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Working in the Twenty-First Century

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BOOK REVIEWS

WORKING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY edited by C. Stewart Sheppard and Donald C. Carroll. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980. 214 pp., index.

Reviewer: ART SHOSTAK, Drexel University

Clinical sociologists may find a considerable amount of consulting work in the 1980's helping major American firms accommodate "future shock." Few areas of national life are as turbulent today as the corporate world, what with automation, cybernetics, global ownership, mergers, productivity campaigns, and quality work circles all combining at present to shake established ways and require a new social order.

Exceedingly helpful in mapping the terrain is a 20-essay anthology based on a 350-person symposium held in 1979. Contributors like Issac Asimov, A.H. Raskin, Louis Harris, Stewart Brand and others bring decades of experience and a personal vision to the task. Their many anecdotes and use of the first-person voice are a refreshing change from the more standard fare.

Of particular interest to certain clinical sociologists will be several essays that attempt to help corporate types better understand "The Age of Me" — and its "broad-gauge decline in worker satisfaction, emerging demands for more control over one's hours of work and leisure, the decline of tolerance for authoritarian bosses, the unwillingness to defer gratification, and a clutch of other issues . . ." Plainly, any and every business firm that comes to believe these cultural changes at play in its system may be open to the potential of clinical sociology to make a desirable difference.

The one sociologist represented among the varied contributors, Suzanne Keller, sought to shed fresh light on "Shifting Values: New Choices and Old Dilemmas." Her forecasts include the vexing likelihood of a sharp new division in the world of work — "a super-trained, well-paid, relatively contented class of technicians, service workers, and professionals, and an underclass of unemployed and perhaps unemployables." Keller speculates that some help might follow from the reviving of "two tendencies constrained during the era of unbridled consumerism: (1) the quest for personal fulfillment — as in various forms of self-renewal; and (2) service to others — the old, the poor, the ill, the lonely." Clinical sociologists, of course, could contribute much to the relief of two-class rivalry and tension, even as we also aid the reviving momentum.

Thanks to essays from Machinist Union president William W. Winpisinger, futurist Theodore J. Gordon, and TV commentator James C. Lehrer, the anthology has vitality, reach, and considerable down-to-earth reasoning. Few clinical sociologists will leave it without enough fresh ideas and new clues to corporate need to think their reading time anything but well-employed.

CORPORATE POWER AND URBAN CRISIS IN DETROIT by Lynda Ann Ewen. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1978.

Reviewer: ALFRED McCLUNG LEE, Visiting Scholar at Drew University; Professor Emeritus at The City University of New York

Ewen started out to write "a 'power structure' analysis" of Detroit, what she now calls "a somewhat sterile exercise in demonstrating 'what is.'" Her experiences in gathering data as a participant observer led her from mere description to diagnosis, and from diagnosis to an analysis of alternative prescriptions for change. She says that it was especially "the political motion of the working class in Detroit that transformed this book." With them, she came "to understand the heat, filth, and danger of the presses and the forges. . . real hunger and the despair of violence against neighbor and violence against oneself."

The result is an outstanding example of clinical macrosociology — "lessons about the capacity of human beings and the necessity of certain alternatives that I would have never grasped in the isolation of academia."

Ewen's concern is for the working class. At the outset, therefore, she attacks "those 'realists' who argue that the benevolence or malevolence of the ruling class is not at issue, for, since the ruling class *has* the power and, they argue, since there will always be a ruling class, one must act realistically and accommodate oneself to the realities of life," a rather typical liberal position among social scientists. As she adds, "The resulting cynicism. . . legitimates the freedom of expression and pluralism of the social institutions." On the contrary, "the working class cynic," as she sees such a person, "*when given a viable alternative*, may actively move to challenge existing power and to struggle for a social redefinition because it is in his class interest to do so."