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The McUniversity: Organization, Management and Academic Subjectivity

Martin Parker and David Jary

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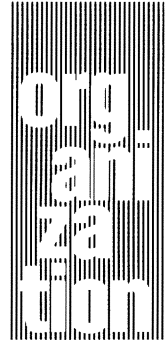
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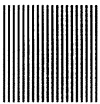
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The McUniversity: Organization, Management and Academic Subjectivity

Martin Parker and David Jary

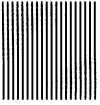
Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent

***Abstract.** This paper uses elements of Weberian and Foucauldian social theory to speculate on the consequences of recent higher education change in the UK. We argue that changes in the political, institutional and funding environment have produced forms of HE organization that increase the power of management and diminish the autonomy of professional academics. These new forms of organization, which are increasingly bureaucratic and utilize sophisticated systems of surveillance, will make academics increasingly instrumental in their attitudes and behaviour. We conclude that the rationalization of HE should be resisted, but that nostalgia for a previous order should not be part of that resistance. 'Mass' higher education organizations are not simply good or bad, but their rationale and consequences need to be clearly thought through if their negative aspects are to be addressed.*



Introduction

Both the authors are full-time permanent academic sociologists in a 'new' university (former polytechnic) in England, one a lecturer, the other a dean. This article is based on our reading, experience and speculation about the changing conditions under which we, and others, work. Whilst we differ in our concerns, both of us feel that it is vitally important that the New Higher Education (NHE) is more widely discussed from a critical standpoint. This is hence both a polemical paper and an attempt to apply some social theory to our experiences of organizational change. Given the scale and potential implications of recent changes, we find it remarkable

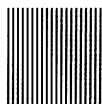


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how relatively little UK sociologists have focused attention upon HE. With a few notable exceptions (for example Halsey, Becher and Kogan), most of the analysis of UK HE has been undertaken either by overseas sociologists or by non-sociologists. Although US writers like Clark and Trow have formulated general models of the transition from 'elite' to 'mass' forms of HE, Britain has been something of an exceptional case, standing out against some of the more general international tendencies and meaning that any simple reading-off from general models is likely to be hazardous. A first caveat, therefore, about this article is its ethnocentric basis—most of our evidence and argument is from and about the UK. A second caveat is that we discuss only the work of academics and their managers—there are many more employees within universities than these two groups but their labour is not the focus of this paper.

The core of the paper suggests a three-layer model of the changes—national-structural, organizational and professional-subjective—a framework influenced by Clark (1983) and Becher and Kogan (1992). In this paper we are centrally interested in the two latter levels of analysis and sketch the former only for historical context and conceptual completeness. At the national-structural level we are referring to a series of structure and policy changes which form general constraints on all HE institutions—the huge expansion in student numbers, changes in funding criteria, the creation of the 'new' universities, the reorganization of research funding exercises, and so on. At the second level—internal to HE organizations—there have been changes in the contexts within which teaching, administration and research take place. Greater managerial power, structural reorganization, more emphasis on marketing and business generation, moves towards performance-related pay and a rationalization and computerization of administrative structures are all characteristic of the NHE organization. Our third level is the action, subjectivity, motivation and goals of academics themselves. The increased competition to publish for personal, departmental and institutional gain, a greater teaching and administrative load and less personalized relationships with students are all common experiences.

In two senses, we recognize that this model is an 'ideal type'. Firstly, the division into levels is an ordering tool: in practice, political economy, organization structure and academic subjectivity are mutually constitutive and interconnected. As HE institutions achieve ever higher 'productivity' so do state policy-makers reaffirm their view that the universities were inefficient in the first place and intensify their attempts to force more students through for less money. As managers increase their attempts to market their institution externally and internally, so do academics and their managers begin to view the organization in a different way. Secondly, different institutions, departments and academics are not reducible to the simple descriptions that we put forward. For example, 'new' universities, with little economic or cultural capital, have less shelter from state policy but may be less constrained by



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established assumptions about their role. Older institutions, on the other hand, may have greater financial and cultural power but be less able to modify traditional assumptions about their place within the educational and cultural system. Similarly, there will be many differences between old and new university staff, between new blood and established staff, between men and women, and so on. Yet, all this being acknowledged, we suggest that our 'ideal type' is a useful way to conceptualize the NHE because it clarifies certain key themes. The most important of these is what we see as a move from elite specialization with strong professional controls towards a 'Fordist' mass production arrangement. In conceptual terms we treat this as Weberian form of rationalization or 'McDonalidization' (Ritzer, 1993) because it seems that comparability and standardization (of institutions, managers, academics, students) are central to NHE organization.

The paper concludes by situating the above analysis within the context of the politics of mass higher education. Many liberals and radicals would sponsor the idea that more students (standard and non-standard) should be encouraged to participate in university organizations, and that time, space and status entry barriers should hence be broken down. Yet, at the same time, there are legitimate worries about the impact that 'Fordist' degree production might have on the experiences of both students and staff. Protecting 'quality' (of experience and learning) whilst encouraging access requires much greater clarity about the aims and alternative forms of mass higher education. In the NHE it seems to us that unmitigated careerism, credentialism and managerialism could leave little space for critical scholarship or challenging teaching.

