

Book review

Policy Futures in Education

0(0) 1–3

© The Author(s) 2017

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1478210317736436

journals.sagepub.com/home/pfe



Petar Jandrić, *Learning in the Age of Digital Reason*, Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, 2017; 406 pp. ISBN 9789463510769, £65.00 (hbk), ISBN 9789463510752, £39.00 (pbk)

A book that begins with the proposal to throw a party for everyone with something to say on the topic is immediately inviting! It is enticing too, as Petar Jandrić is intent on linking together people who would not ordinarily find themselves in conversation with each other through the topic of *human learning in the age of digital reason*. Jandrić's approach is refreshing and original: publishing the diverse conversations he has cultivated over the preceding five years with eminent philosophers, historians, media theorists, educators, activists and artists. Jandrić admits that in selecting his interlocutors, others are excluded, but his book is populated by those who accepted his invitation – and it is a very rich mix.

In *History and Philosophy*, a fascinating debate with Larry Cuban launches the party. Cuban emphasises analysis of the past to better understand the present, suggesting a move beyond Rogers' diffusion theory, which assumes any new technology automatically benefits adopters equally. Rather than blame those who fail to adopt, the examination of more contextual factors around each new policy, device or software is recommended. Cuban reflects on his past predictions on schooling and the persistent economic rationale stressed in policy for education over recent decades, which has superseded more democratic routes of engagement with technology. This leads neatly into an exchange with Andrew Feenberg on *Critical Pedagogy and Philosophy of Technology*. Feenberg emphasises the ongoing relevance of the work of the Frankfurt School in seeking to understand the effectiveness of consumerism and the mass media in controlling human consciousness. Despite our 'network society', these are still the principal mechanisms integrating advanced civilisations (p. 18). From building conceptual bridges with Science and Technology Studies (STS) to discussions of parallels between the 1968 student uprising in France and Internet revolutions, such as the Arab Spring, Feenberg provides captivating insights on synthesising philosophy and technology. He concludes that the ongoing neoliberal desire of decision makers to cheapen education results in a 'pervasive hostility towards teachers on the part of those who pay their salaries' (p. 28). As Michael Peters arrives, he adds fascinating insights into the social character of knowledge, discussing models of dialogic approaches for integrating human knowledge on learning and digital media. He points to big data and learning analytics as representing a profound shift where 'the digital constitutes a new episteme' (Stiegler, 2013). Given this 'educational panopticon', intellectual thought must trace connections between peers, not reinforce exclusive categories. In discussing digital colonialism and postcolonialism, in the form of new social movements, the focus remains on digital capitalism and new

forms of power and control in the epoch of digital reason. Making links between openness and freedom as political conditions for creativity, Peters' far-reaching role in open-access academic publishing, through the development of many journals, is explored. Jandrić concludes with a key question: *How can we transform our digital labour to subvert rather than perpetuate capitalism?* Peters advises that we build shared spaces and collective intelligence through an emerging paradigm that theorises creativity from the point of labour rather than from the point of capital.

With the party now in full swing, new interlocutors arrive to comment in subsequent sections on: *Media Studies, Education, Practice and Activism* and *Arts*. Jandrić hosts each conversation with impeccable detail on the works of these contributors. From discussions with Fred Turner on the role of information technologies in the contemporary struggle against fascism to questioning whether the age of information needs its own distinct religion to build diverse communities, it is clear that digital technologies are intertwined with all aspects of our lives. Another key question is posed: *What does it mean to be a teacher in the contemporary university?* The conclusion is that public intellectuals now live as much by building networks as they do by writing books. Richard Barbrook enters next to discuss radio activism, media freedom and predictions upheld from 'The Californian Ideology' (p. 83). The declaration that we are all now cybernetic communists is amusingly linked with commentary on the irony of dotcom capitalists in helping to sustain this, followed by reflections on how Barbrook's writing approach has come to read like dance music. McKenzie Wark adds insights on the 'vectoral' and 'hacker' classes – those who own intellectual property and control information flow, and those who produce new information out of the old respectively. Jandrić asks: *What does it mean to think critically about human learning in the network society?* Wark exposes a commodification of all forms of social activity, in which humans give themselves up to data surveillance yet never see the metadata. New modes of exploitation are thus based on unequal information exchange, always subordinated to the money form, with digital labour deeply implicated.

