite so straightforward or dramatic because it is also often mediated by some sort of identity as a member of a group, class or category *within* or *between* wider societies (Jenkins, 2008). When organizing

happens on this level – social movements, women’s groups, indigenous organizations, social class-based politics – it is often protecting a form of collective autonomy against perceived repression or ignorance. The politics of identity insists on the importance of some forms of collective distinction and on the ‘right’ to express them. Here we can see many practical examples of how a certain sort of individual difference becomes aligned with a cooperative strategy, and consequently a form of distinctiveness can be articulated as the precondition for a form of solidarity. When a group of vegetarians establishes their own co-operative, or the Somali migrants in an Italian city establish self-help groups, they are making an identity claim. We can be ‘different together’, a position which appears to dissolve a clear distinction between liberalism and communitarianism, between the demand for freedom and the embracing of a collectivity. This is not the same as insisting on radical autonomy, but neither is it necessarily a form of totalitarianism. As with many matters, the messy reality of actual organizing is rarely as simple as theoretical distinctions would suggest.

In any case, even if we acknowledge that our two first principles do embody a profound contradiction, does this matter? Contradiction is not something to be feared or eliminated by arguments in books. Instead it is a lived reality for people who take on the responsibilities of reflexive organizing, as they juggle mixed motives and outcomes individually and collectively. The tensions between being free, making enough money, having an impact, worrying about the future, or whatever, are not ones which will go away by making theoretical gestures. Indeed, if there were no tensions or conflicts in a particular set of ideas it would be difficult to understand it as living thought. If we already have all the answers, if we already know the one best way to do things, then there would be little point in a book like this, and no way to understand what a word like ‘politics’ might mean.

Our third principle is a little easier, however, in the sense that it presents a more direct challenge to the externalizing tendencies of capitalism which we discussed in Chapter 1. We think that any alternative worth the name must have a responsibility to the future – to the conditions for our individual and collective flourishing. This will involve words which are used often nowadays, but not always taken very seriously as practices, such as sustainability, accountability, stewarding, development and progress. The economic and organizational structures of the present tend not to encourage such responsibilities, instead treating people and planet as resources which can be used for short-term gain by a few. In large part these are matters which bear upon questions of climate change, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, but not exclusively. The conditions for our individual and collective flourishing are also institutional and cultural, and hence any responsibility to the future must also have regard to the sorts of people we create, and the sorts of organizational arrangements they make, and that make them. This means, for example, being attentive to what technologies do to us and for us (in Chapter 21); what sorts of assumptions about democracy and hierarchy we embed into our workplaces (in Chapter 4); or how the architecture of our dwellings separates home from work, or women from men (in Chapter 8). We take ‘responsibility’ to be a term which presses us to think about all sorts of consequences, which encourages us to respond to the ‘long future’, and not insulate ourselves with the usual arguments which merely end up displacing problems to some other place and some other time. As the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy was supposed to have it – ‘In every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations’.

What we have here, then, are three principles which we require of alternatives, three responsibilities which must be negotiated and understood – to ourselves, to others and to our future. All three are elements of what we believe to be alternative and any one in isolation is insufficient. An organization which only defends individual liberty will not be able to

coordinate very much, but an organization which only demands collective loyalty must necessarily expel disagreement. And, since we don't know, and probably won't agree on, what the future should look like then the balance between individualism and collectivism will also be written across our futures. These three cannot be treated as matters that can ever be solved for once and for all, but rather as concerns that must be raised, and addressed, in the certain knowledge that there will always be disagreements. Too much concern for ourselves ends up as possessive individualism and selfishness; too much direction from others and bending to the collective will is a form of coercion; and too many promises about the ideal future neglect the mucky problems of the present. In this book, evidence of all three is required before we deem something to be 'alternative'.

Prefigurative politics

Thinking about these three dimensions makes organization into a series of choices and encourages us to see that there is always another way of getting things done. It problematizes the relationship between means and ends, often making means into ends themselves. Rather than believing that 'we have no alternative', we become able to see that 'organizing' is an open process, and become more able to understand and debate the values which underpin particular institutions and ways of doing things.

