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Romance and Revolution*

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review of: **C. Jones and D. O'Doherty (eds.) (2005) *Manifestos for the Business School of Tomorrow*. Ábo: Dvalin Books**. (PB, pp.220, ISBN 9529189079; PDF ISBN 9529189087. Distributed free of charge during at least three management and organization studies conferences in July/August 2005; also available to download at http://www.dvalin.org)

> Future, *n*. That period of time in which our affairs prosper, our friends are true and our happiness is assured.[1]

This is a remarkable collection – the editors tell us so repeatedly in their introduction (the 'Inducement'), it contains poems, photos, pictures and diagrams, biographical sketches, and some thoughtful writing. Past, present and possible futures are presented to the reader, who is encouraged to treat the collection as a 'call to arms', to 'agitate, educate, organize' around it. The 30 or so contributors have written around one word for their personal manifestos, providing us with an 'abecedaire' that runs from Animality to Zero, via Evil, Ketamine, Queer, and Yes. The organizing principle might be the future, or perhaps protest at the present.

The editors give us *Manifestos* because they think they have identified a crisis in education. Universities (all of them) are a 'disgrace', business schools (all of them) are 'cancerous machine[s]' in a 'state of emergency' offering an 'uninspired carcass of crap', a 'refuge for failed business practitioners, inbred doctoral students and daddy whipped undergraduates' populated by scholars who are (all) either 'beaten and bloodied, worked on with hosepipes', 'forced into retirement with gagging agreements', or organized into 'self reproducing cabals' of 'self-arguing, infinitely frustrated privatized schizo[s]' protecting the 'last perk' – international conferences. They compare this working environment with Chile and Guantanamo Bay – presumably

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1 All definitions from an earlier A to Z, Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*, published in volume 7 of his collected works (1911, Neale Publishing Company, New York).

Chile during the 1970s and current US activity in Guantanamo Bay, although this is unclear. The editors are concerned because they wish to save our children, who 'all think differently' but are forced into a standard, uniform, disciplinary way of thinking that 'rewards only parrot fashion learning and conformity'.

The idea of the university, the practice of teaching and scholarship, future generations' thinking – all in deep trouble, all debased, and all because of business schools. The editors suggest a need for revolution, suggest that it is time to return to the lost values of education as a process of personal care and individual tutoring, reversing recent bureaucratization and developing people able to protest and look at 'the system' from outside. Well, this is interesting. Reads like a manifesto for rebellion.

> Rebel, *n*. A proponent of a new misrule who has failed to establish it.

The editors' introduction is central to this collection in a number of ways. First, it establishes boundaries for the authors by locating their work in time and place, arguing that the current moment is pivotal – an educational nadir. Second, it sets a stylistic tone – linguistic and metaphorical violence, apocalypticism, militarism, invoking Romanticism and New Journalism as the foundations which contributing authors often echo. Third, the 'Inducement' tells us that critical management studies is dead (although both editors and many contributors attended the 2005 conference in Cambridge – were they helping to keep it alive? Hoping to bury it? Or simply taking an opportunity to distribute *Manifestos*?), and that it is now time to act rather than simply mourn.

> Lecturer, *n*. One with his hand in your pocket, his tongue in your ear and his faith in your patience.

Bureaucratization and disciplinarity are the two main targets of the editors' representation of contemporary higher education. They would prefer a more personal process that frees people to think and challenge. This involves a combination of two dubious assumptions: that bureaucracies are inevitably restrictive, ethically and emotionally damaging, and that we can somehow escape discourses of subjectivity and be free to develop selves unhindered by oppressive identity regimes. The first of these claims implies that if we don't sign up to the *Manifestos* call to reclaim our freedom then we will be somehow incomplete, partial, or repressed. In addition, it is deeply romantic and therefore conservative, nostalgic even (du Gay, 2000), guiding the reader towards a pre-Enlightenment ideal of the university free of those pesky bureaucrats and their irritating questionnaires. Students could be free to develop their full intellectual potential, gently guided by scholars, if only we didn't all have to think about photocopying and learning outcomes.

What do we make of this claim of bureaucratization and the editors' condemnation of it? It is clear that contemporary universities are subject to different pressures from previous versions of the idea(l); Barnett (1997) explores the many ways in which instrumental and operational discourses have 'colonised' British universities, contrasting current technological and performative demands with the hermeneutic, liberal, and contemplative tradition. He suggests that the British state seeking tighter control of the academic labour process, the influence of professional bodies in setting research agendas and curriculum content, older students with different expectations, and changes in funding structures have all combined to encourage a narrower focus on the

'student-as-product'. Others note the introduction into universities of structures, job titles, roles, and even management theories, resulting in educational institutions that resemble commercial organizations. However 'broad brush condemnations of the university that are derived solely from utopian principles, free from any encounter with institutional realities' (Marginson and Considine, 2000: 13) are more common than informed analysis.

