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ACCESS

Reinscribing the Politics of Difference: Where to now?

Elizabeth Grierson

RMIT University

ABSTRACT
This paper considers the politics of difference and the role of scholarly enquiry in the pragmatics of the creative economies of knowledge innovation and exchange. The discussion pertains in particular to the scholarly journal ACCESS, and its mission for critical enquiry and investigation of cultural knowledge, its place in wider discourses of cultural policy and practice, and the philosophy of education, and its new life, from 2014, under the umbrella of Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA) and the publication, Educational Philosophy and Theory (EPAT). In summarising the work of the writers in this present collection, the discussion positions their approaches in those wider discourses, and takes as a theme the politics of difference, which has been well rehearsed through critical postmodern and poststucturalist approaches. Asking the question, where to now?, it suggests that once again difference arises as a condition requiring further analysis and critical scholarship . The politics of difference continues to be (should be) of primary concern, with the demand for rigorous scrutiny uppermost in our minds: it should never be wobbled off its axis.

Introduction

> ACCESS has, since I have known about it, demonstrated a commitment to asking questions about how a given situation could be otherwise and better, and how we can think about "difference" differently (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2012: 85).

Thinking about *difference* is my task here. In my editorial role for ACCESS there has always been a concern to keep critical discussions to the fore, and questions of difference are pertinent in applying philosophical or political approaches to a range of disciplinary fields. The journal's primary, early, focus on education as a discipline has broadened to include different modes of knowledge and their applications to both education and wider socio-political domains or ways of being human and understanding the world, its policy drivers and cultural points of contestation.

In concert with the growth of creative economies, there is an increasing need for critical discourse around issues pertaining to academic roles and, more broadly, the purpose of universities in these new economies. In this regard, a valuable new book is *The Creative University* (Peters & Besley, 2013) arising from a conference held at University of Waikato, New Zealand, in August 2012. The editors' opening statement offers a platform for concerns about the alliance between creativity and knowledge: "Education and research have been transformed in the development of knowledge economies" (Peters & Besley, 2013: 1). From this starting point, the editors discuss the reshaping of education in the global economies and the challenges this presents. What does it mean to equate education with creativity? How might the nexus between them in the digital transformations of

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production and consumption account for difference? These are the kinds of questions their book opens for discussion; and the kind of focus I will address here.

ACCESS joins PESA and EPAT

In keeping with the global move to extend access to information, which includes finding wider audiences for scholarly publishing, from 2014 ACCESS will be published twice yearly on behalf of Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (PESA), an incorporated society under Western Australian legislation which is open to international membership. PESA is dedicated to the scholarly work of philosophy of education, holding annual conferences and seminars, funding scholarships and research, and publishing through its *Educational Philosophy and Theory* journal, EPAT (12 issues a year), which generates income to fund the activities of the society. From 2013, PESA has formed a publishing partnership with Routledge (of the Taylor and Francis Group):

> Routledge recognises EPAT as a prestigious international journal, making significant contributions to the understanding of educational philosophy, publishing articles and special issues on a broad range of contextual topics in educational research and theory from influential and respected authors (PESA website).

ACCESS journal has an affinity with the work of PESA in that many of the editors and contributors have been or are members of PESA and regular contributors to PESA conferences. It is thus fitting that ACCESS should migrate to PESA and be published with EPAT journal.[1] There is a great advantage for ACCESS supporters to be part of this arrangement as, in maximizing the digital modes of practice, if they become members of PESA, logging into the PESA Members' website they will have online access to not only EPAT and ACCESS but also four other quality journals, *British Journal of Sociology of Education, Comparative Education, Ethics and Education, Journal of Curriculum Studies, Journal of Education Policy,* and to Taylor and Francis' abstracts database, *Education Research Abstracts Online*. ACCESS will be advantaged by the EPAT online infrastructure for submissions, refereeing processes and editing, but will maintain its editorial content and identity, with myself as editor. Having built up the ACCESS journal over the past 12 years, since 2001, I am satisfied with this arrangement.

Reflecting upon ACCESS and critical scholarship

It now seems appropriate to take a moment to reflect upon ACCESS and its scholarly approach; in particular the way it approaches scholarship on the politics of difference. Last year, Volume 31(1) canvassed details of previous issues and contributors, showing the breadth and depth of political and cultural investigation in the name of educational philosophy and theory. I will not rehearse the contributions and themes here. However it is important, I think, to remember where ACCESS has come from, and how emphases necessarily change in concert with new concerns.

