

Organisations as producers of consumers

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to show how organisations can be understood as producers of consumers and that the sphere of consumption should, therefore, become an integral part of the field of Organisation Studies. In order to achieve this objective, we have adopted a Marxist dialectical approach to the centrality of consumption in the value realisation process of capital, within a historical reconstitution of the production of the consumer, and we offer two empirical illustrations of contemporary transformations involving the spheres of consumption and work in the context of for-profit and non-profit organisations. We analyse how the restructuring of production that started in the 1980s altered organisational practices and forms: consumer management began to inform production; the boundaries between work and consumption became blurred, and the logic of value started permeating even non-profit organisations. In this new scenario, the sphere of consumption itself is modified and comes to be understood in terms of new categories, such as prosumption. We conclude by discussing how insights from our analysis will contribute to the field of Organisation Studies so as to build a bridge between work and consumption, and to take into consideration the complex web within which work management, consumer management and organisational forms overlap in the value realisation process.

Keywords

Consumption, organization studies, organizations-as-brands, prosumption, value, work, working consumers

Introduction

One objective is central to this article: to show that organisations can be understood as producers of consumers. Our argument is based on Marxist literature concerning the centrality of consumption in the value realisation process, and on a historical perspective displaying evidence of the way

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in which organisations became producers of consumers. Based on this argument, we aim to further argue that the consumption sphere must be integrated with the field of Organisation Studies (OS).

The first part of this article examines the theoretical background to the treatment of work and consumption in the OS field, thereby indicating how we intend to contribute to the field by building a bridge between work and consumption. We understand the consumer to be a historical category which emerged in the context of industrial capitalism as a form of self-subjectivisation, whose aim was the consumption of commodities, over and above the utilitarian value of things.

The second part of this article looks at the theoretical approach to the essential place of consumption in the value expansion process in the context of the way in which capitalist production was analysed by Marx (1976), especially in pivotal work 'Capital'. Although Marx analysed the production process—understood in its precise meaning within the factory—his main objective was to understand the logic of production and value realisation. It is through this logic that the sphere of consumption gains centrality. This approach is also adopted by contemporary authors (e.g., Gorz, 2003; Harvey, 2010a, 2010b; Jameson, 1991; Jappe, 2003; Žižek, 2006) who advance our understanding of the changes in capitalism, indicating how indispensable consumption is to realising value and, as a result, been the necessary link between work and consumption in current ways of organising capital.

We shall then show how, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, for-profit organisations have played a central role in the production of the consumer. A brief historical reconstitution in the third part of this article explains the nature of the for-profit organisations that initially produced the consumer so that the latter might sustain the new logic of surplus production and infinite accumulation. Up until the second half of the 20th century, this type of consumer had been shaped by the logic of 'production for selling', hence the investment in research and communication criteria oriented towards persuading the consumer based on a ready-made product. However, if from the perspective of value realisation, work and consumption must be thought of as mutually dependent in this first phase of capitalism, these two spheres operated totally independently of each other: one ended in the factory, the other started in the shop. It was this separation that led to a division between the academic fields of marketing and organisational studies: while organisational theory was to respond to questions involving the world inside the factory (production management and worker control), marketing theory was to provide understanding of how the external context functions (market and consumer).

But the transformations that arose from the information technology (IT) revolution and the restructuring of production, as well as the policies that were put into place during the 1980s, substantially altered the spheres of work and consumption and their associated practices and organisational forms. Among other consequences, consumption management began to inform production, the boundaries between work and consumption became blurred and the logic of value began to permeate even non-profit organisations. In the fourth part of this article, we shall examine how these transformations are being analysed in light of new categories like prosumption.

Then, in the fifth part, we present two empirical illustrations. The first example highlights the way in which the merger between work and consumption occurred, emphasising how work can be seen as consumption—noteworthy since little academic attention has been given to this point, whereas a great deal of attention has been paid to the transformation of the consumer into worker. The second empirical illustration shows how non-profit organisations have also operated according to the logic of the production of the consumer. After presenting each illustration, we contextualise it within the scenario of the organising that is carried out diffusively, with a clear absence of measures and forms. This enables us to demonstrate how our perspective on organisations as producers of consumers can contribute to contemporary analyses concerning transformations occurring in the field of work, as well as in associated organisational forms.

Finally, we retrace our steps to indicate that if we initially argued for integrating the sphere of consumption in the OS field, in the end we present this sphere as already modified by historical transformations, which poses new challenges for the field. Our point of arrival, therefore, is not identical to our point of departure. This is typical of the dialectical thinking in which this article is anchored. In his dialectical analysis of capitalism, Marx demonstrated that there is no synthesis but 'merely the internalization of the contradiction and its accommodation at a higher degree' (Harvey, 2010a: 68). Our analysis is situated within the context of this contemporary search for accommodation to the contradictions of capitalism and the role that organisations occupy in this process.

This article's main contribution is, therefore, theoretical in nature. We contribute to the OS field by building a bridge between work and consumption, encompassing the complex web in which work management, consumption management and organisational forms currently overlap in the value realisation process. Our starting point for this will be an analysis of organisations as producers of consumers. The role of this contribution and its future implications are discussed in the conclusions.