The Context

To set the scene for what follows, a brief history of the UK university system will be helpful. Oxford, Cambridge and the Scottish universities' long monopoly on the title was first challenged in England in 1828 with the foundation of University College London. The addition of further civic institutions from the 1850s onwards for the next century was a restricted process which, controlled by federation and London external validation, resulted in only 12 independent universities in England and Wales by 1951 and a clear hierarchy of well-funded Oxbridge arts and letters versus poorly funded 'redbrick' science and technology (Truscot, 1951; Halsey, 1992; cf Rothblatt and Wittrock, 1993, for more detail and cross-cultural comparisons). In 1963, the Robbins Report advocated the expansion of university-level education. The old colleges of advanced technology and London external colleges were given the full title, completely new universities ('plateglass') were founded and in the early 1970s the polytechnics were established to complete the lower end of an expanded hierarchy. Robbins also had the consequence of ensuring that universities relied increasingly heavily on state funding rather than



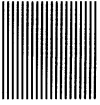
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externally generated income. Although there was some dissent, the dominant assumptions of this era seemed to be that there was a direct relationship between university expansion and economic growth *and* that universities could be agents of social equality (Robinson, 1968). This optimism and faith in the expertise of professional academics is now hard to imagine. The post-1979 Conservative government began to demand 'efficiency' savings from the HE sector beginning with a 13 percent budget cut to the funding council in 1981/2. Attacks on curricula for their bias against business and enterprise, the setting of targets to encourage certain disciplines and discourage others, the renaming and reshaping of the research councils, increasing pressure to recruit full-cost (often overseas) students and the appointment of business executives on governing bodies all continued the general marketizing thrust through the 1980s. Perhaps most significantly, lifetime tenure for new academics was removed by legislation in 1988. At the same time, a system of finance following students was introduced, which was revised to become an expansion-oriented quasi-market bidding process from 1990.

Following a hard managerialist White Paper in 1991, university status was granted to the majority of non-university higher education in 1992, more than doubling the number of suppliers. Not only were these new suppliers cheaper than their established counterparts, their sheer variety and divergence of interests also ensured that any attempt at a cartel would be very difficult to engineer. The Prime Minister's avowed determination to see one-third of 18-year-olds in HE by the year 2000 provided the populist gloss for continued state pressure. The new universities took up the challenge even more enthusiastically than the most ardent marketeer might have hoped and in 1993, amidst a public spending crisis, expansion was reined in with the funding council almost entirely reverting to a system of block grants. The engineered hidden hand having achieved its aims for student numbers and teaching costs (though trimesterization is still a possible development), more attention has recently been focused on research activity. The White Paper on Science and the new Research Council mission statements firmly place economic relevance for national performance at the heart of funded enquiry. In sum, since 1979 the structural contexts of university teaching and research have undergone change at phenomenal speed.

In terms of our broad argument, successive changes in the character of the funding councils are major indicators of the changes leading to a rationalized NHE, marking the steady transition from relative autonomy to centralized direction. The driving principle would seem to be ensuring that HE played its part in state capitalism—that it became more 'business-like' (see Puxty et al., 1994; Willmott, 1994). At one time, the University Grants Council existed as a 'buffer' organization between state and universities, keeping the former at arm's length while also accepting its largesse. The removal of this buffer opened up the universities to the demands of the state and various state-operated quasi-markets. Moves



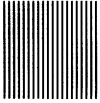
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away from the block grant and a separation of teaching and research funding allowed greater centralized control of the operations of both. National and institutional academic oligarchy was overturned and power given to increasingly policy-driven government departments. As Wragg puts it, the current situation is 'not so much a buffer, more a conduit' (1994: 10).

Running parallel with, and supportive of, the development of these new structures and policies has been the development of 'New Right' thinking on university reform. In broad terms, the 1960s faith in the universities to supply qualified and contented graduates who would find room at the top was severely dented by student radicalism in the late 1960s. Academics became increasingly portrayed as out of touch, privileged inhabitants of ivory towers. The image of the eccentric, but valuable, boffin gave way to the devious and dangerous 'History Man', and the university the bastion of parochialism rather than the cutting edge of the intellect. This movement was given much of its intellectual justification by a series of right-wing think-tank publications. Griffiths and Murray (1985) argued that the universities were a government-sponsored and protected cartel which would benefit from opening to the market. Kedourie (1991) suggested that the universities needed *perestroika*, freedom from bureaucratic constraint. Hague (1991), the ex-Chair of the ESRC, argued that universities must be seen as but one part of the expanding knowledge industries. New technology, new organizational forms and the post-industrial economy would break open the historical monopoly they held over knowledge production and dissemination. Universities must compete, innovate and cooperate with other parts of the information economy or face marginalization. Innovative curricula, delivery, target customers and accreditation were essential coping strategies but, most importantly, economic relevance to the goals of capitalism itself. This 'bias against business' accusation combined both the legitimation of wealth creation as an activity and the assertion that relevant research was being done in the private sector (*Economist*, 1993). Quite simply, British universities were no longer the best in the world but instead a handicap to the attainment of national excellence.

