

**TITLE:**

**The Value of Quality: Capital, Class, and Quality Assessment in the  
Re-making of Higher Education in the United States, the United  
Kingdom, and Ontario**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the utility of quality assessment (QA) in higher education as a means of measuring and improving qualitative excellence. It also tracks the emergence and development of QA in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ontario. I find that QA neither measures nor helps to produce anything that could meaningfully be described as being of high “quality”. Rather, QA is effective in helping to reproduce commercially oriented but hardly ground-breaking research and a more “flexploitable” labour force.

The precursors to contemporary forms of QA first appeared in United States during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To serve the interests of a burgeoning capitalism, corporate America organized independently and under the aegis of the American state to develop and control a national system of higher education. To that end, the captains of industry developed an extensive program of measurement and evaluation as a basis to rationalize funding for university teaching and research. Over time, that system of measurement and assessment developed into what today appears as a massive network of procedures and metrics that aid in the reproduction of a stratified system of higher education that efficiently puts out the kinds of knowledge and workers that can in turn aid in the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism.

Since 1980, successive governments in both the United Kingdom and Ontario have developed systems of QA in the hope of reproducing the kinds of results achieved in America. QA has been seen as a way to install a price-type signaling system, and thereby a market, in what are subsidized and public systems of higher education. In other words, systems of QA were developed to evaluate the exchange-value of new knowledge and graduates within the context of neoliberal capitalism. Accordingly, QA makes it possible for firms and the state to rationalize funding in a manner that disciplines those within and around the university – increasingly by consent - to produce a particular form of value, namely that which can help corporations to secure larger profits, irrespective of the social, political, economic, or ecological consequences.

## **Dedication**

**To Jonah, who is ever true, well beyond measure.**

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## List of Abbreviations

AAUP.....	American Association of University Professors
ACE.....	American Council on Education
ALLS.....	Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
BIU.....	Basic Income Unit
CAUT.....	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CAW.....	Canadian Auto Workers
CBI.....	Confederation of British Industry
CCP.....	Committee on the Classification of Personnel
CEST.....	Committee on Education and Special Training
CFAT.....	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
CFS.....	Canadian Federation of Students
CHEA.....	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
CHEF.....	Corporate Higher Education Forum
CIHE.....	Comparative and International Higher Education / Council for Industry and Higher Education (UK)
CME.....	Coordinated Market Economy
COQA.....	Council of Quality Assurance (Ontario)
COU.....	Council of Ontario Universities
CVCP.....	Committee of Vice Chancellors and Provosts
DeSeCo.....	Definition and Selection of Competencies
DoD.....	Department of Defence
ETS.....	Educational Testing Service
FTA.....	Free Trade Agreement
GATT.....	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GEB.....	General Education Board
GRE.....	Graduate Record Exam
HEQC.....	Higher Education Quality Council (UK)
HEQCO.....	Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
HEFCE.....	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HCT.....	Human Capital Theory
INQAAHE.....	International Network of Quality Assessment Agencies in Higher Education
IALS.....	International Adult Literacy Survey
IPEDS.....	Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System
KPI.....	Key Performance Indicator
LME.....	Liberal Market Economy
MTA.....	Material Transfer Agreements
MTCU.....	Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (Ontario)

NACS.....	National Association of Corporation Schools
NCA.....	National Commission on Accreditation
NDP.....	New Democratic Party of Ontario
NEASC.....	New England Association of Schools and Colleges
NRC.....	National Research Council
NSF.....	National Science Foundation
NGT.....	New Growth Theory
NIH.....	National Institutes for Health
NSSE.....	National Survey of Student Engagement
NUS.....	National Union of Students
OCGS.....	Ontario Council for Graduate Studies
OCUA.....	Ontario Council of University Affairs
OCUFA.....	Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
OSAP.....	Ontario Student Assistance Program
PCFC.....	Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
PIAAC.....	Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PC.....	Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario
RAE/REF.....	Research Assessment Exercise / Research Excellence Framework
ROI.....	Return on Investment
SASCOC.....	Southern Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Colleges
SAT.....	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SATC.....	Student Army Training Corps
SDS.....	Students for a Democratic Society
SET.....	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SPEE.....	Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education
TRIPS.....	Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property
UCU.....	Universities and Colleges Union
UFC.....	University Funding Council
UGC.....	Universities Granting Council
UPRAC.....	Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee
UUDLE.....	University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations
UUK.....	Universities UK
QA.....	Quality Assessment
QAA.....	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)

Theory is always for someone and for some purpose.

–Robert Cox

The one point that I want to bring out clearly to you is that definite objective tests which define the type of ability which you wish to have developed are most valuable, not only to yourselves as employers in selecting your help, but also as your most powerful means of controlling what is done in the school.

-Charles Mann

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Whether it be to promote efficiency, social justice, or the creation of jobs and a knowledge based economy, the drive to assess and assure quality in higher education and research through some kind of bureaucratized audit/evaluation/ranking type process is now ubiquitous. Over the last 25 years, governments around the world have created new organizations tasked with the development and management of processes that allegedly testify to the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector “investments” in higher education. The growth of such organizations has been remarkable. Since its formation in 1991 the International Network of Quality Audit Agencies in Higher Education (“INQAAHE”) has expanded from a membership of just 8 to over 250 member organizations (INQAAHE 2013). A vast and ever-expanding literature dealing exclusively with the elaboration and management of “sound” and “effective” quality assessment (QA) processes has similarly developed over the last twenty years. Today that literature is a discernible sub-discipline of Comparative and International Higher Education with no fewer than three academic journals

dedicated to the subject.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to those who argue for the possibility of such “sound” and “effective” QA processes, I argue that QA holds little potential to deliver anything that could meaningfully be described as being of high “quality”. On the contrary, I argue that QA is effective in helping to reproduce both commercially oriented but hardly ground-breaking research, as well as a more pliant and flexible working class, the members of which are less and less able and inclined to question a pattern of accumulation that is linked to growing inequality. I further maintain that QA needs to be understood as more than just a mechanism of re-production, but as a means by which to constantly renegotiate capital, which I understand as a social relationship.

QA does this by breaking the academic enterprise into myriad discrete parts, each of which is measured and assigned a relative score or value on a scale that ultimately reflects the presumed superiority of units of research or methods of teaching that can either/both fetch higher prices at market and/or drive down the costs of producing such new research or sufficiently skilled graduates. In this way, QA attempts to effect the transformation of all of the constitutive parts of the contemporary university into quantifiable commodities and subjects them to measures that approximate the law of value. Though it is undoubtedly the case that different jurisdictions employ different systems and methods of QA and thus different evaluative criteria, it is not the case that such differences amount to

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<sup>1</sup> Quality in Higher Education; Quality Assurance in Education; Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management

clear qualitative differences in terms of the nature and kinds of research and teaching that QA encourages. Quite the contrary. QA encourages common forms: monopolizable forms of knowledge and readily transferable forms of skill. QA, in other words, recreates the ideological and material basis upon which capital can assert ownership and/or control over the commodities produced in the contemporary university.