Consumption in the field of organisational studies

Some 20 years ago, Knights and Morgan (1993) proposed that the study of consumption should be incorporated into the organisational field, since issues relating to consumption were becoming increasingly prominent in the sphere of human and social sciences as consumption assumed a central role in social transformations in the final decades of the 20th century. The authors concluded, therefore, that since little attention had been paid to the consumption issue by the OS field, this could only indicate a case of 'institutionalized myopia' (Knights and Morgan, 1993: 212).

Knights and Morgan (1993) put forward a framework for analysing the relationship between consumption and organisations based on two different, albeit connected, approaches: (1) the necessary incorporation of an understanding of the interdependence of organisations and consumers within the context of organisational theory and (2) recent reflections arising from social theory regarding the central role played by consumption in contemporary social transformation. The authors suggest that building an analytical bridge between these two approaches is possible. To do so they looked to contemporary sociological analyses, especially the work of Alan Warde (1990, 1991), who proposed an advance in the Marxist discussion of exchange-value and use-value, when he added 'value-identity'. Investigating the role that organisations play in the process of appealing to or creating identities among consumers, the authors showed that it is possible to establish a fruitful dialogue between organisational theory and consumption-based social theory.

At almost the same time as the Knights and Morgan paper was published, Gabriel and Lang (1995) released a book proposing that consumption could not be studied separately from the world of production, since the way in which people consumed throughout the 20th century was the direct result of the 'Fordist Deal', an agreement proposed by Henry Ford that recognised the potential of his workers as consumers. The purpose of such an agreement was to offer consumption opportunities to those workers who produced the goods. The deal was based on the general principle that mass consumption could lie within the reach of all, leading to a new way of life. Despite the various forms this deal assumed in different industries and countries, it was the means by which consumption started to be the counterpart to unskilled and alienated work.

In a paper that appeared 13 years after the publication of the above-mentioned book, Gabriel and Lang (2008) returned to the debate about the 'Fordist Deal' in order to announce its end due to changes that had occurred in both work and consumption. Within the context of production, there was huge restructuring both in the market and in work relationships involving, on the one hand, production outsourcing by major industries to undeveloped parts of the world, and, on the other,

job flexibility, to the point of making 'impermanence in work the new benchmark' (Gabriel and Lang, 2008: 325). It is clear that the development of new technologies was fundamental to this occurrence, but they merely rendered possible this restructuring process. The primary reason was political and economic: to regain control of the workforce, which in the 1960s represented 'one of the main obstacles to the continuous accumulation of capital and the consolidation of power by the capitalist class' (Harvey, 2010b: 20).

In the sphere of consumption, Gabriel and Lang (2008) also cited evidence of a certain depletion of the 'Fordist Deal': demographic transformation resulting in either younger or older consumers, an extension of the consumption logic to areas like health and education, environmental limits that challenged the promise of unlimited consumption. Even with all these transformations, which led to the end of the 'Fordist Deal', the authors insist that 'understanding consumption still requires that we understand production, and understanding production requires that we understand consumption' (Gabriel and Lang, 2008: 326). In order to validate this proposition, they go back to Marx who was already saying a century and a half ago that it was impossible to understand either of these spheres without considering the other. In this line of reasoning, they explain how every form of production involves the consumption of resources and how every form of consumption involves production. Finally, they mention the work of Paul Du Gay (1996), another author who must be considered a pioneer in thinking about the integration of work and consumption in the field of organisational studies. They conclude that 'part of what ties consumption and production together is the new politics of meaning and identity' (Gabriel and Lang, 2008: 327).

Since these pioneering studies, the theme of consumption has become more apparent in the main journals in the OS field. Published texts seek to debate or propose new theoretical models, based on a post-modern sociology of consumption (Hassard and Kelemen, 2002); to question the new forms of ensnaring the consumer by means of images and 'cathedrals of consumption' (Gabriel, 2005); to investigate the role of organisations in the construction of consumer responsibility (Caruana and Crane, 2008); to understand how, in capitalist societies, subjectivities are moulded from consumption-related fetishisation processes (Böhm and Batta, 2010); to expand our understanding of value creation through 'brand management' in contemporary capitalism (Willmott, 2010); and to discuss consumption as a 'political act' (Bradshaw et al., 2013).

Such studies are relevant and elucidatory with regard to the central role that consumption plays in the contemporary economic and social world. They do not indicate, however, how such an analysis should be integrated with the sphere of work. It was in this sense that we sought to explore these pioneering studies in greater depth in order to move ahead to a proposal for building a bridge between work and consumption. Therefore, in this article, we explore why, within a capitalist manner of production, consumption becomes so central to value realisation and encourages organisations to operate as producers of consumers.

The place of consumption in the value production process in capitalism

Contemporary authors in critical social theory (e.g., Gorz, 2003; Harvey, 2010a, 2010b; Jameson, 1991; Jappe, 2003; Žižek, 2006) have returned to Marx to show that his analyses offer glimpses of the crucial importance of consumption for realising value, which, in turn, constitutes the essence of capitalism. Understanding how value is created within the context of a capitalist society and, thus, how capitalism functions was the central focus of Marx's (1976) analysis in his seminal work, *Capital*, particularly in Volume I, which is devoted to the production process. We intend to draw on certain aspects of his analysis of how value is created in capitalism, in order to

examine the way in which consumption and work seem to be intertwined as elements of the same logic: the logic of value creation.