The emphasis on policy analysis impacting on education was very strong in the early years of educational change in New Zealand. Along with this focus, diverse imperatives of educational and cultural change in the global economies of creative innovation bring new questions to the table. Through the perspectives of philosophy of education writers test and interrogate diverse critical approaches as applied in relevant disciplinary domains of theory and practice. Such approaches might include ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, ontology, critical pedagogy, critical theory, hermeneutics, radical democracy, social justice, cultural capital and human capital theory, analysis of educational policy and practice, and postmodern and poststructuralist approaches to the politics of knowledge.

Some reflections on the politics of creativity

The incorporation of articles on the arts and creativity has increased since my time as editor, as my substantive area of educational practice has been in the creative arts. However, this inclusion comes not merely from my own predilections, but rather from the exponential growth of interest in the politics of creative economies as Peters and Besley's (2013) book demonstrates. Aesthetics and the creative arts have a role to play in such politics, and quality critical scholarship has become crucial in extending discussions of the issues that creativity and the arts give rise to. Peters and Besley (2013: 3-4) draw attention to the *UN Creative Economy Report* 2008, which links the economy with culture and technology, recognizing the centrality of "creativity, knowledge and access to information [as] powerful engines driving economic growth and promoting development in a globalizing world". The Report then defines "Creativity" in this context: it "refers to the formulation of new ideas and to the application of these ideas to produce original works of art and cultural products, functional creations, scientific inventions and technological innovations (p. 3)" (UN 2008 in Peters & Besley, 2013: 4).

One of my concerns is how 'art' and 'aesthetics' are positioned within those burgeoning extrapolations known as creative economies. In light of the aforementioned UN Report, I think the question must be asked constantly: How can art, design and aesthetics be understood and positioned in terms of broader creative economies?

One could well ask, from an aesthetic platform, if the need for artistic knowledge has ever been greater. Or are educators in the arts, or those who are artist-practitioners, ever able to position themselves as leaders of the new global order? Do they know how to 'work' the market? Do they have the capacities, any more than anyone else, to keep up with the exponential rates of change? Is 'creativity' as a disposition enough, or does it need injections of skill-based pragmatism in order to take the leadership roles to new levels in the creative economies of innovation and exchange? What has precipitated this leviathan shift of definition within the annals of creativity?

In this open-access, digital world of online learning and exchange, it seems the demand for new global skills and innovation competencies are so altering the twentieth-century ideas of education that scholars and educators now find themselves needing to up-skill at alarming rates or face the fact they are dinosaurs and thus quite expendable. A new technology of human capital is required. Fitting the facsimile of an academic role may not be a comfortable place any more.

Yet on the other hand, there is another way to look at this. Education for the creative economies is summed-up via a liberal humanist concept of transformation in the RMIT Vice-Chancellor's message on the University website, as 'an education forged in the heat of real-world experience' (RMIT, online). This metaphor of the *forge* and *heat* suggests profound changes in and through education in that the quotidian lives of ordinary citizens can be changed via bold action. It can remain an attractive thought, and one arising from the fundamentals of material creative practice, using the language of the visual arts to carry a transformative claim. As clay can be moulded and formed into something new and aesthetically pleasing through the fire of the kiln, so individual potentials can be moulded through the fire of education, thus putting education into the highly active state of change agent. Changes through knowledge acquisition equate to ontological changes in learners. These processes of material, aesthetic and ontological change are, it could be argued, the fundamentals of creativity in action in a world of objects as substance. (See further Grierson, 2012, 2013).

Reflecting on critical approaches

Since its inception in the 1980s, ACCESS has endorsed scholarly approaches that bring a critical edge to their forms of analysis and discussion, as they open the terrains of knowledge to scrutiny. This critical approach reflected in the journal subtitle "*Critical perspectives…*" has been crucial over the past decades of changing landscapes, as successive governments in Australia, New Zealand, the Asian region, UK et al., have sought to respond to the rapidly globalising prescriptions in which we now live and work.