In making this argument it is first necessary to recognize that, with the exception of America, where QA was pioneered, systems of QA have been rolled out by governments around the world since the 1980s and as an express means by which to increase the productive efficiency of the university (Hugh Willmott 1995, 1016). QA's emergence and development since the 1980s is linked, in other words, both directly and inextricably to the emergence and hegemony of neoliberal capitalism and the American state. In the Global North, neoliberalism has entailed a policy program that has effected the progressive redistribution of wealth upwards (Saez and Veall 2005; Fast 2013). In large part this has happened via government policy that has encouraged successive rounds of debt-based consumption and led to the dismantling and/or reform of the welfare state in ways that have left most workers more insecure and sensitive to things like interest rate increases and the investment decisions of huge corporations (McNally 2011; D. Harvey 2005; Langley 2008). Governments have undertaken such a policy program based on the now hegemonic idea that "markets", given the right forms of subsidy and support, are relatively more effective/efficient at

allocating scarce capital. Because of the superior efficiency of markets the proponents of neoliberal policy claim that only in a market-based order will the best and most skilled workers be able rise to the top, the most outstanding new products come to be produced in relatively efficient ways, and the best and most revealing new knowledge be produced and mobilized (Mirowski 2011, location 345–540; Hayek 1945)(Hayek 1945).

And so, where government programs were once either provided universally or on the basis of more nationalist and/or humanist principles, the neoliberal policy program has re-engineered them. Today government funding is linked to private-sector investment priorities, and therein to evaluations of what might be the “return on investment” (i.e. profitability) of different investment opportunities. As such, government spending has itself been re-cast as a form of investment, where the utility of spending is measured almost singularly in terms of economic growth (i.e. increasing rates of private-sector investment) (Altvater 2002; Fine and Jomo 2006). In this policy framework, institutions, like universities, which are dependent on government funding, have been, like workers, forced to bend. Either such institutions adjust to the priorities and machinations of the marketplace and the vagaries of private-sector investment, or their economic security is compromised (Panitch 1994; Sheila Slaughter and Leslie 1997).<sup>2</sup> In terms of higher education, QA effects this flexibility and reform

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<sup>2</sup> Borrowing from Cox (1987), Panitch (Panitch 1994, 69–71) argues that globalization has seen the internal re-organization of the capitalist state in response to the emergence of a new stage in and form of capitalist development and accumulation. Accordingly, ‘globalization’ was

by providing governments and private-sector “partners”, with a recursive and relative measure of value upon which to make funding-cum-investment decisions. Put still another way, by reducing the “output” of higher education to a set of prices, or quasi-prices<sup>3</sup>, QA provides an apparently rational basis upon which to make decisions concerning the allocation of resources. Indeed, QA provides a means via which all of the players in and around higher education can make the decision to “invest”. It is according to this logic that: students decide whether or not to invest in their higher education; both governments and private sector “partners” make decisions concerning the appropriate direction of research funding; departmental chairs allocate teaching and research responsibilities; individual researchers opt to pursue one or another research program.

The argument of this dissertation, is not, therefore that QA is *the* reason for the current state of the university, nor is it the only or arguably even the primary means by which the contemporary university has come to exist. But it has *helped* to create it, to reproduce the symbols and sensibilities necessary for the rationalization of funding as I have just described. In this regard, this

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linked with the hierarchical re-ordering of the capitalist state – all agencies were made subordinate to those bureaucratic centres (ministries of finance etc.) that were more attuned to the emergent global political economy. The instrumental and utilitarian logic according to which the university has been reformed, and which is laid-out in all manner of documents (ex. The Jaratt Report (1985)) is similarly related to this re-ordering of the capitalist state in the era of globalization.

<sup>3</sup> Most forms and mechanisms of QA do not produce prices as such, but rather hierarchical rankings – what I liken to “quasi-prices” – which are in turn transformed into in more strictly monetary terms.



dissertation demonstrates that however much QA provides an apparently rational basis for the allocation of funding, it is not productive of anything that can readily be described as being of high-quality. On the contrary, in providing a basis for the rationalization of funding, QA operates as a kind of veil, effectively hiding the fact that the contemporary university is, as Bill Readings put it, “in ruins” (Readings 1997). This process of obfuscation that QA affects is another side of the QA coin. Not only is QA about the rationalization of financial resources, it is also, and just as importantly, about the reproductive power that QA imbues by so rationalizing such financial resources.

In assigning relative values to the research and teaching “outputs” produced within systems of higher education, QA effects a disconnect between the qualitative aspects of those outputs, while simultaneously reproducing the notion that no such disconnect exists. Put differently, in equating exchange value with value, QA makes the actual utility of a commodity relevant only in so far as its exchange value is concerned. This is so because of both the aforementioned contention concerning the relative efficiency of markets and because QA encourages, indeed rewards, not just gross misconduct and willful blindness, but also - and far more frequently - the normalization of capitalist values. For example, and given the positive correlation between positive assessments and funding for either/both research and/or teaching, QA rewards actors (institutions, scholars, students) for producing positive assessments rather than actual quality. As David Simon’s character in *The Wire*, Roland Pryzbylewski

puts it, QA rewards those who, “juke the stats”.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, QA encourages researchers to ask certain types of questions and to abandon others. Research that is both patentable and commercially promising is accorded more space and funding such that researchers avoid research that cannot be used to profitable ends (Krimsky 2004). In other words, QA does not *necessarily* eliminate the possibility of qualitative excellence even though it does encourage “juking”, but it does eliminate the possibility that new knowledge will be non-monopolizable, and thus, widely and affordably available (Mirowski 2011, 307; Lexchin 1993). Of course, and as I indicated above, the frequency with which research results are manipulated, or “sliced” and “diced”, so as to make new knowledge appear more efficacious is startling, so much so, that it suggests that in fact there is a necessary, or at least a sufficient, relationship between ‘juking’, and other forms of misconduct, and QA (Schafer 2007; Spielmans, Biehn, and Sawrey 2010; Avord; Sismondo 2007; Lexchin 2004; Sox 2006; Cohen-Kohler 2007).

Indeed, this dissertation asserts a causative link between the output of so much junk science and moderately literate graduates and QA. During the very moment

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<sup>4</sup> This quotation is pulled from season 4 episode 9 of *The Wire*, “Know Your Place”. The exchange between Pryzbylewski, a former cop turned junior high-school teacher, and a colleague, takes place during a school meeting, where the faculty are being told about the school board’s various efforts to press standardized test scores higher. The exchange goes as follows:

***Roland 'Prezbo' Pryzbylewski***: I don't get it. All this so we score higher on the state tests? If we're teaching the kids the test questions, what is it assessing in them?

***Grace Sampson***: Nothing. It assesses us. The test scores go up, they can say the schools are improving. The scores stay down, they can't.

***Roland 'Prezbo' Pryzbylewski***: Juking the stats.

***Grace Sampson***: Excuse me?

***Roland 'Prezbo' Pryzbylewski***: Making robberies into larcenies. Making rapes disappear. You juke the stats, and majors become colonels. I've been here before.

***Grace Sampson***: Wherever you go, there you are.

when neoliberal theory has become “profoundly hegemonic”(Fast 2013), QA has emerged and developed as a means of increasing the productive efficiency of the contemporary university. The artifacts of QA testify not to the stellar nature of the contemporary university’s output but also, and at best, to its mediocrity. At the same time, QA clearly provides a rationale for the rationalization of government funding. If the qualitative value of the university’s outputs are disappointing, then the utility of QA must lie somewhere else, namely in the efficiency with which it supports the neoliberal program of accumulation in general.

Notably, most mainstream objections to this characterization of QA focus on one issue: the idea that QA has undermined the qualitative excellence of research and new knowledge. As evidence, scholars who take this position tend to rely upon the very measures and mechanisms that this dissertation draws into question (Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006a; Mowery and Ziedonis 2002).