Marx says that in a capitalist society, the production of a commodity exists with a very specific goal: to create value, something which does not have an empirical existence but which is nonetheless objective: 'value is a social relationship and we cannot directly see, touch or feel social relationships; but they have an objective presence' (Harvey, 2010a: 41).

To arrive at this abstract idea of value and its concrete consequences, Marx begins by analysing a commodity, taking it as the elementary form of the pattern of capitalist production. In talking of a commodity, the author makes it clear that he is referring to something more than an item of value, an object, a product or a service. Some things are consumed that are not commodities but things that are made for one's own use. However, according to the logic of value realisation, once these things are purchased they begin to take on the shape of a commodity.

What defines a commodity is that it is a contradictory unit, having both a use-value and an exchange-value. The utility of a thing makes of it a use-value and 'the exchange-value appears initially as the quantitative relationship, the proportion in which use-values of one type are exchanged for use-values of another type, a relationship that alters constantly in time and space' (Marx, 1976: 114). Also according to Marx, the material content of wealth, regardless of any social form, is formed by use-values. But in capitalist societies, use-values also constitute the 'material supports of the exchange-value' (Marx, 1976: 114). In other words, in order for there to be exchange, it is necessary that the use-value be recovered in the circulation process, given that 'the use-value only becomes effective in use or consumption' (Marx, 1976: 114). Therefore, 'value means nothing if it does not return to connect with use-value. Use-value is socially necessary for value' (Harvey, 2010a: 32). This indicates the pivotal role of consumption in this process, which we will return to later.

Thus, it was through analysis of the nature of commodity that Marx came to understand the process of value creation in capitalism. When he grasped that the materiality of commodities was not capable of indicating anything about what makes them commensurable, he concluded that if use-value were abstracted from the body of the commodities, they would be left with 'a single property: that of being the product of labour' (Marx, 1976: 116). Given this conclusion, Marx returns to the production process. Based on this analysis, he perceived that there was also a contradictory unity between real labour—that which produces use-values—and abstract labour, a value-creator, which is characteristic of the capitalist production system. So, commodities can finally be understood as 'the unity of use-value and value, and the real work and abstract labour that created them' (Jappe, 2003: 27).

The work that goes into constituting value—abstract work—is, therefore, accumulated human work, which presents itself as 'the total labour-power of society' (Marx, 1976: 117). Seeking to make Marx's theory of value clearer, geographer David Harvey (2010a) explains,

talking of the total labour-power of society is tacitly invoking a global commodity that was introduced by the capitalist way of production. It is in this dynamic global terrain of exchange relationships that value is determined. (p. 29)

There is, therefore, an intrinsic relationship between work productivity and the time factor. We shall see that consumption is the factor that is strengthening this relationship today.

The question of how commodities contain a certain amount of abstract labour that creates value wound up being the part of 'Capital' most discussed by Marxist academics throughout the 20th century, including those in the OS field (Adler, 2009). The emphasis on surplus value as the basis of the capital accumulation process eventually steered the debate towards theory of conflict between capital

and labour on the factory floor, and to related themes like exploitation of labour and the centrality of class struggle. It was due to this focus on the factory floor that hasty conclusions were drawn as to the supposed ineffectiveness of Marxist thinking for understanding contemporary capitalism.

The philosopher Anselm Jappe (2003) presents a decisive argument in favour of the topicality of the theoretical approach as explained above. The author says that the frequent way in which the abstract labour of Marx has been questioned, in juxtaposition to the growth of immaterial work, demonstrates a total lack of understanding of what abstract labour actually is, since ‘abstract labour has nothing to do with apportioning work, with its fragmentation into units devoid of meaning, or with its respective dematerialization ... Neither is abstract labour fragmented work on a production line or IT work’ (Jappe, 2003: 42). This question is fundamentally important for us when it comes to understanding the different ways of realising value arising from the overlap between work and consumption in new forms of management.

Abstract labour, therefore, is the basis of value formation as ‘expending human labour power, without consideration for the way it is spent’ (Marx, 1976: 116), in the form of a joint force of society. The expression ‘production relation’ must be understood, thus, as ‘the transformation of labour into value as a fundamental relation in capitalism’ (Jappe, 2003: 95). In this way, even if the forms of work and consumption have changed enormously since the time analysed by Marx, the nature of capitalist production—a specific form of value creation from abstract value—still persists in the new forms that capitalism has currently taken.