At this point it is important to note that, despite our disagreements with Hague et al., from an international perspective many of the changes now occurring do appear inescapable. The expansion and opening up of the system which moves us from elite to mass provision is paralleled in many other nations. Trow (1970), Clark (1983), and with rather different emphasis, Teichler (1980, 1988) and Sanyal (1985) have written perceptively on the origins and implications of global mass HE. However, as pointed out by numerous commentators (e.g. Burgess, 1972; Becher and Kogan, 1992), extreme caution, or outright failure, to respond to new demands has been a weakness of UK HE that has inhibited progress in many areas, not simply those that make up the relatively narrow agenda of recent governments. Because of this, we feel it is not enough to say that all change is bad and that



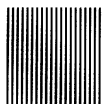
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reversion to older assumptions is the answer. Not only would this be strategically pointless, because the NHE is already well established, it would also fail to deal with justifiable criticisms about the elitism of HE provision and the use and abuse of taxpayers' money. On the other hand, the term 'mass' should not disguise the fact that HE still has a substantial bias towards the middle classes. Putting it another way, HE's role in servicing and legitimizing capitalist organizations and state makes any simple assumptions about more *always* being better very problematic (Puxty et al., 1994; Willmott, 1994). Taking into account both positive and negative features of recent changes will hence be important in the conclusions we present but, having provided this broad context, we now turn to investigate some of its consequences for university organization.

The McUniversity

As stated, it is the implications of the NHE for organizations and their members on which we most wish to focus. The 1985 Jarratt Report on university management consolidated the pressure for change by suggesting the centralization of executive control, the linkage between budgetary and academic considerations and the decentralization of accountable budgets to the lowest level. Our ideal-type 1990s UK university hence exhibits greater managerial power, structural centralization, substantial growth of organization size, rising student–staff ratios, more emphasis on marketing and business generation and the rationalization and computerization of administrative structures. To re-emphasize, the Weberian standardization of tasks is the unifying theme here—what Ritzer calls the 'McDonaldization' of society (1993). As has been suggested many times in organization theory, members with high task variety and decision-making autonomy are not easily monitored and controlled. NHE change is hence necessarily predicated on weakening professional control structures in order to intensify professional labour.

These developments have been underpinned by an importation of management theory. Ideas, often fairly antiquated, rooted in 1970s organizational development are deployed to emphasize the importance of managing culture, producing mission/vision statements and developing 'learning organizations' committed to 'total quality' (Brown and Sommerlad, 1992). Douglas Hague (1991) refers to the pursuit of 'excellence' and 'sticking to the knitting', phrases borrowed from Peters and Waterman's (1982) highly influential business guru text. These ideas are used both to enhance the importance of management as a process within the institution and also to legitimate the activities of particular members—executives, directors and so on—as key decision-makers. As with other UK public sector organizations, the dull but worthy 'administrator' who supported the professional becomes the dynamic leader-manager who directs and inspires other professionals. At the same time, the language of 'line managers', 'customers' and 'products' begins to displace the aca-



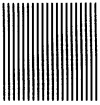
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democratic language of deans, students and courses, and in some cases ('markets' for example) introduces ideas that were not previously used at all. The irony of deploying organization development ideas that were intended to oppose bureaucratic forms of organization to support bureaucratization appears not to be noted, and neither does that of professionalizing management to weaken other professions.

As Trow (1993) argues, this 'hard managerialism' is premised on the idea that systematic changes to institutional processes will, *in themselves*, bring about improvements in what the university does. Like a Skinnerian behaviour modification programme, the assumption is that desired practices need to be encouraged through visible and bureaucratically administered rewards and punishments. Hence the talk is of 'treating dons like employees rather than gentlemen-scholars' (*Economist*, 1993: 56) by introducing and refining control mechanisms such as PRP, staff appraisal, the research active/inactive distinction and shifts to 'local bargaining'. Outmoded practices or poor performers can be made visible, discredited and replaced. At the same time increased bureaucracy becomes necessary to cope with both the standardization of tasks and the proliferation of control, audit, monitoring and reporting functions that carry out the tasks previously undertaken by academics themselves. Accounting, as the dual process of counting and being forced to give an account of activity, is central to this process (Power, 1994; Puxty et al., 1994). 'Quality' then becomes a property (or more correctly, a label) bestowed by others, and not one that an individual or professional group can make autonomous decisions about. Importantly, it is also a labelling process that stresses the comparability of units—lecturers, departments, disciplines, institutions—and may hence serve to further 'de-differentiate' them (Lash, 1990). The departmental 'style' of a particular discipline is likely to be weakened and the distinctiveness of subject areas themselves may come under increasing attrition as it becomes impossible to disentangle sociology, organizational behaviour, cultural studies or cultural geography for the purposes of teaching or research assessment. In other words, if all operations are subject to the same control processes then it is possible that they will begin to be the same. After all, special cases are not acceptable within organizational structures that act without hatred or passion. This could also be seen as increasing stress on the 'performativity' (Lyotard, 1984; see Miller, 1991)—or in NHE-speak 'transferability'—of the knowledges that academics produce. Willmott (1994) refers to this as an increasing stress on exchange value rather than use value. Though this is a distinction that is ultimately hard to sustain, it does capture something of the flavour of the 'commodification' of the products of academic labour. If the knowledge is not perceived as useful for students' performance in a credentialized labour market or the academics' performance in an assessed research market, then it must be of no use at all.