Elsewhere, it is argued that, QA processes have been designed to avoid the pitfalls described above. Through, for example, the application of academically oriented standards or educator-owned/peer review assessment processes, excellence is allegedly assured (R. Brown 2004). Again, the facts tell another story.

In reviewing the full-slate of QA measures and mechanisms currently in vogue, as I do in this dissertation, one finds that the form of quality that QA processes seek to – and do – assess/assure is not of a particularly high standard. QA tends to verify the presence of, and thereby (re)create, an institutional form

within which semi-literate graduates and commercializable research can be turned out at an ever-lower unit cost and, just as crucially, with the support and consent of students, the academy, university administrators, government officials, and the public at large. In fact, the mechanisms and measures that underlie all QA processes are almost universally grounded in the same kind and form of logic as the neoliberal enterprise in general. Just as the neoliberals assume that, given appropriate corrections for things like informational asymmetries, prices will accurately reflect utility (Akerlof 1970; Stiglitz 2000), so is it assumed that student engagement correlates with “deep-learning” and that the use of bibliometric indices and data on patenting correlates with the elevation and publication of the most insightful, cutting edge knowledge (Carini, Kuh, and Klein 2006a; Squicciarini, Dernis, and Criscuolo 2013). But for the simple fact that an increasing proportion of graduates are neither illiterate nor highly literate (Statistics Canada and OECD 2005; American Institutes for Research et al. 2006), one could perhaps forgive those who support engagement based forms of QA for not testing in any meaningful way the accuracy of the presumed correlation between engagement and so-called “deep learning”. Likewise, but for the fact that as much as 30% of the scientific literature is estimated to have been ghost-authored (Sismondo 2007), and the fact that corporately co-sponsored drug trials tend to produce results indicating the efficacy of the drug under investigation more frequently than do drugs tested in publicly funded protocols (Lexchin 2003), one could also forgive the champions of peer review. But, so

glaring is the distance between the claims made by the proponents of QA and the facts on the ground that it is necessary to both question the entire enterprise, and also to wonder how it is anyone could even imagine arguing that QA aims to (re)produce qualitative excellence?

### **1.1 This Dissertation and the Extant Literature**

In mainstream circles, assessments of QA, both comparative and not, abound.<sup>5</sup> As I alluded to above, few assessments meaningfully address the question, “*What is quality in higher education?*” (D. M. Green 1994). When such a basic question is asked within the mainstream literature, the answers provided are rarely satisfying. Where quality is not equated to quantity, it is said to be the by-product of well-designed customer (student) satisfaction surveys or circumscribed forms of peer review or high-level audit processes that effectively “steer” higher education in what is presumed to be the “right” direction (Green 1994).<sup>6</sup> As such “quality” is, within the mainstream literature, actually left undefined, almost ineffable. It is as though, in an apparent effort to avoid too strict and confining a definition of the term, “quality” has been turned into QA, and therein to a process of evaluation and ranking that academics - and not

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the contents of the journal, *Quality in Higher Education*, see Harvey and Williams (2010a; 2010b)

<sup>6</sup> In the volume referenced above, Diana Green concludes: “The best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken” (D. M. Green 1994, 17).

government bean-counters – control.<sup>7</sup> In the context of neoliberalism, however, the ability to control the definition of either or both standards and evaluative procedures is of little consequence. Whether or not a teacher is terrifically engaging and/or effective at using learning-assistive technologies matters little when class sizes are pressed beyond a certain point. And however much publication counts in peer-reviewed journals may be pressed up by rationing remuneration, long-form, deeply introspective and truly ground-breaking work will always take time. More importantly, academics have hardly been immune to the effects of neoliberalism. Academics are not paragons of intellectual virtue who stand above and apart from the rest of society. On the contrary, academics have long been subject to the same reproductive forces that have made students into consumers and administrators into institutionally situated entrepreneurs (Newson and Buchbinder 1988).

In examining the mainstream literature on QA, one finds that it tends to be unconsciously reproductive of neoclassical and/or neoliberal nostrums concerning the purported efficiency of markets. This is because the mainstream literature tends to operate from an ontological and methodological perspective that emphasizes the importance of what are held to be institutionally rooted (and

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<sup>7</sup> To be fair, Harvey (1999; 1995; 2008), writing both alone and with others, talks about the development of a “quality culture” within which “continuous improvement” is undertaken in earnest and, more pointedly, outside the kind of pecuniary policies upon which QA is based. While it appears that Harvey is cognizant of the degree to which such a ‘culture’ is divorced from reality, he persists in arguing for the redefinition of QA processes such that they are effectively separated from the purse strings to which they have always been, and were intended to be tied.

determined) assessment procedures. Such mid-level or “meso-level” analyses provide no avenue via which to historically situate, contextualize, and thus explain the emergence of QA. Instead, different systems of QA are cast as the by-product of competition and compromise between sector “stakeholders”, each of which has a different conception of quality. The fact that QA always delivers some relative measure of quality (i.e. a price or quasi-price) irrespective of who it is that conducts or controls the assessment procedure, is neither raised nor problematized. In other words, mainstream analyses entirely ignore the relationship between the quantitative representation of academic outputs and the frequency with which such representations tie the university into a larger program of accumulation where private interests both dominate and are equated with the public good. Neo-classical and neoliberal nostrums that assert the relative efficiency of markets in the allocation of research dollars or government funding thus remain both central to mainstream policy and unquestioned. For those advocates not blind either to the theoretical underpinnings or effects of QA, arguments as to the superiority of the market and thus to a “marketplace of ideas” (Mirowski 2011, location 59) are themselves rooted in a set of foundational “parables” within which it is utterly impossible to locate a theoretically coherent notion of power (Samuelson 1962; Milonakis and Fine 2009). On the contrary, as with the mainstream literature on QA, power is evacuated from such analyses. Instead, outcomes are said to be determined via the interaction of so many

allegedly “rational actors” whose rational reflexes are so plain and automatic as to make them robot-like (Philip Mirowski 2002).

In more critically minded quarters, QA has been usefully described, documented, and linked with neoliberalism. Here, scholars have outlined how QA is tied-in with the emergence of new “interstitial organizations” that have amassed considerable power within the university and which aim to press forward the cause of “academic capitalism”(Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004). QA has also been linked with the development of a world market in higher education, with policy oriented approaches born of a miserably shallow theoretical perspective, and with revanchist neoliberal political and policy agendas (Marginson and Mollis 2001; Marginson 2004; Marginson and van der Wende 2007; Shore and Wright 1999; Altbach 1998; Arnove 1982; S. Klees 1991; Samoff and Bidemi 2004). QA has also been discussed as a kind of “performative” social technology that creates the incentive for those within the university to enforce the rules of a market-oriented neoliberalism (Power 2003; Shore and Wright 1999). And QA has been discussed as a kind of ideological lever that successive neoliberal governments in the UK have pressed upon in order to effect a fundamental shift of the cultural and/or theoretical norms within the university (Hugh Willmott 2003; Sandra Harley and Lee 1997). There have also been a number of studies that have focussed more pointedly on particular QA processes. For example, there are those which have dealt with the pioneering efforts of Thatcher’s government to restructure higher education via the UK’s



Research Assessment Exercise (Rolfe 2003; D. Smith 1986; Harley 2002; Elton 2000a). Others have dealt with the poverty of student evaluations of teaching (Platt 1993; Shevlin et al. 2000), with league tables and rankings exercises (Hazelkorn 2008; Altback 2006; Marginson and van der Wende 2007), with key performance indicators (Conlon 2004; Cave 2006), and with bibliometrics indices (Roy 1985; Winston 1999). Most critical contributions to the QA literature are not, however, focussed solely on the development, evolution, and effect of QA. On the contrary, notable contributions, such as Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) are more accurately situated in the relatively larger literature that is roundly critical of the commercialization of the university.