If value is created from abstract labour, it is effectively realised only in circulation through consumption of commodities, or by purchasing of a service. It is at this point that we must return to the question of consumption, since Marx (1976) says that to produce a commodity it is necessary to produce

not only use-value, but use-value for others, social use-value. To become a commodity, the product, by way of exchange, needs to be transferred to others, for whom it is going to serve as use-value. Nothing can be of value without being an object of use. If it is useless, the labour contained in it also is; it does not count as labour and, because of this, creates no value. (p. 119)

Slavoj Žižek (2006), one of the major contemporary authors in critical social theory to reinterpret Marx from the standpoint of capitalism historical transformation, turns to the notion of parallax to show ‘the insuperable persistence of the parallax gap in the mortal leap the product has to take to become a commodity’ (Žižek, 2006: 75). Parallax is

the apparent dislocation of an object (a change in its position relative to the background) caused by a change in the observation point that allows for a new line of vision. (Žižek, 2006: 32)

Applying this concept to the analysis of value, Žižek observes that despite being created in production, value is realised in circulation, at the moment the commodity becomes use-value for someone and, thus, can be sold. There is, therefore, a temporal gap between value production and its realisation, that is, in production

there is no value in the strict sense of the word—here the temporality is that of the *futur antérieur*: value is not immediate; it ‘would have been’. It is retroactively materialized and staged performance-like. Value is generated ‘in itself’ in production and only with the end of the circulation process does it return ‘to itself’. (Žižek, 2006: 78)

The crucial importance of consumption is apparent in this analysis. It was post-Marx Marxism, says Žižek (2006), that ‘lost this parallax viewpoint and regressed to the unilateral elevation of production as a real place against the illusory sphere of exchange and consumption’ (p. 75).

The question of the mortal leap of the commodity, or overcoming the temporal gap between the moment of value creation in production and its realisation in consumption, is the fundamental challenge faced by the process of capitalist expansion, since value 'is only conserved by force of growth' (Jappe, 2003: 60). This requires that commodities circulate and be consumed quickly. And this need explains why capitalist organisations seek to eliminate the risks of the temporal gap by using sophisticated research methods (see Zwick and Knott, 2009), with the aim of collecting information that can be processed and resignified in the shape of commodities that must be placed in circulation rapidly and consumed immediately.

In brief, consumption was presented as a central factor even in the original Marxist analysis, although Marx did not place due emphasis on this question but, instead, emphasised the production side at a historic moment when social and economic life was being structured by the manufacturing world. It is not coincidental that contemporary authors (e.g., Baudrillard, 1970; Bauman, 2007; Gorz, 2003; Jameson, 1991; Žižek, 2006) developed interested in consumption only as it became clearer that society was structured as a consumption society. This change in emphasis occurred with the speed inherent in the expanding consumerism—including sectors hitherto considered outside the commodity circuit—as a way of overcoming the temporal gap in value realisation (Harvey, 2010a, 2010b; Jameson, 1991). This will be dealt with later. First, however, we need to examine the first stage in post-industrial revolution consumption in order to support the idea argued here that organisations should be thought of as producers of consumers in the value realisation process of capitalism.

Producing the consumer: the place of marketing and the (non) place of OS in the first phase of consumer capitalism

According to cultural critic Raymond Williams (1985), in modern English the nouns *consumption* and *consumer* are predominantly used for describing all types of goods and services. To understand this predominance, it is useful to look at the history of the word. *Consume* has been part of the English language since the 14th century and was always used in the negative sense related to the idea of destruction. Although the term *consumer* makes a neutral appearance in descriptions of bourgeois political economy beginning in the mid-18th century, the negative connotation of the term *consume* persisted until at least the end of the 19th century. It was only in the mid-20th century that the word acquired the general and popular sense usage it enjoys today. This modern usage arose in North America and spread quickly. Williams (1985) attributes the rapid and positive development of the word to the advent of a new stage in the search for planning and control of markets which is inherent in capitalist industrial production and is based on the creation of needs and specific ways of satisfying them.

The birth of marketing—'a word of English origin that designates the tendency of commercial practices to be rationalized as a function of the market' (Lagneau, 1977: 18)—well represents what Williams (1985) calls this new moment in the search to plan and control markets, which was also the moment when the consumer was created. But since this new stage was only consolidated in the mid-20th century, we need to go back several decades to understand how the consumer production process developed following the birth of marketing as a specific discipline.

Agreement is not unanimous regarding the historic root of marketing. The French sociologist Gerard Lagneau (1977) believes that prior to marketing as an academic discipline, there was advertising as a sphere of action in itself, with the United States pioneering this practice, 'with its daily newspapers filled with advertisements after 1832 and with agencies ... as from 1840' (Lagneau, 1977: 14). Starting from this finding, Lagneau says that marketing was born out of advertising, when the latter tried to base itself on scientific studies taken from psychology in the quest to better understand buying behaviour so as to prepare more persuasive commercial advertisements. In fact,

the beginning of the 20th century was marked by pioneering studies analysing the relationship between business, advertising and psychology, as demonstrated by the studies of Brisco (1916), Cherington (1913), Hollingworth (1913) and Tipper (1919).

According to the economist Roger Mason (1998), one of the first marketing theoreticians, it was the need to understand—and control—the psychological mechanisms underlying purchasing that led marketing to be separated from economics and become an independent academic field in the first decade of the 20th century. Within this context, it is also clear how this occurred: marketing initially relied on knowledge coming from psychoanalysis to a point where another theoretician in the field (Alderson, 1957) designated Sigmund Freud as an author whose work was fundamental to the formulation of an appropriate marketing theory. Other studies also indicate the influence that behaviourism exercised in formulating an appropriate marketing theory (Buckley, 1989).