The editors of *Manifestos* suggest that revolution is needed. Is it? British academics may have been 'subjected' to managerialist discourses, but they have learned to work with them in a way which meshes with local practices and knowledges (Prichard and Willmott, 1997). Individual and collective resistance is one result of this; we even find attempts to sustain a 'scholarly craft ethic' (Barry *et al.*, 2001). So perhaps we and the students we teach might survive after all… just like everyone else has so far under managerialism.

The second claim, that we should attempt to escape from disciplinarity, is more complex: it subsumes a variety of knowledge claims ranging from children's cognition to discipline through discursive control. Again, the aim is freedom from externally imposed behavioural norms – free thinking, free thought, and the development of human potential free from any need to respond to 'the system' of examination. Once again we are presented with an implicit vision of a free university space in which education is not the hyphen in power-knowledge (Hoskin, 1990) but a space of resistance, individual development, bringing something (unspecified) out of the self. Yet the university is essentially a space constructed by and within society to control precisely this form of rebellion and resistance (Hoskin, 1990) – and has always been thus. Freedom within it is as unlikely as freedom in any of contemporary industrial society's superstructural institutions:

> Neither in its medieval nor in its modern form has the university disposed freely of its own absolute autonomy and of the rigorous conditions of its own unity. During more than eight centuries, "university" has been the name given by society to a sort of supplementary body that at one and the same time it wanted to project outside itself and to keep jealously to itself, to emancipate and to control. (Derrida, 1983: 19)

Stylistically the writing reflects the editors' preferences in a number of ways. The 'Inducement' sits within a mode of writing that came to popular notice in the late 1960s with the New Journalism movement. Practitioners of this form represents worlds through their own aesthetic experiences; linguistic and typographic experimentation provide signals that the authors are playing with convention, challenging norms. It is fundamentally realist in form and epistemology (Wolfe, 1973), a happy coincidence that allows the editors to make solid truth claims as to the nature of the world they inhabit.

In its more extreme moments the writing also echoes 1980s British fiction that took the 'postmodern condition' as a theme – known as the 'new unpleasantness' in tribute to the characters and settings. The lead British exponent of this genre is Martin Amis, a writer sometimes portrayed as the leading novelist of his generation, sometimes derided for his inability to see beyond his characters' and his own physicality. The writing is generally acknowledged as masculinist, grotesque, hyperbolic, and reliant on caricatures. The desire to shock that this style displays is transferred directly to the editors' introduction,

but unfortunately the vividness or linguistic imagination of the best fiction and journalism are missing. As Amis has noted, it also becomes increasingly difficult to engage with and represent rebellious underworlds when separated from them by relative wealth and educational privilege.

> Cynic, *n*. A blackguard whose faulty vision sees things as they are, not as they ought to be…

Third, it seems that the editors wish to present an alternative to critical management studies (CMS), a movement born around a decade ago within business and management studies departments. It is incontrovertible that CMS is, in some senses, successful: four UK-based conferences, the last attended by around 500 people, a special interest group at the American Academy of Management, a wide variety of journal papers and books that at least claim to be informed by a critical approach to understanding management and managers. There is even a business school in the UK that is represented as oriented towards research and teaching informed by CMS. Yet the editors would have us believe that CMS is dead, having expired through simply being critical (implicitly: negative, backward looking, complaining). Time to be positive, to build for the future, to revive hope…

Once again the editors have identified something significant, but once again may be looking in the wrong direction for a solution. Their manifesto for change rests on a vision of student and scholar standing outside, observing, analysing, and presenting knowledge. The practices of managing and organizing are reduced to thoughtless activities, undertaken by unreflective dupes for their own aggrandisement. The editors' approach to critique, in theory and practise, is echoed in a paper presented at the CMS conference in 2005 (Rhodes and Pitsis, 2005). In that paper, the authors also claim that CMS has 'failed' in its 'unmasking project'; as the 'CMS project' has been unable to convince students or practitioners that critical analysis reflects reality we need to move on. To overcome this 'impotence' we need to be more stylish in writing, to attempt to connect with rather than reflect the world, through writing magical fictocriticism (Rhodes and Pitsis, 2005). Or perhaps Romantic revolutionary manifestos.