From the 1960s rise of 'human capital' in education coupled with the neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s, a prioritisation of regulatory frameworks and measurement have been endorsed and strengthened by successive policy changes primarily affecting economic and knowledge management. Higher education is at the heart of this changing global landscape as new forms of knowledge capital define the creative economies, and academics are folded inevitably into the equation as human capital for creative knowledge industries. Today public universities are managed as corporations with emphasis on economically-driven standards, entrepreneurial research, innovative technologies, interactive learning and virtual connectivity, the rise of the MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) phenomenon, robust links with industry, and layers of regulatory mechanisms. Taken as a whole, academics are expected to perform more and more with less and less, often obfuscating the core pedagogical business of education. Academics, cast as managers of knowledge capital, often struggle to find stamina or time to perform as the critical conscience of society. Therefore, I suggest that scholarly journals have a role to play insofar as they provide a robust forum for critical engagement with current concerns, and it is here this present volume of ACCESS finds its critical capacity.

There are various approaches to education and different forms of critical analysis that can be judiciously employed to bring out the potential for difference in this cross-border world of creative economies, and they are well evidenced in this present collection of papers. Theories of democratic education based on the ideas of Durkheim and Dewey are demonstrated in the work of Ruth Boyask in *Theorising the Democratic Potential of Privatised Schools through the Case of Free Schools*. Boyask gives examples of privatised schooling in the UK dedicated to students' equal participation to build recognition of how knowledge is shaped and how they can be a part of that shaping experience. Democratic education values staff and student co-participation in knowledge and decision-making to enhance the social good through learning and governance. But this is not without its challenges. Boyask's work demonstrates the workings of critical pedagogy in the way it exposes power differentials between national and school governance. This is particularly interesting in the case of Summerhill School in Suffolk, founded in 1921, where 'personal freedom' came up against national Ofsted standards, the tension eventually ending up in a case in the Royal Courts of Justice, London, and resolved in Summerhill's favour.

Critical pedagogy informing feminist approaches to scholarship is evident in Jill Blackmore's approach to analysing the regulatory frames of academic work and their stultifying outcomes on curriculum, pedagogy, and academic work, thus diminishing if not stultifying the transformative potential of education. Janet Mansfield also positions her work through a form of critical pedagogy and radical democracy. Blackmore in *Student Dis/satisfaction and Academic Dis/enchantment with Edu-capitalism,* and Mansfield in *Value 2 .0*, are both calling for forms of social justice through exposure of injustice. They are drawing from both Marxist and poststructuralist theories of difference in their calls for a widening of consciousness and recognition of authoritarianism in national and global governance affecting education. Global circulation of neoliberal ideologies in economic and knowledge markets have traded knowledge for economics—and equated economics with power—and both these writers forcefully draw attention to the relationship between power and knowledge in the ways university governance impacts upon academic work. Mansfield also places her critique within the larger framework of ACCESS and its critical approach to scholarship. For their trenchant engagements with university governance in education, both writers were invited to contribute to this final issue of ACCESS published out of a university setting.

Another invited contributor is Mark Jackson, whose *Marx after Heidegger* also raises questions of power. He works through the contemporary theories of power from Antonio Negri to present a challenge to both writer and reader, to make some sense of encountering Heidegger through the legacies of Spinoza and Marx. He succeeds by arguing a radical engagement, which in itself evidences a grappling with power in its manifested and imminent forms. The article seems eminently suited to the philosophy of education approach in its direct engagement with philosophers whose work has informed, and continues to do so, the educational and social spheres of living, thinking, working, teaching, learning. If Marx and Heidegger are considered to be incommensurable in their approaches to life and thought, then this article goes some way to demonstrate how incommensurability can co-exist. Indeed, this must be so in a world of difference where one person's priorities and prejudices may be anathema to another. For Jackson, through Negri, the dynamics of contemporary democracy are at stake; and he carefully concludes with the potential for further work on Heidegger whose conception of time, as Negri says, "radically breaks the hegemony of substance and the transcendental and opens it to a certain kind of power…" (Negri 2011 in Jackson, this collection).

Positioned as number five of eight articles, Jackson's work forms a philosophical hinge, of sorts, for this collection. It opens backwards to the former papers on critical pedagogies and democratic schooling in terms of the workings of power and how power might be articulated and recognised, and it opens forwards to the papers which follow it by the way they pick up on the significance of difference.