Another implication of this is to think of organizing as a kind of politics made durable. Our current versions of markets, management, hierarchy, leaders, employees, consumption and so on constitute a particular set of political assumptions. These aren't necessary and inevitable arrangements, dictated by the structure of our monkey genetics, or the calculus of the invisible hand of the market. Rather than seeing organizing as a technical matter, something to be left to experts with MBAs perhaps, we can understand it as a way of working through the complex ways of being human with other humans and hence a responsibility and possibility for all of us. This is what we might call 'reflexive organizing', a form of working which deliberately and continually reflects on how people and things are being put together. For example, if we claim that democracy – the rule of the people – is a value that we care about then we might reasonably ask just why so many decisions in workplaces are taken autocratically, by a small minority. Arguments from expertise or efficiency might work in particular cases – such as when a doctor uses their expertise to diagnose a medical problem, or something has to be done quickly – but this is not the case in many situations. Why assume that all forms of organization need a class of people called 'managers', and that these people should be paid so much more than the workers? Why are these managers appointed, and not elected? Why assume that the people who work for a company will be different to the people who own it? Why not have workers or trade union representatives sitting on boards of directors? Why do shareholders have votes, but not employees, members of local communities, customers and so on?

Once these sorts of questions and many others are opened up, it is difficult to get them back in the box. The answers become prefigurative of a certain attitude, a constitutive politics in themselves. This is to stress the open-ended quality of organizing and the importance of thinking about organizational processes as part of thinking through the recognition of individual autonomy, the encouragement of solidarity, and taking responsibility for the future. As we explored above, how we reach decisions can be as important as the decisions themselves. This is a really important shift, because it moves us away from thinking that organizing is what happens *after* decisions have been taken, and that it can be left to other people. In a society with a complex division of labour, professional politicians and policy makers, global

supply chains and gigantic corporations, it is not surprising that we should believe this. Most often, the responsibility does not seem to be ours when we swipe a credit card, buy some shoes or tick a box on a ballot paper. We make a choice, and someone else organizes things for us. In this book, we are proposing that organizing is a decision too, a decision which pre-figures and shapes what follows.

In some rather important ways, we also think that these principles press us to think locally, to think small (Schumacher, 1973) because any meaningful use of words like difference, community, sustainability and so on must refer to a particular group of people with names and faces. Otherwise the words are merely hopeful labels with no referent to the times and places where we live our lives. One of the features of the ‘there is no alternative’ argument is to point to forces outside the local which constrain decision making. ‘If it was up to me . . .’, ‘in an ideal world . . .’, ‘if we don’t do this . . .’, are all phrases which deny local agency and point to a framework which means that things just have to be like they are. Other people and things – ‘head office’, ‘the market’, ‘the customer’ – can be given the responsibility for the maintenance of the social order. But this buck passing has a cost in terms of the way that it prevents us from thinking that these responsibilities are ours, and that we can imagine different ways that things can be done. That is why many of our alternatives confront us with the local, with what is in front of our noses, because it is there that we spend most of our lives. That being said, small isn’t always beautiful, particularly when it comes to the avoidance of insularity and the building of (real and metaphorical) bridges, but it is less likely to do as much damage. In other words, we don’t have to assume that organizations must grow and become big, because in taking our three responsibilities seriously we might decide that local works better.

The rest of the book

Not that any of this is easy, because simply imagining that the world could be different merely builds castles in the air. This is not a utopian book, in the sense of putting forward some images of what a perfect world might look like. It’s more like a recipe book, in which the chapters function to provide some ideas and inspiration by documenting the history, current state and future possibilities of alternatives to market managerial capitalism. With a recipe book, you are not told what to make, but are encouraged to think that you don’t need to keep on eating Chicken McNuggets. Other ideas are available.

The following twenty chapters explore these ideas in terms of three issues – how this affects conceptions of work and labour, exchange and consumption, and the sorts of resources required to re-imagine organizing in different ways. We have divided the book into these sections because we believe that it broadly reflects the sorts of questions that are raised by reflexive organizing. How shall we work and make a living? What shall we buy and sell? How shall we deal with the people and things that we organize? None of the chapters in each of the sections represents a final or settled answer, rather an attempt to open up questions which many people in the societies of the global North do not even see to be questions. In the final chapter, Chapter 24, we return to the broader idea of change, and to what extent we should be pessimistic about the idea that ‘another world is possible’, to quote the slogan of the World Social Forum (McNally, 2005). Obviously we can’t be that pessimistic, otherwise we would not have put this book together, but we do think we need to acknowledge the forces and interests ranged against change. This book will not change the world, but the ideas and practices within it, if taken seriously and not dismissed as ‘mere idealism’, might.

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