Is this the alternative? Standing outside, writing about managers and organizations as if they are captives that we can emancipate? Well, it would be if we were able to escape or stand apart from the institutions we work within, the disciplinary conditions that we have submitted to in order to become established academics, and separate our subjectivities and hence capacity to resist from capitalism and education. This does seem unlikely, however; indeed protest has long been acknowledged as driving the progress of capitalist relations (Weber, 1930; Chow, 2002). Of the two *Manifestos* editors, one is a senior lecturer in an English university (senior indeed), while the other works at Manchester Business School (Manchester indeed). It would surely be fair to say that they are both working successfully within what they call 'the system', as most of us are; in order to work within a business school in the UK there are a number of games that must be played. Authority to speak, to write, to critique, is granted through acceptance to some degree of the rules of the game. We all already have dirty hands (Anderson-Gough and Hoskin, 2005); washing them briefly and loudly in public while remaining in the job that made them dirty seems oddly contradictory.

But whatever the direction we look in for a solution to disciplinarity, it is necessary to react to it in some way. It appears that the editors of *Manifestos* would have us be post-disciplinary, somehow outside the knowledge-power games of writing and lecturing. To achieve this it seems we might be oppositional, fighting against 'capitalism', 'management', 'organization', universities, business schools, by fomenting revolution and rejection. (But you go first, students – we'll be right behind you, theorizing your actions and building careers.) Writing 'fictocriticism', encouraging students in a 'fantastic journey' of individual development – these critical futures preach change without engaging with practice (Anderson-Gough and Hoskin, 2005). This lack of engagement leads directly to the construction of them and us, with an implicit hierarchy, and a denial of the ethics of teaching and writing.

Despite the editors' attempts to disavow their authority, by collecting the contributions to *Manifestos* and publishing them they inevitably establish themselves as vocal. In writing and publishing we accept the authority that allows us to speak, and in exercising that authority we also potentially silence others. So we might ask the editors where the student voices are in this collection, why there are no accounts of critical management practice, why there are so many young, white, male contributors, and we might ask why the editors decided the collection needed an introduction. In addressing these and other questions the editors might perhaps have been able to reflect a little more on their own actions, their own practices, to everyone's benefit:

> … there is a way in which one can lie in the guise of (telling the) truth, that is, in which the full and candid admission of one's guilt is the ultimate deception, *the* way to preserve one's subjective position intact, free from guilt. In short, there is a way to *avoid* responsibility and/or guilt by, precisely, *emphasizing* one's responsibility or too readily *assuming* one's guilt in an exaggerated way, as in the case of the white male PC academic who emphasizes the guilt of racist phallogocentrism, and uses this admission of guilt as a stratagem *not* to face the way he, as a 'radical' intellectual, perfectly embodies the existing power relations towards which he pretends to be thoroughly critical… [the problem with this form of critique is] that, in its very excess, it is *not radical enough*… the subjective enunciation of position *remains the same*… [it] tell[s] us *nothing* about the subject's inner truth (maybe because there is actually nothing to tell). (Žižek, 2000: 46, emphasis in original)

Excess does not necessarily equate to radicalism, in thought or deed; nor does ignoring one's own position within existing power-knowledge relations enable change; and nor does claiming to reveal the 'real truth' lead directly to emancipation.

All of which is a pity. Manifestos for the future of the business school are necessary, and should be written, collected, printed, read, and acted upon. The editors have certainly recognised some urgent problems, contributors often make suggestions that would help academics and students engage more with each other, and might even provide practically useful in the pursuit of education, knowledge and understanding. There is thoughtful reflective writing in this little book, in particular about our own practices towards each other and students; how conferences might be different from the current disjointed individualist espousals they often are, how challenging indifference in ourselves and students could help to make a difference, how students might weave courses within a community of scholarship rather than be subjected to standardised content, how business schools might engage more with local communities and organizations rather than just large corporations. These contributions stand out in their

approach, prioritising understanding of the current in order to inform the future, promoting personal accountability, and exploring local practices and social order. They are, in short, reflexive (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). They emphasise interpretation and reflection in relation to both the object (research, teaching) and the self. More of this would have been welcome. The title of the collection, however, mentions only the future, and titles do provide us with a means of understanding editorial intent (Jones, 2004). Perhaps the editors and most of the contributors are more interested in suggesting alternative futures, rather than exploring current practice and seeking to effect change through engagement with what is.

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