Included in the literature that has been critical of commercialization and the “neoliberalization” of the university are a number of works that are significant to the arguments advanced in this dissertation. For instance, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) like Slaughter and Rhodes (2004), provide an outline of the transformed economic, political and juridical environments within which the commercialization agenda has taken shape. They also highlight how the university, in responding to these transformations, has embedded the commercialization agenda ever more deeply within universities by giving rise to an increasingly powerful slate of internal bureaucracies that press and prod the academy into neoliberal shape. Newson and Buchbinder (1988) and Newson (Newson 1998a) demonstrate that in the remaking of the contemporary university according to the strictures of neoliberalism, academics have been front

and centre, at times consciously paving the way and, at other times, choosing oppositional tactics that have created unforeseen contradictions. Noble's (1977; 2002) outstanding histories of higher education in America and of digital education provide all-important links between past and present, thereby laying out the background to and antecedents of contemporary policy. In a similar vein, Sears' (2003) work, which does also discuss the advent of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) in Ontario's system of higher education, is perhaps more notable for its rich description of the transition to neoliberalism. Sears demonstrates that in "retooling the mind factory", the university was not placed under the thumb of capital, where it had not been before, but retooled in order to better fit within a reformed (neoliberal) capitalism. Klees (1991; 2002) has highlighted the need to not only understand the international dimensions of neoliberalism, higher education and the university, but has also pointed to the significance of economic theory in the shaping of higher education policy.

Polster (C. Polster 2001; C. Polster 2007; C. Polster 2003), in describing and tracking the effects of the transformation of intellectual property laws and the funding priorities of Canada's research funding councils, has lucidly demonstrated how neoliberal policy has re-framed and redirected the kind of research that university based researchers undertake. Krinsky (Krinsky 2004) has also usefully talked about the kind of "normative shift" that neoliberal policies have had in terms of University based research. Sismondo (Sismondo 2007; Sismondo 2009) has indispensably outlined the remarkable extent to

which corporate interests through both ghost authorship and “ghost management” of research publications have undermined the reliability of the science literature. Lexchin (2004; 2003) has also documented the deleterious effect of corporate funding in terms of the reliability of university research. Perhaps most comprehensively, Mirowski (2011) has tied together all of these loose ends, and, moreover, linked the commercialization of university-based research to Hayekian notions of market efficiency and ultimately to the production of ignorance.

Unfortunately, with some notable exceptions, many of which are listed above, the theorization of QA and of neoliberalism in such critical sectors has been less spectacular. Frequently, neoliberalism is only distinguished from capitalism in so far as the profit incentive is alleged to have become increasingly important in the organization of academic life and enquiry. As such, the university is cast as a site that, at one time, apparently factored less centrally than it now does in the reproduction of capitalism.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the contemporary university is conceived of as being under siege, most often by social forces outside

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<sup>8</sup> Though there are many other examples, I would highlight the work of Marginson and Rhoades (2002), Slaughter and Leslie (1997) and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) in making this claim. At the risk of painting with too broad a brush, the critical literature in higher education flirts with a variety of theoretical currents, from different, and in many cases divergent, critical schools, but it does not really engage steadfastly with any. Slaughter and Leslie, for example, draw from Foucault, Mann, and others, without really exploring the tensions in and between Marx and Weber, Marx and Foucault, and what those tensions might mean in terms of our understanding of and approach to issues around agency and structure. I have highlighted the work of Marginson, Rhoades, and Slaughter because they are among the most widely read and referenced bits of the critical literature. To the extent that there is a “cannon” within the critical fold, their works are most certainly a part of it.

of the university, but in some cases by social forces situated within it as well. In this way, the dense linkages between, for example, the university and early post-war capitalism are neither meaningfully dissected nor theoretically accessible. Similarly, the linkages between a thoroughly restructured capitalism (i.e. neoliberal capitalism) and the university are likewise not examined. In other words, the theoretical weakness of many critical accounts feeds back into an empirical analysis that does not pay sufficient attention to things like the re-emergence of global finance, which I argue has been key to governmental and popular support for “accountability” and thus QA. Also missed are the qualitative realities of the so-called “knowledge-based economy” and the Global North’s shift to a services rather than an industrially-based political economy.

This dissertation therefore is intended to be both additive to this critical literature, and also suggestive of some theoretical directions that might deepen and broaden the explanatory power of that literature. Thus, while this dissertation makes an original contribution, there are important theoretical efforts on which it builds. In fact, some scholarship has sought to bridge precisely the same gaps as I do in this dissertation. For example, De Angelis and Harvie (2009a) use a value theoretic to both describe and understand the nature and operation of QA in the UK. Glenn Rikowski (2001; 2002a) has also attempted to develop a value-theoretic as a means by which to understand “capitalist education” and to develop a “Marxist theory of education”. Though Rikowski does not talk specifically about QA, his work does address the way in

which the “special commodity” is produced, partly in response to industry’s expressions of demand, which he documents by way of reference to corporate QA processes. Hugh Willmott (1995) also uses a value-theoretic to outline the emergence of managerialism, and of QA in the UK. Subsequently, Willmott (2003) has offered a more focussed examination of the UK’s Research Assessment Exercise, again through a value-theoretic, albeit one that he spends decidedly less time in developing than in the 1995 piece referenced above. None of these works, however, provide a cross-national comparison of QA and its development, as I do below. Similarly, the links between neoclassical and neoliberal economics and QA, though ripe within these other analyses are not discussed systematically or in any great detail. Also, neither Rikowski nor Harvie and De Angelis link QA to the reproduction of mediocrity and a debased form of science and literacy, as I also do below.

This dissertation is not, however, only intended as a contribution to the critical literature in higher education. This dissertation also draws from, and attempts to add to, a rich tradition in Marxist political economy, and particularly that part of the Marxist literature which has sought to account for and theorize the emergence of neoliberalism and the pattern(s) of accumulation by which it is described (Gindin and Panitch 2012; Dumenil and Levy 2005; D. Harvey 2005; McNally 2012; Wood 2005).

There are several aspects of that literature to which this dissertation adds. One of the main axes of debate within contemporary Marxist circles has to do

with the role of the state, and therein of key states, in authoring the development of neoliberalism. At issue is not so much the fact of the state's central role in the development of neoliberal globalization. Rather, debate has centred on both the apparent pre-eminence of the American state in first constructing and then managing (on an on-going basis) contemporary global capitalism and on the durability of that arrangement. For some, the imperial ambition and position of the American state has been triangulated in respect of: the political ambitions of American power-brokers; a domestic bourgeoisie with a truly global reach and orientation; the need to manage a hierarchy of subordinate states; and, the need to secure the legal, political and economic foundations for global capitalist accumulation (Gindin and Panitch 2012). Seeing no immediate successor whose economic fate is not critically tied into the American imperium, Panitch and Gindin see no significant diminution of that imperium. For others, the one-time centrality of the American state and of American capitalism has given way to an economic order within which a transnational managerial ruling class itself holds the imperial centre (Robinson 2004). Underscored by the ability to rapidly invest/divest into or out of any jurisdiction, this ruling class is allegedly able to set the rhythms of accumulation to which every state must adjust. Elsewhere, it is argued that capital itself has become the "Empire" (Hardt and Negri 2000). Accordingly, the exigencies of capitalist accumulation compel ruling and working classes alike to perform (in different ways, to different effects) almost ceremoniously, in accordance to the exigencies of global capitalism. For still

others, neoliberal globalization is less about the dominance of the American state in the context of so many sub-ordinate capitalist states (McNally 2011; McNally 2008). Instead, neoliberal globalization is understood to be the by-product of competition and cooperation between the American imperial centre and multiple, but junior-imperial poles, all of which collectively share an interest in maintaining the foundations for capitalist accumulation in the global capitalist political economy.