Whatever historical origin is attributed to marketing, what is clear is that its rise resulted from a specific aim: to construct the consumer of commodities. In the words of one of the practical pioneers of this discipline (Shaw, 1912, *citing* Dawson, 2005),

only in recent years, when the development of production (that is potentially greater than the available market) has been changing emphasis to distribution, has the businessman become a pioneer on the frontier of human desires. Today, the progressive businessman is looking for the unconscious needs of the consumer; he is producing goods to gratify them; he is drawing the attention of the consumer to the existence of such products and to meet this demand, when it becomes real, he is taking the goods to the consumer. (p. 64)

In emphasising the action of these new practices in inciting consumption, historians in the area (e.g., Allen, 1997; Strasser, 1989) underline the idea that business leaders are becoming increasingly focused on demand and looking to the market as a malleable space that can be manipulated in the interests of organisations. The historian Frederick Lewis Allen (1997) points out how the new interest in marketing came from a growing awareness on the part of the business community that consumers needed to be persuaded to buy, and to buy prodigiously, so that products like cars, cigarettes, lipstick and electric refrigerators would not be left on the shelves on their sales outlets (Allen, 1997).

Structuring itself on a field derived from administration, marketing underwent assimilation, as the place that would generate practices and thinking about purchasing behaviour (Morgan, 1992). Thus, it was the responsibility of marketing to look at action taking place outside the factory, to look intently at the external world, especially at the consumer market. Continuing the thread of this article, it was marketing's responsibility to implement the role of business organisations as producers of consumers, since, from the perspective of organisational theory, the consumer was a player totally outside the world of production, which had room for only two players: the worker and the manager (Gabriel et al., 2014). This scenario remained unchanged until at least the 1980s, although emphasis on shaping the consumer market became more pronounced in the post-World War II period, with its increase in consumption and the sophistication of its forms of research and commercial advertising (especially with the rise of television in the 1950s and its mass use from the 1960s onwards). However, these actions for encouraging consumption did not substantially alter the way in which value was realised, based on types of work and consumption that had been shaped as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. At the end of the day, capitalism still functioned on the basis of a production-for-sale logic, hence the investment in places of work and consumption as distinct spaces. In other words, marketing was still responsible for thinking about the consumer as a player outside the factory, while the OS field was responsible for thinking about the world inside the factory and about worker management.

So the fact that business organisations could already be considered producers of consumers in this historic period had nothing to do with OS. Within the context of organisational theory, the view that organisations were ‘structure-takers, not structure-makers’ (Knights and Morgan, 1993: 213) still predominated. It was only in the 1980s that a convergence of economic, technological, social and cultural conditions started to favour a radical transformation in the link between work and consumption, requiring the OS field to adjust its perspective accordingly.

Commodity expansion and the rise of prosumption: new links between work and consumption in the reorganisation of capital and organisations

Starting in the 1980s, work seemed to disappear in the midst of a vigorous consumer capitalism that was increasingly supported by immaterial commodities—services, images, experiences—and by the financialisation of the economy, which was also based on a process of consumer indebtedness encompassing everything from consumption to credit for expensive commodities, like one’s own home, or even the most banal of products.

However, when analysed in terms of the logic of capitalist value expansion, what this scenario revealed is a new way of understanding the need to fill the temporal gap between value creation at work and its realisation in consumption. The new dynamics of capital, resulting from the macroeconomic restructuring that occurred beginning in the late 1970s, produced a more competitive capitalism at the international level—one in more of a hurry with regard to guaranteeing the uninterrupted flow of value realisation (Harvey, 2010b). So the logic of the first phase of consumer capitalism, that the commodities that were produced should be quickly consumed, gave way to the search for a guarantee of value realisation even before their production, and the search to transform the whole of the work time into abstract work. This was defined by a Brazilian sociologist as the ‘plenitude of abstract work’ (De Oliveira, 2003: 135), in the sense of indicating the extension of unpaid work to the sphere of consumption.

Bearing in mind the challenge of value realisation, the most visible result of this reorganisation of capitalism was the acceleration of consumption, thereby guaranteeing the sale even before production. This was accompanied by the expansion of the sphere of commodity to include an ample service sector, one which even involved public and non-profit organisations.

The technological innovations stemming from the information technology revolution enabled labour markets to be decentralised, meaning that manual or less skilled work could go to regions where labour was cheap, or be outsourced to smaller companies. This process was analysed through the logic of ‘organisation through dispersion’ (Harvey, 1989), ‘diffuse factory’ (Bihl, 1991), ‘vassal firms’ (Gorz, 2003) and others, in terms of a guiding issue: understanding this new form of organisation as being based on an immense but rigidly controlled fragmentation of work. According to Gorz (2003: 39), this reorganisation of work goes beyond the processes of lean production or reengineering. ‘It is a question now of imposing a new division of work, not only between work providers, but also between companies and capitals’. Gorz (2003) is referring to the ‘new conception of what lends value to products, that is, what makes them sellable at the maximum profit’ (p. 38), since with the decentralisation of work, major capitalist organisations started to focus their management on brands and to increasingly invest in constructing a consumer of images, based on a recrudescence of the incitement to consume (Gorz, 2003; Klein, 2002). Brand management started imposing the shape and pace of work in the factory to guarantee just-in-time production. But this centrality of the immaterial is tied to the material conditions that support it, which requires a new form of management that links the potential of branding to the organisational capacity of

labour (Marazzi, 2011), that is, organising as the ‘management of a continuous flow of information’ (Gorz, 2003: 17).