The current interest in validating the validators, monitoring the monitors and training the trainers illustrates the importance of this new regime



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of surveillance. The secrets of the collegiate clan are being opened for legal-rational scrutiny and management decisions about the allocation of scarce resources. Some institutions will concentrate their surveillance on research, others on administration, yet others on teaching. In any of the three cases these activities will be structured by external pressures—the teaching-quality assessment, quality audit, BS5750, Investors in People, research assessment exercise, research councils' intervention in theses submission rates, in taught components on research degrees and in deciding what is fundable research. At an institutional level these forms of scrutiny will hence be translated into committee structures and audit technologies to ensure that goals are being met. 'Quality' research, like 'quality' teaching and administration, will require bureaucratized regimes of surveillance to ensure that it is achieved, labelled and rewarded.

Two of the most telling indicators of the character of the NHE are modularization and the increasing casualization of the academic labour force. To take modularization first, offering students choice and customized degrees is rooted in ideas of 'flexibility' within the NHE. It is very difficult to argue against consumer choice because it is a rhetorical device that contains within it liberal assumptions about the 'freely acting' individual selecting goods from a marketplace. Yet, in terms of the analysis we are putting forward here, there are two problems with such notions. The first is the use of the consumer/student as a surrogate surveillance device. If the buyer gets a product that is not fit for the purpose for which it was sold then they will inform the producer and the product will be modified or withdrawn from sale. That may be a viable argument if the pages fall out of the textbook but becomes less convincing if the consumer/student simply does not agree with what the textbook argues. For all HE to be acceptable under the terms of a putative sale of ideas act is to mitigate against a course that might not be intellectually comfortable for the student. The second problem is that the buyer may not have complete knowledge. What is not on offer (difficult courses, small seminars, well-equipped accommodation, motivated staff) will no longer be a choice. In other words, if there are only textbooks in the library students will not miss journals. Combining both arguments, modularity can be used to drive down direct costs and increase surveillance. The fact that it increases indirect costs through greater bureaucratization is rarely noted. Adding to this, the flexible just-in-time availability of modules and awards is only one aspect of the flexibility that modularity makes available. In future it may also become a vehicle for dismantling the distinction between the full-time and the part-time students, and ending the linkage which at present exists—though clearly already under attrition—between full-time status and mandatory entitlement to state support.

Another feature of the NHE is the casualization of much academic labour through the increasing use of part-timers, postgraduates, tutorial assistants, franchised FE and overseas colleges. This clearly reflects a



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move towards the core and periphery arrangements supposedly characteristic of flexible firms which are recommended by Hague (1991). Wilson notes that there was a doubling of academic staff on short-term contracts between 1980 and 1991 and a trebling of part-time staff (1991: 254). He also suggests that there is evidence that the periphery is disproportionately female. Again, these are devices that can effectively increase control through making elements of labour supply available on a just-in-time basis. Peripheral, or for Willmott (1994) 'underclass', labourers are likely to be more amenable to direct instruction because their employment position is insecure. They are likely to accept less pay for more work and to work with less favourable conditions on the assumption that this will eventually guarantee them a position within the core. They also require that low-status members of the core turn into proxy managers, spending time administering and mentoring courses on which these staff teach. Whether many of these employees will ever become members of the core now that HE expansion has been halted is a moot point but, as with most neoliberal arguments, if the alternative is unemployment then no real alternative exists.

To summarize this section: It seems to us that the NHE is characterized by an increasing variety of formal control systems with management, as function and personnel, at their centre (or apex). Once it could be argued that the university was a loose mediating arrangement between government funding and academic labour with largely implicit controls. At the time of writing, it is less convincing to talk about a university as a community of scholars; perhaps instead it is a legally constituted web of corporate surveillance mechanisms. The search for excellence, for a corporate culture, for total quality management is the search for a way to regulate the labour of academics and other employees. The de-mystification of the academic's world is well underway and it is to this we turn in the next section.