At this point, I join those deep in conversation about *Education*. I am thrilled to find Henry Giroux, at Petar Jandrić's request, applying his concept of 'border crossing' to ways that digital technology might improve the human condition, and the Internet serve as an alternative public sphere and even be understood as a form of pedagogy. Giroux reminds us that technologies are implicated in power and inequality, and so asks how we might insert the notion of democracy into their language. He concludes optimistically that history remains open, and he cannot imagine not imagining different futures. As Peter McLaren arrives, he brings pre-digital and contemporary insights concerning superficial consumer needs and human control via mass media. In this context 'we are all Julian Assange, lecturing from the balcony of the Ecuadorian embassy'. He comments on ecopedagogy in the age of the Anthropocene, the coloniality of power, and a need to create a 'revitalized ecology of body/mind/spirit' (Kahn, 2010) by understanding the dependent hierarchies of capitalism, spirituality, epistemology, governance and imperialism. The digital revolution has encoded dangerous assumptions about endless growth and individualism, but an earth-centred ecological intelligence is now required. Via colourful observations across continents and distracting digital cultures, McLaren reminds us that capitalist consumer culture hijacks the archetypes of identity – and none of them are fighting capitalism. The mutual relevance of theology and social science is considered. Jandrić and McLaren communicate across time and space in a tangible account that merges their academic and personal contexts around critical revolutionary praxes. Striking cross-cultural examples of iPhone and Internet

addiction precede McLaren's appealing, concluding vision of life, as 'jerky' (p. 92). From here, the party takes a posthumanist turn, in discussion with Sian Bayne, to consider where humans are not distinct from machines, animals and other objects, but entangled. In a 'Manifesto for Teaching Online' (Ross and Bayne, 2016), Bayne has sought to counter the popular ideologies that technology drives educational practice and to refute the notion of 'digital natives'. The embodied legacy of humanism in education remains a key challenge for teachers and researchers.

Whilst I cannot, in this short review, do justice to the wonderful exchanges in the remaining sections, including, for example, civil disobedience and public libraries and curating digital art with heart and mind, I do notice several key threads emerging. Firstly, Jandrić's interlocutors do not separate the past in any way from our digital present. They make social and political connections across history, art, the physical, the airwaves, power, control, freedom, love, passion, play, the technological and virtual. When discussing the commons in relation to the Internet, Howard Rheingold suggests 'any resource from which people cannot be excluded can be treated as a commons'. People have come to believe digital technology has more magic than it has. However, they still need to know how to learn. Building political movements still require human agency and commitment. So we have the technology. We now need to spread the literacies about it. In this masterful and disruptive book, Jandrić has been doing just that. He has hosted a collective party in his own inimitable way, opening the doors to all of us to witness not only rich conversations but their embodied nature and how they came into being. Technologies, like ideas, are not devoid of emotion and sexuality. We have been co-evolving with our technologies for millions of years (Matthewman, 2011: 176) and so we may reflect, as Astra Taylor invites us to, on why things are the way they are, and how, in terms of social justice, technology might contribute to other ways of being for humans, rather than those rooted in capital.

References

- Kahn R (2010) *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy and Planetary Crisis*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Matthewman S (2011) *Technology and Social Theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Ross J and Bayne S (2016) *A Manifesto for Teaching Online*. Available at: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff/teaching-matters/features/a-manifesto-for-teaching-online> (accessed 2 September 2017).
- Stiegler, B. (2013). *The Digital Future of the University*. Available at: <http://www.samkinsley.com/2014/01/15/the-digital-future-of-the-university-stiegler/> (accessed 2 September 2017).

Sarah Hayes

Centre for Learning, Innovation & Professional Practice, Aston University, UK

Email: s.hayes@aston.ac.uk