This dissertation does not take-up these issues directly. However, there are important ways in which this dissertation nonetheless contributes to the debates just outlined. First, in examining the systems of QA that have developed in the US, the UK, and Ontario, I necessarily highlight the pioneering role played by American capital and the American state in the development of QA. At the same time, it is decidedly less clear that the American state was so active in the design and development of QA in either the UK or Ontario. On the contrary, governments in both the UK and Ontario appear to have undertaken QA as a means of adjusting their systems of higher education to the alleged realities of the new global economic order. That said, American firms, like, for instance, the Educational Testing Service, as well as American philanthropic organizations, like the Pew Charitable Trusts, continue to play important roles outside the US, if only as the suppliers of testing and assessment technologies. It is also of some significance that American firms launched the first of what became a veritable on-rush of private-sector efforts to rank universities and colleges both nationally

and around the world. Furthermore, it is at least notable that American “research intensive” universities have long dominated on that first, and every other subsequent, international ranking exercise. At a minimum, this dissertation suggests that QA effects the application of standards and values that benchmark against and seek to emulate American institutions as well as a program of accumulation that has not obviously weakened the power and centrality of the American state to, at minimum, dictate the juridical foundations for the global trade in intellectual property and human capital. In fact, if QA has not been consciously undertaken as an exercise in securing the “New American Century”, and this dissertation suggests that it has not been so undertaken, it is nonetheless the case that QA appears to reinforce/recreate patterns and processes that reproduce American centrality, if not American dominance.

Second, this dissertation adds some dimension to discussions about the centrality of global finance in the (re)making of neoliberalism. Despite vigorous debate within the Marxian literature over the precise nature of neoliberalism, there is more or less universal agreement concerning the significance of broader and deeper financial markets and their penetration into everyday life in the remaking of global capitalism after 1980. In fact, the obvious importance of finance to the neoliberal order has prompted Marxists to take-up more focused studies of global finance and the issue of “financialization”. Here the goal has been to understand the relationship between global flows of capital and the contours of the neoliberal order (Lapavitsas 2011; Bryan 2006). For current



purposes, the most relevant pieces of that literature come from thinkers such as Langley (2008), Krippner (2005), and Montgomerie (2007; 2006) who explore the relationship between global financial flows, patterns of securitization, consumer debt, and the realities of everyday life. In a similar vein, thinkers such as Pryke and du Gay (2007) and others, have begun to theorize the social construction of both financial markets and “homo-economicus”. In so doing, their work draws generously from Foucauldian, Gramscian and Regulation school currents to emphasize the significance of global finance and the financial form to new forms of “governmentality”. In turn, they argue that such forms of ‘governmentality’ have been fundamental to, among other things, the reform of public policy in the neoliberal era.

In highlighting the many links between neo-classical and neoliberal economics, higher education policy and QA, and the degree to which QA functions to commodify higher education, this dissertation tracks how global finance and neoliberal policy are densely related. Indeed, this dissertation suggests that the strict definition of financialization offered by Lapavitsas (2011), needs to be broadened. For Lapavitsas, financialization has involved three parallel processes:

...first, large non-financial corporations have reduced their reliance on bank loans and have acquired financial capacities; second, banks have expanded their mediating activities in financial markets as well as lending to households; third, households have become increasingly involved in the realm of finance both as debtors and as asset holders. (Lapavitsas 2011, 612)

Here Lapavitsas captures some of what can be linked with the transformation of higher education. As states have progressively withdrawn funding from higher education, universities and colleges have become increasingly large players in financial markets (Wolinsky 2009). Similarly, households have become players in financial markets, taking on billions in debt to finance ever-rising tuition fees. As with mortgage and credit card debt, student debt has been packaged into securities (asset backed securities) that are cycled over and over through global networks of finance (Kramer 2012). More than this, government programs like Canada's registered education savings programs (RESPs), and the US's "529s", in providing households with the option of saving for higher education through a tax-deferred investment vehicles, have similarly meant that households are more plugged into global finance than they were before. Myriad government and private-sector initiatives aimed at increasing the "financial literacy" of households has both helped to create what Harmes (2001) has called a, "mass investment culture". Indeed, in the US, the Federal Reserve has made numerous interventions at the secondary school level precisely so as to "educate" students about the world of global finance (Newstadt 2008).

As this dissertation makes clear, the normalization of global finance and the apparent realities of neoliberal capitalism has also happened via government policies that press public services, knowledge, and skill into the commodity - and thus the financial - form. In so doing, government policy extends the logic of global finance and investment to what emerge as new fields for accumulation and

new avenues of reproduction. Again, QA operates to create so many higher education “commodities” the “quality” or “utility” of which are putatively represented numerically, as prices or quasi-prices. Not only does QA therefore enable the outputs of higher education to be tied into international-cum-global circuits of capital, investment, and migration, and therein into flows that are at the very core of neoliberal capitalism, *it also effects the normalization of those processes*. Put differently, this dissertation suggests that measurement via QA has been critical to the creation of identities and subjectivities that both reflect and preserve the pattern of accumulation that has described the neoliberal era. And yet, with but a few exceptions (ex. Leys 2001), Marxists have hardly touched on the issue of QA *in terms that relate the increasing ubiquity of such programs – both in and outside of higher education – to the transition to neoliberalism, the re-emergence of global finance, as well as to the nature and roots of the neoliberal capitalist state.*

## **1.2 A Word on Method**

In examining the systems of QA that have developed in three jurisdictions, the US, the UK, and Ontario, I demonstrate that despite significant institutional differences, those jurisdictions share a common program with effects that are broadly similar. In other words, procedural and/or institutional differences appear to matter less than does the substantive drift of such institutions towards a common set of policies and approaches. Though this fact would tend to render those analyses that fetishize institutional variation irrelevant, it hardly means

that institutional variation does not matter. On the contrary, the fact that the US, the UK, and Ontario have each pursued QA in different ways and at different times speaks to the need to embed our analyses of institutions in an historical approach that is sensitive to both the particularities of each jurisdiction and the socio-political and economic forces that nonetheless tie them together.

In aiming to tie together so many seemingly loose historical and institutional ends, this dissertation begins with the centrality of production-relations. I assert that the primacy of production in the determination of social, political, and economic outcomes, enables us to access, in an ontologically and epistemologically coherent manner, the primary motive forces and tendencies at play in each of the jurisdictions under investigation, namely those having to do with capitalism. This should not be taken to mean that I either employ or advocate for any kind of crudely structural account. On the contrary, in examining the expression of capitalist production relations as *tendencies*, I suggest that the particularities of time and place are utterly decisive to the manner in which such tendencies find expression. Thus, despite the fact that there are myriad and obvious indications that the political economies of each the US, the UK, and Ontario have developed along common, and what I assert are usefully described as *neoliberal* lines, such developments have been animated by myriad differences that require attention if we are to really understand their apparent convergence around a neoliberal pole.