Work and Self-identity

The third level which we now want to address is the subjectivity of the academics themselves. The popular stereotype of the academic is as a member of the leisured class—tenured, eccentric, individualist and able to pursue their arcane teaching and research interests without external constraint. Dissemination, speed, accountability, relevance are supposedly unimportant or secondary within 'a value system that transcends the enterprise and is deeply rooted in notions of professionalism, academic standards and collegiality' (Wilson, 1991: 257). As Hickey et al. (1990) put it, few academics have traditionally been attracted to HE for the salary. Historically, then, academics have been self-disciplined and driven by peer reputation rather than subject to forms of explicit discipline of the kind that are now being introduced. As Bilham suggests, previously this meant that 'most academic staff have concerned themselves little with the uni-

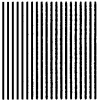


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versity as organisational form . . . it was simply the backdrop of legality and resource management in front of which the educational and intellectual action took place' (quoted in Brown and Sommerlad, 1992: 183). This may have been sustainable in a context in which the authority of disciplinary departments was paramount and teaching was very largely done on a customized tutorial basis. However, the rise of large-scale core and option courses, routinized lectures and seminars, and most recently modularization and research exercises has made the academic labour process much more transparent. It is no longer possible to view the university as a legal backdrop because the NHE is increasingly attempting to ensure that internal motivations become external and hence manipulable (see Trow, 1993).

In material terms, academic labour has certainly become subject to new pressures. More competition to publish, more teaching, more administration combined with less personalized relationships with students are common experiences and a source of demoralization for many. New contracts regulate research time, holidays, presence at the workplace, consultancy income and teaching hourage. General conditions are simply objectively worse—the decade after 1980 saw a 25 percent rise in student load, 37 percent decline in pay and 22 percent less spent on libraries (Miller, 1991; Wilson, 1991). It is this that has led many commentators to argue that the academic guild has been deprofessionalized (Trow, 1993: 15) or even proletarianized (Wilson, 1991; Halsey, 1992). Low trust relations, adversarial management, taller hierarchies, greater management power, less responsible autonomy all broadly confirm Braverman's hypothesis about the 'middle layers' of employment (1974: 403). At the same time, however, this is too simple an assertion. The epithet 'professional' is not merely an occupational category but a valued self-identity that implies both commitment and skill. It is one that will not easily be given up and which has clear consequences for work-based behaviour. As Willmott (1994) notes, it is also increasingly a discursive strategy for managers to suggest 'we know you won't let us down' when they propose the latest form of work intensification. It is precisely this 'professionalism' that ensures that staff will continue to do their best in worsening circumstances and make withdrawal of labour, union militancy and so on difficult to organize (Hickey et al., 1990). Though academics are increasingly anti-conservative in their politics, they 'are not a class. They are a loosely knit array of overlapping hierarchical status groups seeking honour and reputation mainly from each other' (Halsey, 1992: 256).

The problems of the professional working in a large organization have been recognized at least since Merton's 1945 essay on the intellectual in the bureaucracy (Merton, 1968b). In this sense, the professional academic does not necessarily want to please their management because they gain status from their relationships with their students and other academics inside and outside their organization. It is a powerful argument, and as noted, it probably begins to explain why universities still function at all when their resource base has been cut so badly. That being said, it seems



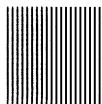
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to us that 'professionalism' is an increasingly unconvincing justification for many academics to carry on working in universities. Instead we suggest that the new academic, like the NHE, begins to become more instrumental and rationalized. No longer should teaching, administration and research be seen as complementary and inseparable activities. No longer is a fascination with 'the discipline' a satisfactory legitimation for a scholarly life. The new academic becomes an organization person, someone dedicated to a 'career' with certain progressions and rewards, and someone who knows their (and others') quality ratings. Willmott's (1994) example of the circulation of staff publication data to all members of a department exemplifies this process. Knowledge, about self and others, intensifies visibility and hence comparison. Foucault's (1977) description of the panopticon fits well with our Weberian theme here. If those under surveillance know the right responses to gain reward they will provide them—calculate what needs to be done and do it. Multiple authorships, self-citation, dividing one paper into many are all responses to such pressures. The panopticon is a behavioural device, but it is also one that relies on discipline being internalized because the subject must be available for surveillance at any time. Departmental guides to the conferences, journals and publishers that are worth concentrating effort on further standardize the exchange value of the ideas and words that academics produce. 'Research' turns into so many publications or citations and 'teaching' into the development of programmes which process larger and larger numbers of students cheaply. Public policy interventions, journalism, paper refereeing, collegiality, having an open door to students—any activity not measured—becomes less attractive because it is not the subject of scrutiny.

The logical outcome of this kind of NHE rationalization is positively evaluated by Hague (1991)—the teacher becomes an 'educational consultant' who assists students in their programmes of learning, the researcher concentrates on producing as many (economically relevant) publications as possible and the administrator becomes a charismatic leader-manager. Each task is separated from the other, analysed for its costs and benefits to the institution and controlled by the forms of audit covered in the previous section. As with Lyotard's (1984) formulation of 'performativity', the increased operational output of the organization becomes its own rationale and legitimation. The disenchantment of the academic McUniversity is complete, the means have obscured the ends and the institution becomes an effective iron cage populated by Weber's cogs in the machine, specialists without vision and sensualists without heart (Weber, 1948: 228).

