

alongside private sponsors and investors to meet the timetable for the European Union offer on service liberalization tabled at the World Trade Organization—not mentioned by any of the contributors. Also omitted is the persistence of 1.63 million officially unemployed (at the last count) who underpinned New Labour's 'economic miracle', combining high productivity growth with low wage inflation through continuous downsizing and relentless *learning unto death*.

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### **Pedagogy and the university**

Monica Mclean, 2006

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It is good to see that critical theory is alive and well as a useful lens through which university practices—particularly the behaviours of teachers and learners—can be viewed. In an era when postmodern discourses are often thought to have displaced the hopelessly modernist project of critical theory, a book that places itself unabashedly in the critical tradition is welcome indeed. The focus of that tradition - to use reason to replace the exchange dynamic of capitalism with a system that allows people to exercise creativity in their work—is needed more than ever as global capitalism reconfigures itself to wreck lives across the world. In *Pedagogy and the university* Monica McLean aims to address the question 'How can university teachers practise pedagogy which is attentive to how their students might as citizens of the future influence politics, culture and society in the direction of justice and reason' (p. 1). A big question indeed and one that (as McLean's use of the terms 'attentive to' students and 'might' being able to influence them indicates) carries no guarantee of success. In her application of critical theory to university activities McLean relies almost exclusively on the work of Jurgen Habermas.

In the choice of one critical theorist as the source of the book's chief arguments lies both a strength and potential weakness. The strength is the consistency allowed by relying on only one theorist. Given the corpus of thinkers who could be encompassed by the term critical theory it will be a relief to some readers to know that they are not going to have to negotiate in and around the tributaries, whirlpools and eddies branching from its main stream. Hence, the book's reference section contains no Marcuse, Adorno, Fromm, Benjamin, Althusser or even Marx. However, connections McLean makes between Habermas and contemporary thinkers are woven throughout the text, with Freire, Giroux, Apple, Bernstein and Barnett well represented in the final bibliography. Given

Habermas' wide-ranging intellectual explorations, even a focus on him alone could be problematic but Mclean wisely concentrates on the relevance of some core ideas for reconfiguring university education. These are helping people to deal with the threat to their lifeworlds and helping them learn the use of communicative reason.

It would have been helpful to have included a brief discussion of the major critiques of Habermas (for instance his difference with Foucault or his low opinion of Marcusean theory) and to have acknowledged that not all who ally themselves with critical theory view him as one of their own. In the US, for example, Cornel West has been consistently critical of Habermas' 'soft' radicalism that, in West's view, allows white intellectuals to wear a superficial badge of leftist leanings while covertly subscribing to centrist ideals of liberalism. So the book should be read more as an explication of Habermas for university teachers, and less as a critical assessment of his relevance, since this is already implied.

Early on in the text (p. 4) McLean predisposed me to be favourable to her analysis by her allusion to C. Wright Mills' classic statement of the meaning of the sociological imagination—an imagination that explores the connections between social forces and structures and individual agency. The early chapters are strong on the relevance of Habermas' analysis for exploring this intersection. Recent developments such as the audit culture and quality regimes (pp. 46–48) are illuminated well by Habermas' thought. Critical theory's stress on the way reason has been so thoroughly instrumentalized that only thought addressed to making the current system work better is deemed to be valid is well elaborated. But it is not till 60 pages into the text, in the chapter on 'Pedagogic justice' that Mclean really gets going. Here she builds on the notion of 'really useful knowledge' (long known to adult educators) articulated by nineteenth century working class movements. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain the heart of her argument that true critical thinking and critical reflection focus on helping students challenge dominant ideology and rethink how political economy might be reorganized. These are well and convincingly written and construct a valid alternative discourse to the dominant framing of these ideas. Critical thinking is mostly conceived as a technical process grounded in analytic philosophy and used to make more effective decisions. Mclean proposes critical thinking as a moral and cognitive process grounded in critical theory and concerned to reconnect the idea of effectiveness to moral considerations and questions of value.

For me, however, Mclean does not go far enough in the two final chapters in terms of connecting her analysis to Socialism. There is stress on the importance of collective action, on directing students to examine questions of morality and justice, on the importance of thinking critically, and on universities as mainstays of democracy. But the summary of curricular objectives and pedagogic approaches on page 161 has (as one would expect given Mclean's debt to Habermas) strong Habermasian overtones on helping students learn to argue about values with each other in ways that will help them solve social problems. Communicative democracy is stressed over economic democracy and the need to disempower those who refuse to be as reasonable as we would like, is not discussed. Yet, as so many activist autobiographies remind us (Nelson Mandela's *Long walk to freedom* and *The autobiography of Malcolm X* are good examples), when our fight to use reason in the cause of justice stalls, those who choose not to be reasonable have to be challenged using whatever means necessary.

Two final points of which readers should be aware. For North American academics the predominance of British examples of select committees, the research assessment exercise and the like will be off-putting. Also, the price in the US—a whopping \$95.00—will severely limit the book's potential readership. This book should really be in the hands of all lecturers who ask themselves the most basic questions regarding their practice—What should I teach? What do I want my students to learn?

As such, the book illustrates the enduring relevance of another critical theory concept—Marcuse's repressive tolerance. This describes how society allows a veneer of open dialogue and critique (the book has been published, after all) whilst simultaneously circumscribing its effectiveness (few can afford it!).

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### **Inspection, inspection, inspection: how Ofsted crushes independent schools and independent teachers**

Anastasia de Waal, 2006

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The most effective critiques of managerialism in schools in general and Blairite New Public Managerialism (NPM) in particular have been largely confined to a group of anti-managerialist academics such as Thrupp, Gewirtz, Ball, Mahony, Hextall, etc. Their judgment of NPM has been restricted to the state sector of education and, for them, NPM has had a wholly detrimental impact by forcing through the implementation of a toolkit of Governmentally approved processes and practices. Some of these processes and practices have the force of statute, others take the form of 'guidance'—all are driven by the expectation that they will enable schools (and their teachers and pupils) to achieve a related set of centrally determined targets—the 'standards agenda'.

The implementation of these processes and practices has been criticized by academic anti-managerialists on a number of grounds including: a failure to recognize the special nature of school culture by imposing business practices on schools; ignoring the impact of the socio-economic status of pupils; encouraging inequity and anti-welfarism; ignoring the values that school leaders may hold; as well as a failure to have any favourable influence on schools except through achievement (or not) of largely spurious targets. As a result, they argue, teachers and school leaders have been reduced to a de-professionalized technicist function. In addition, the values and controlling objectives of Central Government have imposed this peculiarly confining form of managerialism as the dominant discourse on the state sector as a whole.