Notes and References

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6. T. B. Veblen, 'Why is economics not an evolutionary science?', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 12, 1898, pp. 374–97.
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8. Perhaps, though, the distinction between Darwinism and Lamarckism is not so clear cut in human social evolution. For example, Darwinian natural selection can be seen to operate on 'varieties' of economic behaviour, however generated. See John Nightingale's chapter in J. Laurent and J. Nightingale (eds), *Darwinism and Evolutionary Economics*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, forthcoming.

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Information Liberation

Brian Martin

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Information Liberation sets out to examine the relationship between information, information producers and information media. In particular, it focuses on the informational dimensions that establish and maintain empowered and disempowered social groups in their opposing positions. In exploring this dimension of information, Martin maintains that information is power. More to the point, and following in the footsteps of Lord Acton, Martin states that power (and thus, information) tends to corrupt. However, unlike Acton, he argues that grass-roots responses can allow those who are activists for social justice and equity to achieve their goals. Specifically, he states that; 'Challenging information-related systems of power is one avenue for social change' (p. 5). This route to social change is placed as another 'third way' option that provides an alternative to market economies and centralized state control.

The contribution that this book makes is not easy to place in the academic landscape. Martin makes no academic pretensions; rather, his contribution is in relation to activist needs. Indeed, the academic literature is characterized in *Information Liberation* as being frequently superfluous to the needs of activist social reformers. Evidence is provided to show that the complex outputs of Academe are, on some occasions, useful to activists despite being misunderstood and despite sometimes being wrong. Yet even when they are accurate—but impenetrable to the lay reader—they are often of little use. Furthermore, it is not only the research that academics publish but the institutions and research processes surrounding them that are inhibitors to their usefulness in social change. The

restricting demands of bureaucratized job performance and the lack of community participation in the identification of research questions and the conduct of the research are pin-pointed as problems. Here Martin is suggesting that research is often done to enhance the career prospects of the researcher rather than for the social good. He is also suggesting that academic researchers are removed from the problems and worries of most people. *Information Liberation* is, therefore, not heavy with theory and models but is something of a 'cook book' for social action.

Looking beyond the generalities of the book, there is a rather broad scope of discussion of issues related to information and power to be assessed. The opening chapter deals with power and its tendency to corrupt. Although the topic of power is one for which much literature exists, Martin moves through, not unexpectedly, with speed and relative simplicity. The remaining chapters all address specific sites of information politics: mass media, intellectual property, surveillance, free speech and bureaucracy, the politics of research, the value of simple ideas, and celebrity intellectuals. Once again, there is the characteristic 'cook book' approach. The real questions, for Martin at least, are not those relating to the political economy of information and power (although those kinds of questions underpin them and are to some degree directly engaged in them) but what it is that an activist needs to know to make change happen.

Martin's argument that grass-roots activism can counteract the corrupting influences of information power is the core of the book and never far from his reach. This argument is an interesting derivation of the idea of fighting fire with fire, except in this case it is fighting information with information, or rather, fighting one kind of information infrastructure with a different kind of information infrastructure. Firmly in Martin's critical sights are the elite technical, economic and social information infrastructures that have high barriers to entry. The tools for struggling against these elite infrastructures are the information infrastructures available to the non-elites.

Leaflet drops, e-mail campaigns, web sites, word of mouth, communicating ideas in simple terms and so on count among the many vehicles available for the grass-roots campaigner in this kind of information skirmish. It is argued and demonstrated that many of these rather unspectacular communication media can allow individuals and groups to disseminate relevant information to large numbers of interested people. Thus, information power is not only a function of the information itself but of the ability to disseminate information favourable to your cause widely enough to make a difference. Non-elites can, in fact, achieve rather wide dissemination of information through non-mass media channels.

At the heart of Martin's stance is his observation that 'information seems like the basis for a co-operative society. It can be made available to everyone at low cost, and a person can give away information and still retain the use of it' (p. 172). He is not arguing that low dissemination cost is an ineffable characteristic of all information but that low cost is achievable to poorly resourced community groups and the like if they think carefully. Of course, the world is not to be turned on its head through these skirmishes, but change can be initiated through these processes. So, just as information can be used by the powerful to entrench their positions, so can it be used by the disempowered to strike back.

Assessing the success of Martin's approach is difficult if not challenging. Just as he argues that simple ideas are more accessible (even if they are incomplete or wrong) to activists than dense and complex intellectual treatises, so he has written this book. There is a pervading simplicity of style and expression in *Information Liberation*. The academic mind is sure to find this book unfulfilling on an intellectual level but challenging on the level of reflection about the role of academics in social change. Might it be possible that

such a simple book is more socially useful than the next freshly minted Ph.D. thesis by a student fired with passion and commitment to changing the world?

The old style political economy and anarchist flavour of this book, with its tendency to imply conspiracy, make it seem out of date and just a little tired. It also makes for arguments that will find much disagreement among the academic audience. Despite this, it is worth the read for its timely wake-up call that questions the primacy of the academic approach—the high theory, the rigorous analytical approach, the dense and exacting argument—to dealing with one of the major issues of our time; for its relevance to being able to fight information with information.

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Workplaces of the Future

Paul Thompson and Chris Warhurst (Eds)

London, Macmillan, 1998, xi + 230pp., £16.99 (pbk), ISBN 0-333-72800-9 (pbk), ISBN 0-333-727991(hbk)

This book is part of the Macmillan Business series titled 'Critical Perspectives on Work and Organisations' originating out of the Annual International Labour Process Conference. The editors claim in the Preface that the International Labour Process Conference has always had the aim of providing empirically informed theoretical analysis. Readers are left to guess about this presumably UK based Conference as little more information is provided.

The editors also claim that the series needed a book that 'returned to save the "classical" roots of labour process writings' focussing on 'some of the core themes of changes in the nature of work itself' (p. vi). This they claim is necessary to counter the current period where 'popular discourse is deluged with futuristic babble' (p. vi). The book consists of 11 chapters from 18 contributing authors. The majority come from Scotland and England, two from the US and two from Austria. The main contributors include Ruth Milkman, Andy Danford, Steve Taylor, Joan Greenbaum, Kate Mulholland and Mike Dent.

The contents of the chapters are diverse. Topics include the sick building syndrome; the impact of computer information systems on the design of work organisation; discussion of the labour process in terms of producing and operating software; reaction to examples of devolution of responsibility at the workplace; discussion on the trend in the medical industry in Europe in following the US market driven model; an account of a case study on the changing role of managers in a large government utility undergoing privatisation; and a bottom line response to the path of the 'high road' in the US: the move toward a high wage, high skill economy.

In the introductory chapter, the editors set the tone of the selection of contributions by using the title, 'Hands Hearts and Minds: Changing Work and Workers at the End of the Century' (p. 1) thus giving emphasis to the human dimension. They link the recent past—by reference to the 'old Taylorist and Fordist forms' (p. 19)—to the present, when they say 'managers have sought to develop a variety of coping mechanisms in the form of cross-functional and on-line teams, thus creating a shadow of the division of labour' (p. 19). They refer to this as the 'new workplace' and conclude that despite this change