Expansion of the service area was another path to accelerating consumption and realising value. Here, says Harvey (2010b), the logic of value realisation changes, because the work process is the commodity. In this case, value realisation becomes effective in the act itself, in the very process of realising the service, which removes the risk of the temporal gap. But this requires a long-term investment in the training of service workers, which equally demands a change in the way of managing them (Korczynski et al., 2000; Korczynski and Macdonald, 2009; Sieben and Wettergren, 2010). In this context, organisational discourse and practices with regard to ‘human capital’ (Becker, 1962) take on their own meaning, since they bring to the agenda the fact of making service workers accountable for themselves (e.g., Chertkovskaya, 2013; Lopdrup-Hjorth et al., 2011; López-Ruiz, 2007).

The facets of these new forms of capitalism are different, albeit complementary. They start from an emphasis on consumption, but alter the sphere of work as well; in fact, they overlap in such a way that they blur the previously well-defined boundaries between production and consumption that prevailed in the Fordist-industrial period.

Contemporary researchers have been discussing these new relationships between work and consumption using concepts of ‘prosumer’/‘prosumption’ (Büscher and Igoe, 2013; Cluley, 2013; Comor, 2011, 2010; Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2012; Ritzer, 2013; Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson, 2012; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), ‘co-creation’, ‘co-production’ or ‘working customer’ (Cova and Dallı, 2009; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Rieder and Voß, 2010; Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody, 2008). Central to this debate is the question of how the consumer has become increasingly engaged in the value production process. That is why some authors (like Büscher and Igoe, 2013; Comor, 2011; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Rieder and Voß, 2010; Zwick et al., 2008) have critically discussed the phenomenon by alluding to questions of control, alienation and exploitation, when the consumer assumes the functions of worker. At this point, they focus on the Internet, especially Web 2.0, arguing that many of its sites incorporate part of the unpaid work of these ‘new consumers’.

From a perspective very much in line with ours, Büscher and Igoe (2013) argue that the roots of the prosumer have their origin in the period of the Industrial Revolution, when the commodity valuing process already demanded the existence of a consumer who could attribute a value to it that went beyond its utility. According to these authors, what has been occurring is an intensification of the production of commodity-sign values that rely on co-production by the consumer, making prosumption ‘a particular and intensified dynamic of value-producing labour in late capitalism’ (Büscher and Igoe, 2013: 301). The term ‘prosumer’, therefore, can be considered as illustrative of this new form of consumer that organisations are producing. Such an affirmation enables us to pursue our objective of showing how organisations can be understood as producers of consumers. But this entails clarification of two points: how work can be consumption, and how non-profit organisations have participated in prosumption.

Advancing the debate into the OS field: two empirical illustrations

We have chosen two empirical illustrations that can help us understand organisations as producers of consumers. These illustrations are particularly interesting because they come from places considered to be on the margins of capitalism. They also occur in non-virtual companies, although the use of new technology has certainly altered the way in which work, consumption and work-value realisation are managed. In addition, based on our analysis of these empirical illustrations, we indicate how our argument about organisations as producers of consumers can combine with and

contribute to some of the analyses already being developed in the OS field regarding transformations in the sphere of work and in organisational forms.

First empirical illustration: work as consumption

Abílio (2011) carried out research for his PhD in Sociology in Natura, a Brazilian cosmetics and personal hygiene enterprise. The research dealt with work as consumption, encompassing two perspectives: work that realises value and the worker as consumer.

Natura's business model was structured as a direct sales system, in which there is no employment tie between the saleswomen and the enterprise. What is being outsourced here is the sale, not the production, but under the same logic of making the workforce flexible in the search for value realisation. The resale system is nothing new in capitalism, but it can be reinvented by way of new technologies, enabling work to realise value in the production space. Natura reflects the logic of 'selling before producing', since sales orders sent to the factory are what enable a just-in-time production and packaging system in product delivery. Abílio shows how making the work of the saleswomen informal parallels the digital enterprise.

The author also shows how the boundary between work time and non-work time becomes confused in the sphere of consumption, as the saleswomen end up becoming worker-consumers 'who rarely manage to discern how much they earn for their work and how much they invest in product consumption' (Abílio, 2011: 21). This is because the saleswomen are also consumers of Natura products, whether purely for the pleasure of using the products (many say they became saleswomen to be able to consume), or to meet their monthly required sales quota by buying unsold stock. In this last aspect, Natura is the perfect example of what De Oliveira (2003) indicates as the current trend of capital: 'the payment of workers will not be a capital advance, but will depend on the results of the sale of products-goods' (p. 136).

