The Vulnerable Fortress: Bureaucratic Organization and Management in the Information Age. JAMES R. TAYLOR and ELIZABETH J. VAN EVERY. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. xxiii, 283 p. ISBN 0-8020-7773-0.

"Today's castles of bureaucracy" are under attack by forces that have rendered obsolete our notions of how organizations should be managed. The barbarian at the gate is "globalization": the trend towards multi-centred organizations, transnational conglomerates, and the "gavotte of floating partnerships and virtual organizations" made possible by new telecommunication technologies. Meanwhile, microcomputers and their increasingly sophisticated software are the weapons of an attack from within, undermining authority relations and contributing to the "atomization" of organizations—"more and smaller businesses do what fewer and larger ones did before." That our manager-knights are being defeated by these forces is indicated by studies showing that the massive investment in new information and communication technologies has led to no measurable increase in the productivity of white-collar workers, and that many managers simply defer to technical advisers when implementing the technologies.

According to Taylor and Van Every, this situation is an "anomaly" that points to inadequacies in current theories of organization and management. In response to this anomaly, they propose new theories with a postmodern flavour: a "discourse theory of organization" and a "hypertext model of administration." In recent years, various philosophers have described to us the "decentred subject," and now Taylor and Van Every provide us with the decentred organization, where that slacker can, at last, get a job.

In the first part of this book, the authors develop their theory of organization:

> Organization is a "discourse" of spoken and written communicational transactions: the organization is regenerated communicationally in a dialectic between "conversation" and representation or "text," each having its own logic.

Such a theory might soon find frisky deconstructionists snapping at its heels, but when stated simply, it seems intuitively appropriate to describe the interdependence of the informal and formal aspects of organization with this talk/text metaphor. Traditional theories of organization have been based upon "rational machine" metaphors: organizations are hierarchies whose parts "were programmed to perform tasks according to pre-established criteria and coordinated within a tightly coupled communication network, obeying strict rules of interconnection." "Anomalies" arise when, for instance, the rational model is operationalized in the software "text" of office automation systems, and this text clashes with the "conversation" of actual practices. The rational text aims at restricting and controlling the actions of individuals, while those individuals are engaged in a "conversation" which might not coincide with the formal description of their duties, and which includes investigating the potential of computer technology for carrying out diverse and complex tasks, and for communicating with any other point in the organization. The discourse model of organization removes any presuppositions of restrictions on communications and tasks. The organization is seen as a system of transactions, where authority and tasks can always be renegotiated, to meet changes in the organization's environment.

The structuring of organizational conversation and text, and the nature of the dialectic between them, are described at some length, using ideas and terminology from such sources as communication theory, speech act theory, semiotics, and linguistics. Unfortunately, the topic is complex enough and the treatment brief enough that one is left wondering whether the model is coherent, or just a forced-fit of bits and pieces from the work of Erving Goffman, A.J. Greimas, J. Austin, et al. In addition, the intuitive appeal of the conversation/text metaphor begins to dissipate when the authors describe the interaction of groups within organizations, which obliges them to introduce such notions as micro- and macro-processes, micro- and macro-actors, and micro-, macro- and meta-communication. The discomforted reader should probably turn, at this point, to the more detailed account of the model in Taylor's recent book, *Rethinking the Theory of Organizational Communication*. In spite of these problems, archivists will be interested in the "transactional theory of communication" used to explain the structuring of organizational "conversation" (chapter 4). For example, the theory's premise that "information is a property as much of the transactional situation as of the message" points to a way of incorporating archivists' traditional interest in the context of records creation into the broader field of organization and management theory. This, in turn, would provide support for such efforts as Sue McKemmish's and Frank Upward's redefinition of the "archival document" to include active records, and David Bearman's and Richard Cox's work on standards for automated records-keeping systems.

The second half of this book is devoted to using the organizational model as the basis for a new model of management: if the organization is a "transactional universe of discourse" whose structure and limits should always be subject to renegotiation, how is it to be administered? The authors believe that the design of hypertexts provides a useful metaphor for managing the organization-as-discourse: one identifies work-group "nodes" and transactional "links" between nodes, while recognizing that new links and nodes will come into existence as the organization evolves. "Day-to-day administration consists of 'navigating' a network of organizational nodes." Hierarchy is no longer a function of authority inherent in particular positions, but is, instead, an ordering of those transactional links which "optimize value" in the organization. The process of mapping nodes, their links, the transactional hierarchy, and involving employees in the construction of new nodes and links is "hypermanagement."

This book does not provide a new recipe of management or a fixed view of organization to take the place of the stale machine-metaphors of yesterday. It should instead be read as an introduction to a new approach that might make better sense of recent social and economic trends, using theoretical tools derived from such disciplines as semiotics and linguistics. While the authors describe the infinite flexibility of their models as a strength, the weakness is that this flexibility implies that everything is permitted when it comes to constructing organizations, and this does not seem believable. Writers such as Mary Douglas have argued for the development of typologies of possible forms of organization; defining such parameters for these models would provide useful guidance for those (including archivists) whose work involves "mapping" organizational structures. The holistic view of the interconnections of organization structure (both formal and informal), office

technology, and information, offered by the conversation/text metaphor will be especially attractive to archivists, and points to a way of allying the archivist's work with that of other managers in organizations. One need not accept whole-heartedly the authors contention that organizations are nothing more than commu-nication to make use of this holistic view. Finally, archivists can have some fun reflecting upon how this hypertext model of management might apply to the archives as an organization.

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