Again, to stress the point, there will be huge differences between old and new university staff, between new blood and established staff, between women and men, and so on, but in general we suggest that these pressures will change the way that most academics think about themselves and their role. To borrow some ideas from Merton again (1968a:



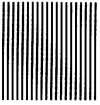
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194), it seems possible to argue that there might be three major categories of 'individual adaptation' to the NHE—conformity, ritualism and retreatism. The new higher and middle management are encouraged to identify with corporate goals by being paid higher salaries, removed from the chalkface, separated from national bargaining, and so on. For this older group, academic professional values become a *problem* because they can interfere with the management task of making rational decisions about resource allocation. At the same time, this group is given greater 'responsibility' and encouraged to behave as dynamic leaders. This seduces some successful academics but also—perhaps more especially—it may be attractive to those who have not achieved professional respectability and hence might find this alternative route to power and preferment particularly attractive. Thus what is problematic for some about the NHE is a major source of opportunity for others. On the other hand, older less published academics may come under increasing pressure from younger conformists and managers. Some of the former may retreat into quietism, be pressured to resign or take early retirement, but an alternative response is to engage, or be seen to engage, in ritualistic and short-term research, simply to bring in grants or improve ratings. Managing appearances will be a fruitful strategy if it is only appearances that get measured. In sum, in all but the retreatist case, the means becomes more important than the ends and the 'career' subsumes the vocation.

The gendered implications of this process are also important to recognize. As is being increasingly noted (Savage and Witz, 1992), the bureaucratic separation between public and private and the foregrounding of dispassionate action are also reflective of ideas about a male career serviced by women in the home and in subordinated positions in the workplace. As Adrienne Rich (1992) notes, the valorization of academic work is also itself based on usually implicit assumptions about what this work is for, why it is important and how it should be disseminated. These assumptions often rely on a separation of theory and practice—scholarship and the everyday world. It seems possible, therefore, to argue that the McUniversity may also be a highly masculine form of organization in which aggressive and competitive behaviours are rewarded over cooperation and pastoral care. The NHE manager or academic may not, of course, be male but the organizational form within which they work could still reflect masculine values.

It is important to understand that academics' responses to the NHE are themselves one of the ways in which the NHE is being produced. As already stated, our three-layer division is an ordering device, and we would insist that there is continual interpenetration of, and dialectic between, the layers themselves. Hence, for our argument it is essential to understand that subjectivity is produced by, and produces, broader patterns of constraint. As Knights and Willmott put it, subjectivity is:

... a product of disciplinary mechanism, techniques of surveillance and power-



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knowledge strategies. . . . Through processes of individualisation, the activation of autonomy is seen to become preoccupied with disciplining the self in ways that secure the recognition and confirmation of significant others. (1989: 554)

This Foucauldian line of argument applies to more than just the NHE, but it seems particularly useful as a way of understanding the effectivity of market-type control mechanisms. Careerism, ritualism, retreatism are all strategies that respond to, and hence further tighten, the effectivity of the surveillance mechanisms. The research active will be even more active whilst the others teach and manage more. On an institutional level, the teachers will increasingly be pressurized to work in teaching institutions and the researchers be concentrated in the equivalent of an 'ivy league'. The policing process, in itself, brings about the effects it seeks knowledge of. That this paper may well be entered in the next research exercise would seem an ironic example of this form of power.

In summary then, it seems to us that greater managerial control and an increasingly restricted sphere of academic professional autonomy will result in new forms of subjectivity amongst academics. No longer can they be assured of 'responsible autonomy' (Friedman, 1977) over their labour process, and neither can they assume that peer validation should take primacy over institutional validation. A move from elite specialization with strong professional controls towards a 'Fordist' mass production arrangement seems also a move from charisma and cultivation to expertise (Halsey, following Weber, 1992: 170). It seems ironic that these demands for flexibility end up as attempts to reduce the self-determination of professionals, to take away their autonomy and ensure that they follow the rules. But, just as importantly, the new academic subjectivity will respond to and reinforce the inexorable logic of these rules. Rather than self-consciously managing appearances, many academics may begin to construct a fetishism of rankings as a measure of the worth of self and other. As the mountain of publications, and the length of the CV, grows so will the conviction that this is the best way to organize and measure academic labour. No doubt this academic entrepreneur will be efficient—but efficient at what?

Dilemmas of Mass Higher Education

As Rustin (1992) remarks, in a particularly perceptive application of recent social theory to the NHE, the distinctiveness of the old university has traditionally been demarcated by architectural styles, calendars and rituals that symbolically represent its separation from everyday life. Within these times and spaces the academics exercised their freedom to think and teach as they wished—free from the interventions of the state, the capitalist or the mundanity of the nine to five. The young person (at a defined time in their life) was taken away from the domestic home to live in an enclosed community of scholars with its own rules for work, leisure, language and ceremony. To facilitate this, both the state and the capitalist



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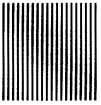
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supplied grants and bequests that would allow these spaces and times to continue being protected. Following Rustin, we would argue that this spatial and temporal boundedness has been declining since Robbins.