For Abílio, the Natura brand is what 'makes the work of the saleswomen recognizable'. In its brand management plan, Natura invests in the person of the responsible consumer, whether from the environmental perspective or with regard to the care they should take with their own body. This construction hovers over the saleswomen and even absorbs them as consumers. Not only are they responsible for making the consumption experience of Natura products work, they are an important link between the consumer and the brand. The enterprise reinforces the role these saleswomen play in disseminating the brand's values from the basis of their dispersed and formless work. Abílio's research shows how it is by consuming Natura products that these one million saleswomen become central agents in publicising the brand and selling its products.

Abílio's focus on transformations in the work sphere is what makes this research a significant illustration for the purposes of this article, since it highlights how work is being increasingly produced as consumption, a perspective that has as yet been little explored in analyses of prosumption.

Studies on transformations in work (e.g., Fineman and Sturdy, 1999; Korczynski et al., 2000; Korczynski and Macdonald, 2009; Nixon, 2009; Sieben and Wettergren, 2010; Warhurst et al., 2000; Wharton, 2009) have intensified the debate over the type of professional required for occupations that involve a direct relationship with the consumer, since the worker becomes fundamental in the process of constructing the consumption experience. These analyses emphasise the challenges related to controlling 'emotional' work and to the acquisition of very specific technical and social competences.

The argument over organisations as producers of consumers enables this debate to be broadened. To emphasise work as consumption requires us to think also from the perspective of the worker who must invest in himself or herself within a context in which consumption is seen as

an investment in work. As we indicate in the fourth part of this article, organisational discourse and practices involving the notion of ‘human capital’ (e.g., Chertkovskaya, 2013; Lopdrup-Hjorth et al., 2011; López-Ruiz, 2007) illustrate this perspective very well as the worker is increasingly led to think of consumption as an investment in his or her work. As suggested by Chertkovskaya (2013), ‘this is a new ideology of work that is brought by the “hegemonic project” of consumption’ (p. 89).

Second empirical illustration: prosuming in non-profit organisations

Seeking to understand ‘the prosumption phenomenon’, Büscher and Igoe (2013) undertook ethnographic research with two non-profit nature conservation organisations that operate in South Africa and Tanzania; the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) and the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF). The authors show how these non-profit organisations ‘behave like for-profit businesses with elaborate marketing and branding campaigns’ (Büscher and Igoe, 2013: 287) in order to produce a specific kind of consumer/prosumer who is necessary for nature conservation: the environmentally responsible prosumer.

By analysing the websites of these conservation organisations, the authors show how they have produced a consumer who will be able to co-construct the nature that he or she wishes to conserve. As an example of this, they cite a fund-raising campaign to support conservation of the ‘Oltupai’ elephants, in which prosumers are asked not only to contribute funds, but to create their own personal websites with the AWF and share the content with family members and friends. The site suggests that this enables prosumers to make a difference in the project of saving African animals.

Büscher and Igoe (2013) also show how prosumption conservation occurs not only on websites. Another form of financial support for the projects of these organisations is an alliance with powerful capitalist corporations, like Starbucks and McDonald’s. In this perspective, prosumption places these non-profit organisations directly in the value production chain, given the complex forms of intersection that link them to the marketing strategies of major corporations which are, themselves, increasingly investing in producing ethical, conscientious and responsible consumers. The authors give an example of this by way of an analysis of the ‘Nike Human Race Project’, which grew out of a partnership between the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Nike and involved, among other things, the purchase of a special pair of Nike running shoes, with which the prosumer was going to take part in this support movement for a more sustainable world.

Discussing the process by which prosumers are invited to co-construct not only the image or experience of the brand, but also images of themselves as responsible consumers, Büscher and Igoe (2013) remind us how prosumption can be taken as a symptom of an intensification of the logic of value that is expanding beyond the realm of for-profit organisations. So although they focused on a specific type of non-profit organisation, this empirical illustration can be taken more broadly considering how the contemporary logic of value accumulation has been extended to other types of public and non-profit organisations.

The debate over the blurred boundaries between for-profit and non-profit organisations has already entered the OS field. In an extensive analysis of hybrid organisations, Battilana and Lee (2014: 398) argue that they epitomise a phenomenon extending over the last three decades: the blurring of the previously well-defined boundaries between private, public and non-profit organisations. In this period, while

corporations have faced increased public pressure to help address far-reaching societal problems, leading to the adoption of behaviours meant to fulfil their perceived social responsibility, non-profit

organisations, under pressure to increase their overall efficiency and accountability and to find new sources of funding, have adopted tools such as planning and quantitative programme evaluations and have engaged in commercial activities to complement revenues from donations and subsidies. (Battilana and Lee, 2014: 428)

This phenomenon has led to a wide variety of overlapping among organisational forms. Based on an extensive review of the literature, Battilana and Lee (2014) show how these hybrid forms have been combining the actions of business organisations with those of government, charitable organisations and academic research organisations, among others. The authors also demonstrate the feasibility of hybridisations within a single organisation, involving a combination of multiple organisational identities or multiple institutional logics.