This analysis is by no means exhaustive, and indeed has various limitations. Perhaps the most glaring limitation of this dissertation has to do with the relationship between the US system/model of QA and the advent of QA in both the UK and Ontario. While the apparent vigor and dynamism of the American system has played a fundamentally important role in other jurisdictions' drives to develop systems of what I argue are essentially price-type signaling systems (i.e. QA), this dissertation does little more than suggest what might have been the links between the American system and that in either/both the UK and Ontario. While I do certainly point to the influence of organizations like the Ford and Carnegie Foundations in acting as emissaries of American-style higher education around the world, I do not provide clear evidence that such was effective and/or even partially determinative of outcomes in either the UK or Ontario. Precisely the same could be said of the role played by organizations like the Educational Testing Service (ETS), or the Pew Charitable Trusts, or Thompson ISI, all private-sector organizations that have left the confines of the American higher education marketplace to become key players in higher education around the world. Also, though I discuss the role played by American economists in the process of "economics imperialism", which I argue has been key to reconfiguring the social-sciences in both the UK and Ontario so as to make them more amenable to QA, that role is something that deserves more attention and focus. And there is likewise no clear-cut evidence that rankings exercises, the first of which was pioneered in the US, by the **US News and World Report**,

effectively pressed other jurisdictions into action. Finally, I do not highlight to the extent that I might have, the degree to which the American model was actually at the forefront of policy-makers' minds when they set about addressing the apparent shortcomings of higher education in the UK and Ontario.

A second limitation of this study has to do with the circumscribed manner in which I deal with the methodological approaches taken-up and advocated for in the critical literature on higher education. While it remains my contention that the critical literature in and around higher education (considered as a whole) suffers from either/both the kind of a-historicism that describes the mainstream literature and/or too shallow an engagement with any one theoretical approach, such a description cannot be applied uniformly and without notable exceptions. I do of course make mention of some such exceptional examples of work that provides a more thorough-going engagement with critical theories and therein with Marxism, but there are still others. I would however suggest that where I have sought to provide a sustained focus on mainstream approaches to and analyses of higher education, a worthwhile task would be to take-up the same program in terms of critical approaches to higher education.

The third limitation has to do with my selection of cases. In a comparative study such as this, selection bias is almost unavoidable. There are, however, good reasons to suggest that a comparative study of QA could benefit from the inclusion of, if not several others, then, at minimum, New Zealand and Australia. Because both jurisdictions were relatively early adopters and practitioners of QA,

they provide important counterpoints to the British case, which I position as *the* key to understanding the post-1980 ubiquity of QA. That QA spread early and rapidly to two rich Commonwealth countries is significant, not least because it suggests lines of proliferation that are not explored in what follows.

### **1.3 Structure of the Argument**

This dissertation proceeds in three broad sections. In Chapter 2, I begin the first section with a thorough analysis of neo-classical and neo-liberal economics, the New Institutionalisms, and the other social-scientific theories that have been central to the development of mainstream approaches to higher education and QA. Aside from outlining the myriad deficiencies and obfuscations that one finds with such theories, my intent in this analysis is to highlight the centrality of Hayek's re-formulation of the central problematic of economics in the reform of higher education and the advent of QA. By redefining the central problematic of economics in terms of the mobilization and integration of knowledge in the allocation of scarce resources, Hayek laid the foundation for his conception of the market as an information-processing machine *par excellence*. Thus, Hayek pitted the hubris of self-interested bureaucrats and their five-year plans against the creative and destructive power of the market. Vacant any meaningful notion of power, but for that associated with some entirely unreal notion of 'the market', Hayek's theorization provided the perfect theoretical accomplice to the kind of right-wing populist narratives that became hegemonic from the late 1970s on, and therein an important counterpoint to

Keynesian/humanist arguments that allegedly entailed the never-ending expansion of the “nanny state”. As such, Hayek’s theorization of markets became the “common sense” and therein the basis for all contemporary mainstream approaches to higher education and QA. As such, QA is most fundamentally about the creation of price-type signalling systems – quasi-markets – that ostensibly empower ‘the market’ to filter between high- and low-quality research and graduates.

In Chapter 3 I add some empirical evidence to the theoretical analysis I provide in Chapter 2. In so doing I examine most of the contemporary modes and mechanisms of QA, all with an eye to testing the truth-claims made by those who advocate QA as an effective means of assessing the qualitative aspects of both research and students/graduates. In finding as I do, that the “outputs” of higher education are, at best, mediocre, and furthermore that QA does not effectively enable the qualitative assessment of such outputs, I suggest that the functional significance of QA lies elsewhere. Indeed, I argue that QA is effective at reproducing that which is functional to the neoliberal program of accumulation – flexible forms of human capital and monopolizable forms of new knowledge.

Chapter 4 marks both the beginning and the end of the second section of this dissertation. In that chapter I lay-out the theoretical approach that I take in seeking to understand the nature and significance of QA. To do this I first examine the theoretical lenses used by those critically minded scholars who have sought to study either/both QA or, more broadly, the remaking of higher



education through the era of neoliberalism. In finding much of that literature wanting, I draw heavily from contemporary Marxian political economy to lay-out, as much as is possible, how it is I believe insightful social *analysis* necessarily blends a keen sensitivity to history and contingency with a structural account of (neoliberal) capitalism. In following what I assert is a kind of immanent critique of QA (the first movement), I believe I avoid the pitfalls of crudely structural accounts of capitalism, which, like mainstream analyses, tend to read theory into history.

Chapters 5 through 7 collectively comprise the third section of this dissertation. In that section I examine QA *in situ* by looking in turn at the history and development of QA in each of my three major cases, the US, the UK, and Ontario. In Chapter 5, I outline the long history of QA in the United States. Although, “quality assessment” has not, as such, enjoyed a history in the US that is much longer than anywhere else, the history of measurement and assessment as a means of direction and reproduction is decidedly longer. At the start of the second industrial revolution, higher education in the US was made and/or remade “by design”, and therein according to the specifications of an emergent industrial managerial class (Noble 1977). Before the turn of the last century, America’s system of higher education was small. At the time, higher education was a means for the sons of upper class families to become educated in the classical mold. Disciplinary boundaries did not then exist, at least not in any approximation of the way in which the academy would be divided and subdivided

in the decades that followed. Students were thus exposed to both the natural and social sciences, which were also not so neatly divided. Metaphysics, philosophy, biology, chemistry, physics, were all densely interpolated as part of the undergraduate curriculum. With the emergence of huge agglomerations of industrial capital, however, things began to change. The first changes relevant to the issue at hand happened within the largest industrial firms. In an effort to develop and train a cadre of technically knowledgeable managers, industrial firms – led primarily by a network of engineers - formed in-house corporation schools within which the earliest forms of quality assessment took shape. Intended as systems of personnel management, the earliest precursors to standardized testing were devised as a means by which to assess and shape young engineers as they prepared for entrance into the managerial ranks of corporate America. At the same time, the same engineers undertook efforts to develop curricula for elementary and secondary schools that would perform the same function: shape both would-be workers and their would-be managers for life within what was then an emergent industrial capitalist powerhouse. With surprising speed, the practices and programs of the corporation schools were transposed to America's universities, which had begun to adapt to the new political economic landscape. At the same time, the professoriate began to organize, not so much in unions, but in associations that began to mark the disciplinary boundaries that describe the contemporary academy. Such associations quickly looked to establish their dominion over their respective

disciplines, and, in so doing, to provide a platform from which to “serve power” and obtain status (Noble 1977; E. Silva and Slaughter 1984).