The new university has no defensible quadrangles; instead it has dilapidated modernist buildings (that could be any office block) spread across industrial cities. The new university is flexible in time and space. Many of its students may be part-time, from the local area and studying at other times in their lives. It has borrowed US models of semesterization and modularization, franchises courses to local colleges in other small towns and allows for transferability of its credits across Europe. It offers 2-year degrees, teaching in the evening and summer, and even distance learning totally unrelated to the spaces and times of the institution. It is so different from medieval Oxbridge that calling it a university at all seems to stretch the word beyond descriptive limits. What legitimacy or function does this new university have? Clearly there are historical aspects to this question. As far back as 1605 Francis Bacon was bemoaning the lack of funding and status given to universities (1891: 79). In 1951 Bruce Truscot felt the need to legitimate the redbricks as being as good as Oxbridge, and in 1968 Robinson described the new polytechnics as the 'people's universities' and hence entitled to 'parity of esteem'. The idea of a 'crisis' in the conception of the university is indexed in the title of at least three books over the last 40 years (Moberly, 1949; Scott, 1984; Reeves, 1988). Simply put, we may always be in danger of assuming that our moment is historically unique. It might also be added that new entrants might feel this uniqueness more sharply than their established counterparts. So do we seek to legitimate the new universities, and the idea of a modern university, whilst at the same time preserving scope for our criticisms of much of what currently happens within them.

That being said, it is now increasingly difficult to justify universities at all. There would be little mileage in attempting to claim that universities are the only places where intelligence is deployed when, for example, the expanding media, culture and knowledge industries provide so obvious a counter-example. The idea of a university as an institution that preserves the continuity of intellectual work must also be flawed if it is accepted that 'thought is incorporated into all social institutions: the family, the workplace, the church, the town hall are also bearers of intellectual continuity. Hence the university is in principle substitutable. It has a monopoly of nothing' (Halsey, 1992: 17). This problem is exacerbated in an age when, as Bauman suggests, intellectuals can no longer be legislators, merely commentators on things that they are no longer central to (1987). Simply put, in an age when the customer is king, what domain does the academic rule? In what terms can the university be justified?

Even if these are relatively abstract views, it seems fair to say that any form of resistance to the NHE can so easily be articulated as conservatism, as a nostalgia for the days when academics had credibility and could insist on certain exclusionary practices that legitimated an easier life. The



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increased, and understandable, pressure for economic relevance combined with an employment position more like everyone else's would seem to support the idea that 'status will depend on performance and it will have to be earned' (Hague, 1991: 81). Moreover, it will be earned within a system that no longer recognizes the putative uniqueness of an academic, a discipline or an institution and forces competition for consumers, between psychology and sociology, between the old university and the new university. The growth and decline of a product then becomes purely a function of its consumer attractiveness. Wernick (1991) and Fairclough (1993) have commented respectively on the promotional strategies and discursive changes that follow from this emphasis on competition. In economic terms, the monopoly of a strong group of producers becomes broken down into Marx's 'band of hostile brothers'—small units competing with other small units by claiming particular qualities for their products whilst the engineered hidden hand reduces direct costs. This 'marketization' of the external and internal contexts of HE is equivalent to the process that has been happening in most other public-sector organizations for the last 10 years—health, social services, local government and so on (Farnham and Horton, 1993). Doctors in the NHS, or producers in the BBC, make very similar criticisms of managerialism to those we have made here, professionals set themselves against the 'rationalizers' and claim special exemption.

We have no interest whatsoever in defending the pretensions of academic life—what Hague sardonically calls the 'grandness' that academics crave (1991: 71). Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* (1990) is, after all, not a very defensible creature. We acknowledge that academics should be monitored to ensure that they do not cancel classes, turn up drunk, abuse their students and so on, *but*:

... almost everything in a university depends on the inner motivations of teachers—their sense of pride, their intellectual involvement with their subjects, their professional commitments to the role of teacher, their love of students, or of learning. ... And these motivations are usually quite independent of unpredictable external assessments, and the remote incentives and punishments that can be attached to them. (Trow, 1993: 11)

In other words, we do wish to defend the institutionalization of free enquiry and the importance of academic autonomy for political and pedagogical reasons. It seems to us that Trow is right, commitment to a particular set of ideas is the starting-point for challenging teaching and research. This does not have to be teaching or research that students or colleagues find easy to digest, neither should it necessarily be assumed that managers in HE or elsewhere would or should approve of the things being taught or written about. Higher education should not only be about pleasing customers, but about giving them the intellectual resources to challenge established ways of doing things—however uncomfortable that may be for them and others. It is quite possible, after all, that the new



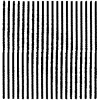
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instrumental academic will be paralleled by the new instrumental student. The subjectivity produced by the NHE for its customers could be one of doing no more than is necessary to gain the passport to the next activity, be it module, course or job. If university teachers want their students to be rather more active citizens than this, then surely they should lead by example. Our version of academic labour would be one that stresses independent thinking as the most important transferable skill. Other, more instrumental or vocational, bodies of knowledge should and will also be taught because universities must be economically relevant and not merely hideouts for those who do not wish to engage with problems outside the quadrangle. Yet even instrumental knowledges should be taught by people who stress that all these things are provisional. Unless, of course, there are really eternally right and wrong ways to do things—in which unlikely case even independent thought has no more to offer.