Following Jackson's paper, are two papers that demonstrate the necessity for further scholarship based in the politics of difference in educational work. In *Mata Pasifika as Critique,* Nesta Devine examines the interface between Pacific and non-Pacific forms of knowledge and understanding. Drawing from her work with Pasifika researchers and students, Devine investigates the challenge for educators to think through, and work with, the implications of such difference. Her analysis seeks to alter personal, social and institutional environments by inviting critique of policy frameworks to widen the understanding of '*mata Pasifika'* in the higher education setting. Here, difference calls for attention.

From the Pacific to China, Lau Chung Yim brings a Chinese perspective to the questions of knowledge with his *Underpinnings, Issues and Challenges of Art-based Enquiry: A Chinese perspective* . While art-based enquiry might be a current mode in Western scholarship and education, in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan it is, according to Lau, virtually invisible. Lau makes a strong case for its importance as a way of analysing contemporary culture, and proposes a framework for art and art educational research employing methodologies from art-based enquiry. He bases this necessity for theoretical frameworks of art-based enquiry on visual perception, and socio-cultural and educational perspectives. His discussion demonstrates the significance of visual perception in our way of understanding the world, and how different methodologies suit different needs and perspectives in education. Thus, the politics of methodology continue to inform our educational work.

The final contribution from Michael Peters, Jim Marshall and Elizabeth Grierson is an annotated bibliography, extended and updated from one previously published in ACCESS, 2004. This summary, *31 years of ACCESS journal 1982-2013* provides a record of articles, authors, themes, editors, guest editors and special issues over the years, valuable as an archival document. It seems fitting that this record should appear at the conclusion of an era.

Comments on the politics of difference and some contestations

As *difference* is the theme highlighted here, I would like to take this opportunity to make one final observation on the politics of difference as it coheres with much of what arises through the papers in this collection and in the aforementioned book, *The Creative University* (Peters & Besley, 2013). In this book there is an account of the prioritisation of beauty as essential to the advancement of the human mind, i.e. "The better that plastic order is, that is to say the more beautiful it is, the better are the neural structures that process the information …" (Murphy, 2013: 35). This declaration raises a number of questions in any setting of difference. Making value claims on those 1960s built environments as constituting "ugly buildings", it seems that the argument that "beautiful minds" need to be surrounded by beauty is notably devoid of relevant contextual discussion from, for example, art or architectural theory, psychology, psychoanalysis or philosophy. It appears to adhere to broad generalisations such as, "Hardly any of the campus architecture of the new universities built through 1960-2010 was memorable or even good" (Murphy, 2013: 43).

Having disclosed, even advocated, binary divisions of good/bad, beautiful/ugly, the proposition seems to be floating on a fatal mistake of defining the "object-world" by an aesthetic perception upon which standards are founded, proclaiming, "Beauty at its core is the beauty of line and form". Is he depicting the world through its substance, and does so with not so well disguised assumptions? Questions raised might be: Whose substance? Whose beauty? Whose criteria? Whose object of enquiry? Whose choice? Whose aesthetic standards? Whose eyes? What aptitude to *all* the beautiful minds? This epistemic certainty, I thought, when I first heard his presentation in 2012, is surely at odds with the political and philosophical interrogations of decades of postmodernity, not to mention poetics.

To my mind, Murphy's position could be advocating a return to the days of binary divides, hierarchical value judgements, and the adherence to hegemonic standards upon which decision-making has been founded—but that may not be so. Seeking some critical solace of sorts, and starting to question the purchase of postmodernity, given that an academic in this context could speak and write upon such truisms today, I reflected long and hard on how such an attitude could be revived or revised with such alacrity. The *Stanford Encyclopaedia* firstly states postmodernism is indefinable, which we would probably all agree with; however, its description of postmodernism is fairly accurate here:

> [I]t can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning (Aylesworth, 2013).

From this definition, it is, to my mind, the *critical practices* that we must continue to employ, and do so *strategically* as academics—if knowledge is to be kept in play with its creative potential. But, it is never wise to adopt an approach without seeing other sides to a question, so turning to what is generally regarded as a most substantial critique of postmodernism from Jürgen Habermas (1987), who brings forward the problem of self- referentiality, postmodernism is to be seen as "an illicit aestheticization of knowledge and public discourse", and "postmodernists presuppose concepts they otherwise seek to undermine, e.g., freedom, subjectivity, or creativity" (Aylesworth, 2013). Habermas argued for authority and consensus, an accepted anathema to postmodernists. Murphy's comments come at a time when the *attributes of difference* can be recognised and generated to inform and interrogate attitudes of certitude.