Because a college or university education was initially only accessible to the wealthy in America, those who were subject to the early forms of QA, generally in the form of standardized testing, were seldom prevented from actually obtaining a degree. Rather, the tests functioned as a way to help determine at what managerial level and in what managerial role a given individual would be placed (Noble 1977). Through the 1930s and 40s this changed considerably. With the massification of American higher education in the immediate post-war moment, testing became an all-important filter that was intended to aid in efforts to reproduce an American meritocracy. To the extent that access to higher education was ever conceived of as a universal right, only America’s junior and community colleges were accessible without participating in the SAT. It was not any higher education that the masses could access during the “golden age” of American capitalism. Rather, the SAT supported a program of institutional “differentiation” which, to borrow the words of the one-time president of the Educational Testing Service, which owns and administers the SAT, the Test was a means by which to keep hope, “within reasonable bounds (ETS 1950 as quoted in; A. Nairn 1980, 4)”.

Though it was only in the 1980s that state and federal authorities began to more clearly articulate how it was the quality of university based research was to be evaluated, university-based researchers and their output had nonetheless

been subject to similar forms of quality evaluation since the 1920s, when the National Research Council was first formed (Noble 1977; Kravchuk and Schack 1996). Long before the development of more bureaucratized forms of management came into widespread use, corporate America organized under the state's umbrella to manage and channel funding to particular quadrants of America's research and development enterprise. When the state assumed fuller control of that managerial process, it developed an immense bureaucratic machinery dedicated to the evaluation of research. And although the state did – to a relatively limited extent – champion so-called “basic” research, as well as force researchers in both corporate and university based labs to place significant amounts of new knowledge into the commons, it did so as a kind of industrial policy by stealth.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it built-out the distinction between “basic” and “applied” research that was itself a convention of corporate America. (Mirowski 2011, 110)

The longstanding history of QA in the American system meant that with the arrival of neoliberalism, which grew out of the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s, there was already in-place a system of assessment that was ripe and ready to be tweaked and accentuated in the service of the new mode of accumulation.

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<sup>9</sup> As Mirowski (2011) outlines, the US Department of Defense (DoD), generously supported both university-based and private-sector research with an eye towards leveraging public dollars to support industrial development and growth. Though it is undoubtedly the case that the lion's share of DoD funded research was kept secret, it is also the case that the DoD forced huge amounts of new knowledge into the commons. In fact, DoD funds were tied to agreements that forced non-secret research to be made publicly available at no cost.

Whereas, until the 1980s QA had operated alongside and within dominant discourses concerning the appropriate role of the university, which was in turn tied to notions of citizenship and what Slaughter and Rhoades identify as a “public goods learning/knowledge regime”(Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004), QA was, in the 1980s, situated within what Ben Fine refers to as the “developmental market model”(Fine and Jomo 2006). Herein, the university was “retooled”(Sears 2003) within the context of an agenda that conflated the public good with economic growth and the untrammelled logic of the market. Arguably, because the American system had long operated according to the kind of instrumental logic associated with neoliberalism and with QA, the “neoliberalization” of America’s universities since 1980 has hardly kicked up much of a storm and has in fact found many avid supporters already active in the sector.<sup>10</sup>

In the UK, QA emerged shortly after the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Although there were clearly some antecedents, nothing so sophisticated and organized as what would develop under first Thatcher and then Blair are present in the much longer history of British higher education (R. Brown 2004).

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<sup>10</sup>I should qualify this statement. To be sure, the neoliberal drift of America’s colleges and universities has met with some opposition. But that opposition has failed to coalesce into any kind of powerful social movement. Indeed, since the 1960s and 1970s, when student activism crested, progressive social forces have appeared unable to even mildly mitigate the effects of revanchist and neoliberal policy. When contrasted against the very qualified success of, for example, the students’ movement in Ontario, which successfully lobbied for a temporary freeze to tuition-fees between 2003 and 2005, the “success” of American students in lobbying for a lower – but still relatively high – interest rate on federal student loans seems like an endorsement of the status-quo.

One of the reasons why this was the case has to do with the history of British capitalism, and the relative absence of an organized and cohesive capitalist block, at least until Thatcher arrived on-scene and placed British capital firmly under the thumb of finance capital (Leys 1985). Two other factors are relevant to the relatively late arrival of QA in the United Kingdom. First, the massification of higher education did not occur in Britain until comparatively late, and as such did not provide the same kind of socio-political economic opportunity for capital as did the universities in America. Second, the nature and depth of the British welfare state also forestalled any sizeable effort to corral the academy for the purposes of reproducing more flexible labour markets and thereby a particular program of accumulation. The massification of Britain's system of higher education was driven, at least initially, by a relatively more militant working class (Leys 1996; Leys 1986; Anderson 1987). Third, the traditions of academic enquiry in the UK also posed something of a challenge to the narrow and instrumental logic of Thatcher. Simply, the kind of instrumentalism and social scientism that had long dominated in the US were less visible in the UK (John A. Douglass 2003; Ryan 1998). Nonetheless, what emerged after 1980 in the UK was a system of QA that was then arguably unparalleled for its byzantine complexity. And so it remains today. As such, the UK's system of QA is a paragon of virtue much admired in jurisdictions, like Ontario, where higher education is, as is the case in the UK, also dominated by publicly funded universities and colleges.

Ontario's system of QA is of a still more recent vintage than is the case with the UK and most certainly the US. In Ontario, the instruments of QA are clearly the result of "policy borrowing" from other jurisdictions, particularly the US and the UK. Indeed, outside of program assessment, which emerged earlier on in the history of higher education in Ontario, things like Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have almost no history in the Province prior to the 1990s, when their arrival coincided with the election of first Third Way social democrats and then Thatcher-inspired neo-conservatives. But, "policy borrowing" hardly captures the process through which QA gained traction in Ontario. Nor does it explain the relative absence of measurement from the Province prior to the 1990s.

The relatively late arrival of QA to Ontario is related to a host of issues. As a branch-plant economy, Ontario's export-oriented manufacturers did little R&D in Canada. And as much as the Canadian state grew decidedly larger in the post-war era, such growth hardly bore the indelible marks of the Cold War like the American system. Therefore, although Ontario's universities were organizationally similar to their American and British counterparts they were far less involved in either corporate or military research than was the case in the US. Right up until the end of the post-war era, Ontario's government simply did not have the incentive to develop the apparatus necessary to evaluate and direct university R&D.

Because Ontario – and indeed the country as a whole – never really pursued the kind of aggressive developmental program as did other dependent, albeit less developed states, the consequences of Canada’s “staples” economy were difficult to ignore. As a result, the social sciences in Canada and in Ontario, given the history of branch-planting and Canada’s position as a rich dependency, were more sensitive to the nature of American-cum-global capitalism than were American counterparts, at least until the neoliberal era. Intellectual traditions like those associated with Macpherson and Innis mirrored the reality that workers and the government in Canada faced every day, namely the degree to which the fate of Ontario’s economic fortunes were rooted elsewhere. This translated into more than just a tolerance for a more nuanced and radical form of social scientific analysis, it also meant that Ontario’s labour movement remained militant and mobilized long after labour in America had been domesticated.