To re-emphasize our Weberian theme of rationalization: we acknowledge that there are elements to the NHE which are efficient in a narrow sense of that term. Wider access can be encouraged through using resources more intelligently, and academic self-interest is not always a convincing argument. Yet, formal modes of reasoning can all too easily subsume substantive ones. One of the consequences of rationalization is that debates about ends may become precluded. If processing large numbers of products (graduates, publications, cars, hamburgers) is the over-riding goal then questioning the means is difficult and questioning the ends almost heretical.

What Is to Be Done?

We do believe that there are strategies that might help the most objectionable features of the NHE to be resisted on behalf of a viable modernized version of the university. We should again stress that we are not simply suggesting a return to an earlier order: self-interested nostalgia is not our aim. Our strategies might be thought of in terms of the three layers of our model, though we will only sketch them briefly below. On a structural level it is clear that internationally—where mass systems of HE have been longer established—there exist many more kinds of university than an ethnocentric British perspective readily allows. ‘Mass’ higher education is far more than simply the product of new right social engineering. Some of these models might be utilized in providing alternative models of elite to mass transition. One element of this which is often ignored is the relationship of universities to their localities. Developing strong economic, cultural and political links with their local area would be a very viable way of developing both a ‘buffer’ against the national state and an interested constituency prepared to listen to the university’s case. At the institutional level, a retreat from managerialism and a return to academic government and academic administration, as



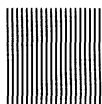
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well as flatter hierarchies, is possible and required. The proliferation of multiple audit and control devices is expensive in time and resources, and in many cases replicates already existing structures. At the subjective-professional level academics themselves should also consider their place in the NHE. Given increasing discontent there would seem to be no good reason why they should not act collectively to resist further imposition of the worst elements of the McUniversity. In addition, reflecting on one's own reasons for writing, teaching and so on can be the stimulus to other ideas about what an 'academic career' could and should involve. If Merton's (1968b) conformity, retreatism and ritualism seem the current dominant responses then we would suggest that rebellion and innovation (the other two in his typology) are preferable. All of our suggestions above are merely indicative, but whatever the immediate barriers may appear to be the important thing is to continue analytical and political work in activating alternatives.

In broad terms, what we feel is important is an enhancement of reflexive debates about the ends of higher education in the context of the idea of active citizenship. The characteristics and responsibilities of the HE citizen (student or staff) should not be assumed by state policy-makers but instead university education could become one of the terrains upon which debates about rights might be engaged in. Public-policy interventions should be just as important as multiple articles in unread journals. Management efficiency then becomes a means to release more resources for reflexive ends and not an end in itself. Clearly this goal requires changes in each of our three domains and more; in the way that governments, civil servants, university managers, academics, students and the general public think about the purposes of higher education. It also requires much greater clarity about the relationship between economic growth and higher education expansion—whether one is the means to ensure the ends of the other. We would suggest that both are important, but neither should be an end in itself. In sum, a wider 'constituency' needs to be developed that will listen to arguments about universities, if for no other reason than they do not have mass support, and hence politicians' votes, at present. Creating modernized but critically reflexive universities is a long-term and difficult task but seems to us well worth exploring if it is accepted that the NHE is politically, organizationally and pedagogically problematic.

To conclude then, many liberals and radicals would sponsor the idea that more students (standard and non-standard) should be encouraged to participate in university education and time, space and status entry barriers should hence be broken down. Yet, at the same time, there are legitimate worries about the impact that 'Fordist' degree production might have on the experiences of both students and staff. The NHE is in danger of becoming a fast-food outlet that sells only those ideas that its managers believe will sell, that treats its employees as if they were too devious or stupid to be trusted, and that values the formal rationality of the process



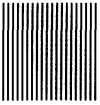
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over the substantive rationality of the end. It is certainly true that democratization requires the 'decline of donnish dominion', the disenchantment of academic magic (Halsey, 1992) but it does not require the systematic erasure of creativity and autonomy. Protecting 'quality' of student and staff experience and learning but also encouraging access requires much greater clarity about the aims and alternative forms of mass higher education and the 'choices' that students and staff are empowered to make about each other and the education process. We would suggest that, for academics, 'control is gained not by engineering responsible autonomy but by conceding it' (Wilson, 1991: 259). If academics are to be innovative and creative then they must be given the space to make mistakes, to judge each other and their students, and the resources to do all these things. The alternative is an NHE which is simply a self-justifying, but incredibly efficient machine—producing textbooks, paraphrasing them in lectures and then giving marks to those students who write them down as assessment. As Roy Wilky remarked 'poor Wittgenstein: only two short books in the whole of his career' (Anthony, 1994: 58). In the McUniversity, unmitigated rationalization and standardization could leave little space for any practices that do not fit within very narrow definitions of efficiency.

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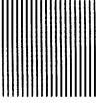
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