Battilana and Lee (2014) do not focus on the role these hybrid organisations might have as producers of consumers; they are more interested in discussing how this combination of forms contributes to retrieving the social function of capitalism (see p. 428). But we believe that our analysis of organisations as producers of consumers will contribute to the academic debate related to hybrid organisations by indicating critical reflections that raise doubts about these hybridisation processes and that even question whether value realisation is the challenge that lies behind the new forms of hybrid organisation.

So while Battilana and Lee (2014) point to positive aspects of blurred boundaries in terms of integrating a more social view of capitalism, the analyses of Büscher and Igoe (2013) show the negative aspects that arise when conservation organisations are structured around prosumption. Based on their own research and on extensive literature on the ambiguities and limits of these hybrid projects, they show how 'contradictory and inconvenient local realities rarely enter the spaces where conservation is presented for prosumption' (Büscher and Igoe, 2013: 300).

In conclusion: challenges for the OS field

When we began to write this article, we had in mind that organisations could be understood as producers of consumers and that, therefore, the sphere of consumption should be integrated into the OS field. Our assertion was based on the centrality of consumption in the process of realisation of value for capital.

Reiterating the dialectical perspective of this article, whose point of arrival is not identical with the point of departure, we shall retrace our steps to indicate how the consumption sphere has been modified by the historical transformations, leading to a contemporary non-distinction between the spheres of work and consumption. We conclude by maintaining that the sphere of consumption can only be integrated within the OS field if it is thought of in terms of the current scenario of blurred boundaries between work and consumption.

We argue that our main contribution lies in advancing the debate over contemporary overlaps between the spheres of work and consumption based on the proposition that organisations can be understood as the producers of consumers. Thus, we would like to indicate some of the future implications of our analysis for the academic field of OS.

Within the context of the overlaps between work and consumption, this article has presented both theoretical and empirical perspectives for reflecting on new formats of consumption that produce value and which work realises value. The literature on prosumer/prosumption led us to understand how this literature is predominantly focused on the analysis of consumption as work. Therefore, we seek to grasp how work can be seen as consumption as the other side of this equation, which is based on the pursuit of the realisation of value. Based on an empirical illustration, our analysis of work as consumption shows how, from this perspective, consumption can be

considered investment in work. This certainly has an impact on the conceptualisation of work and opens up new prospects for the OS field, as was pointed in this article, when we discussed organisational discourses and practices involving the notion of human capital. The theory of human capital, however, leads to the perspective that ‘there is no longer work or workers: everything is capital and we are all capitalists’ (López-Ruiz, 2007: 221). The theoretical approach on which this article is based does not corroborate this perspective. We certainly have not all become capitalists. But we can say that the logic of value has been expanded in such a way that we now produce value for capital, even in spheres that seemed to be the exact opposite of the surplus value production sphere, like that of consumption. Following the trail blazed by De Oliveira (2003), these non-distinctions point to new forms that are phantasmagorias, ‘a non-place, and a non-time, which is equal to total time. This time is the time of the plenitude of abstract work’ (p. 137).

Thinking about organisations as producers of consumers is, therefore, like a conceptual proposition capable of building the tension in the relationship between work and consumption on a Marxist theoretical basis that assumes the logic of value as a determinant. From this perspective, the categories ‘work’ and ‘consumption’ can be understood as a contradictory unit. Drawing a parallel with Marx’s notion of commodity-form—which is not capable of being divided to distinguish use-value, exchange-value and value, since these only operate in relationship—a similar formulation is possible with regard to the overlap that now occurs between consumption and work. On the other hand, proposing this form of thinking about consumption and work based on the Marxist perspective builds tension in this very theory, since how can we understand work that consumes or that exists to consume, reversing the Marxist logic that the labour space is the place for value production? On the other hand, to what extent is consumption today not involved in value creation? Was this function clear to the world of production before? We believe that such questions open up new perspectives for the OS field.

The proposition of organisations as producers of consumers also indicates that in this new stage of capitalist development, when organisations have to produce consumers—and produce themselves too, according to this same logic—a new organisational framework is configured, one with a clear absence of forms and measures because of the overlap between work and consumption. At the same time, a new division of work occurs between organisations and capital, leading even non-profit organisations to act according to the criteria of the logic of value production. In the debate about blurred boundaries between for-profit and non-profit organisations, our analysis points to the way these hybridisation processes are lying behind the challenge of value realisation for capital and the centrality of consumption in this process. And, in the end, we can also affirm that even non-profit organisations are involved in the complex network of production of consumers in the sense of indicating how the logic of the functioning of contemporary capitalism extends to these organisations. Here, what Chertkovskaya (2013) called ‘hegemonic project of consumption’ is revealed as the spearhead of the hegemonic value project. This also points to a necessary reflection by the OS field regarding its place in this new logic of organisations as producers of consumers and the academic researchers who study them. After all, as one of the reviewers of this essay pertinently inquired: to what extent is the OS field not ‘complicit with its own prosumption’?

We hope, therefore, that in proposing that organisations be thought of as producers of consumers, we have contributed to this special issue, which is directed to building a bridge between work and consumption. Such a proposition assumes that consumption should be included in the OS field in a relational way with work, indicating that both categories can only be thought of in a mutual and dependent relationship and taking into consideration the complex web within which work management, consumer management and organisational forms overlap in the value realisation process.

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