There may be paradoxes here, but on the other hand, when rigorously and systematically applied to the task of analysis of subject-object relations, and the role of objects as substance in the world, postmodern criticism and poststructuralist interrogations can open for question the authoritarianism of value-laden judgements. Such excavations can destabilise the absolutist authorities through which knowledge as human labour is marked or measured. Where is the final authority? When knowledge is seen as substance, as the object of labour, then it is too easy for that object to become hegemonic, especially in an economically-driven world; and also too easy for the human subject to be objectified as a productionist cog in the technologies of capital. Perhaps a recollection of Aristotle is in order regarding the prioritisation of repetition, i.e . *this is the same as that*, compared to Socratic methods of *questioning* as an approach to learning through which *difference* may be activated (however untidy it may be); and then, Heidegger's "Questioning builds a way … The way is one of thinking" (Heidegger, 1999: 311).

It may be seen that art and architecture, aesthetics and “beauty” find no virtue as measurable objects in the world. Rather, applying a Heideggerean sense, they may be perceived not as substance, but as conditional, in time, open to disclosure, adding to disclosure, always imminent.

In considering our academic responsibilities in these problematic times, as meanwhile power differentiation and potential disturbance become apparent, it is worth restating what Charles Guignon said:

> What is needed, then, is a way of recovering a sense of openness of the possible and of our own responsibility as individuals in articulating and bringing to realization the worldly contexts in which we find ourselves (Guignon, 2007: 30, cited in Grierson, 2011).

And this is not to presuppose beauty at all. There is a guarding against experiencing “our predicament” as “subsumable under universally valid (and hence anonymous) principles” (Guignon, 2007: 30).

Justice of multiplicity

> “There must be not only a multiplicity of justices, but a justice of multiplicity” (Baron, 1992: 34).

Via the kinds of critical issues that the writers in ACCESS have opened up for interrogation over the years, and in light of demanding decades of poststructuralist interruptions of hegemonies of value, it seems implausible that a thesis of beauty and the neurons of the mind should ever find audience—however, it is there and I am viewing it.

I raise this concern on the eve of two political announcements: one for the new music curriculum in England advocating pupils to learn primarily from the “*great* composers and musicians” (white, Western, male etc.? Emphasis added), and stating, “As pupils progress, they should … listen with discrimination to the *best in the musical canon*” (Department for Education UK, online, emphasis added). And that other announcement in Australia that the new Liberal Coalition government plans to interfere in the Australia Research Council decisions about what should be funded, thereby deciding what is “good” research and worthy of funding, and ensuring it plucks $103 million from the ARC funds to ensure “bad” research is edited out of existence, such as “studies into philosophy, sexual health, art and climate change” (ABC, 2013). Kim Carr on the same ABC programme states, “They think … a thought police committee can be established to determine what is good research and what is bad research ...” (Carr in ABC, 2013). Worrying times indeed, when research that does not fit the economic mantra is so easily wrenched away by the fall of a policy pen.

Conclusion

When academics or politicians start to make claims for good and bad thoughts, acting as differentiations, which could be supportive/non-supportive or destructive, seemingly based on personal prejudices and predilections, we might all be concerned. And when an academic speaks and writes of standards of “beauty” that will fortify our minds’ neurons in order that the mind will improve its intellectual production, I suggest that we should be concerned.

Reading through the examples, as noted above, it seems our work in political philosophy and the philosophy of education is not yet done. The hierarchies and hegemonies keep rearing their heads, and the hegemonies of the good, the bad and the “ugly” continue to be re-positioned with a paucity of evidential scrutiny. However, academically dressed one can say anything with or without offence.

The writers of this present collection are keeping important critical issues to the fore. It is to be hoped that continuing contributions to ACCESS will enhance the scholarly interrogations of cultural, social, political, philosophical, policy and educational concerns—eschewing reverential elaboration.

"Let us wage war on totality… let us activate the differences", Lyotard had said (1984: 82). Where to now? To reignite epistemic certitude might be the end of a beginning.

Notes

1. PESA website is http://www.pesa.org.au/

   EPAT website is http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rept20/current#.UjUnqmQY2Fc

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