In fact, such militancy both slowed and outlasted the restructuring of Ontario’s political economy, which became increasingly dependent on both the provision of services and the vagaries of American finance through the 1980s and 1990s. Such militancy was undoubtedly aided by favourable exchange rates, which acted as temporary boon to Ontario’s manufacturing sector. Ontario’s ruling class was also not as organized as was the corporate power-bloc in the US or in the UK; while in the 1980s corporate Canada did organize politically and also rapidly divest itself of the kind of “Red Toryism” that had bank-rolled the massive expansion of Ontario’s university system, it was nonetheless somewhat



slower in arriving to the neoliberal party, only partly because of the opposition organized labour was able to mount. By the mid-1990s, however, the tide turned more definitively. First, in 1992, the Government, then controlled by the New Democrats, kowtowed to pressure from corporate Canada and delivered an austere budget (that cut up-front grants for university students, and raised tuition-fees), restricted bargaining rights, and ploughed additional funds into Ontario's then budding commercialization infrastructure. In 1995, Ontario's Progressive Conservatives carried the mantle of neoliberalism further still. On a platform that aped Thatcher's own brand of neoliberalism, the Progressive Conservative (PC) government pared-back government expenditures (and revenues) via waves of cuts that were described as Draconian. In terms of higher education, the PCs raised tuition-fees unremittingly, deregulated tuition-fees entirely for most professional programs, opened the door to private for-profit higher education, subjected the colleges to a regime of QA that signalled how the universities were to be managed, and further expanded the suite of programs that aimed to support the commercialization of university-based research (Cohen 2001; Herd 2002). But the PCs were largely unable to impose as thorough-going a restructuring of Ontario's university system as they had perhaps hoped. The PCs hardline approach to education and the public-sector in general, excited tensions between the government and public-sector workers and triggered the mass mobilization of organized labour. Of course, if the PCs did ultimately prove unable to completely overhaul Ontario's universities in the same way as Thatcher

had in the UK, they were nonetheless able to spur the sector in action on the QA front: it was during the tenure of the Harris/Eves Tories that the COU began expanding and extending its system of program review. Harris's far-right program also left the electorate hungry for a more palatable sounding alternative: the "roll-out neoliberalism" that has been associated with Ontario's Liberal Party, since it was elected in 2003 (Evans 2007).

Since then, Ontario's government has aggressively pushed the neoliberal program- and QA - with an unexpected adroitness. The Liberals have also benefitted from both the NDP's tenure in office, which eliminated the NDP as a credible left-wing alternative, and the subsequent split between organized labour and the NDP. In other words, where shrewd calculation has been lacking, the Liberals have benefitted by being the lesser of right-leaning evils. As a result, the Liberals were able to leverage the transient political commitments of former NDP Premier-cum-federal Liberal party leader, Bob Rae, to impose year-over-year tuition-fee increases well ahead of the rate of inflation since the 2006/2007 academic year. As well, the on-going and generous support for the commercialization of university-based research, which has fit seamlessly with the policy direction of successive federal governments, along with the periodic threat of direct forms of intervention in the management of the universities has enabled the provincial government to press the university sector into a predictable dance. Accordingly, sabre-rattling by the government leads to new self-regulatory QA efforts by the universities. Of course, less and less sabre-rattling is necessary, as

key segments of the universities in Ontario now avidly support the neoliberal program. Overtime, academics have acclimated to the competition for research funding and the programmatic conditions that effective competition requires (C. Polster 2007). And given that the fortunes of both individual departments and whole institutions increasingly relate to either/both their ability to put-out new, more pliant workers, and/or “useful”, “policy relevant” or commercializable research, university administrations have similarly become avid proponents of neoliberal policy.

#### **1.4 Prospects for quality in the neoliberal university**

The concluding chapter of this dissertation is, unfortunately, no less disheartening than what precedes it. Like Mirowski in his recent book, *Science-mart*, upon which sections of this dissertation rely heavily, it is inescapable that we consider the “production of ignorance” in wondering about the future of the neoliberal university and of QA within it (Mirowski 2011). While QA aids in the reproduction of a university system that is ever-more bankrupt and narrow, it does so in a manner that leaves the electorate either blind to or tolerant of such processes. Many of those who are central to the endeavor – the academics themselves – seem hardly aware of or concerned with the degradation of their profession, so long, that is, as they are not reduced to proletarian status. And where a large and growing number within the academy have already been so reduced, they currently face a level of precariousness that imposes its own disciplinary constraints. The force and forces of measurement make it difficult

for those who do not “measure-up” to both object and survive. Measurement thus becomes both Satan and Saviour.

QA therefore operates a kind of psychic fix, a “false want”, that satisfies and pacifies, if only temporarily. Viewed within the context of the march of commodification under neoliberalism and the centrality to that process of financialization, QA appears as a kind of perfected and hegemonic discourse. What better alternative to ranking and assessment is available that would enable, on the one hand, the on-going massification of the university, and, on the other hand, fill-in for the affirming effects of measurement?

Fortunately, hegemony is never absolute.

## **Chapter 2 – The Imperial Roots of Mainstream Education Policy: From Neo-classical, to Neoliberal, to Quality Assessment**

It has now become somewhat old hat for scholars on the left of the political spectrum to liken the neoliberal vision of higher education and the university to an industrial enterprise. The critical literature on higher education is replete with industrial type metaphors: “sausage factory”; “degree-mill”; and, “McUniversity” to name but a few (N. Smith 2000; Noble 2002; Parker and Jary 1995). Critical scholars have also been rather adept at dissecting much of what is an expansive and convoluted discourse within the mainstream of both policy-making and academic circles around higher education. Indeed, critical scholars have been adept at reading between the lines in order to demonstrate that mainstream rhetoric envisioning higher education as a means by which to instill students with a love of learning and an appreciation for liberal democracy is really concerned to ensure that the university serves as a fount of human capital “inputs” and research “outputs” all of which are available for purchase by well-heeled corporate interests at stable bargain basement prices (De Angelis and Harvie 2009a; Sears 2003; Sheila Slaughter and Leslie 1997).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is something of an open question, as to what the university might look like were it freed from the instrumental rationalities that have remade it into its current form. Outside of any utopian vision of the university, it is not difficult to imagine an institution that encourages freedom of thought in ways that do not happen today. The remaking of the university, for instance, might begin with efforts to re-establish recently lost traditions of collegial self-governance, or better yet, to build-upon such by including students in a far more meaningful manner than has ever been done before. The artificial separation between the university’s senate and its board of governors, in so far as such structures disingenuously split “academic matters” from those considered more

In fact, there was once a time when mainstream scholarship was itself somewhat less convoluted than it has become when it comes to outlining a vision for the modern neoliberal university. For instance, in its 1977 report of the Crisis of Democracy, the Trilateral Commission offered the following:

The 1960's saw a tremendous expansion in higher education throughout the Trilateral societies. This expansion was the product of increasing affluence, a demographic bulge in the college-age group, and the increasingly widespread assumption that the types of higher education open formerly in most societies (with the notable exception of the United States) only to a small elite group should "by right" be made available generally. The result of this expansion, however, can be the overproduction of people with university education in relation to the jobs available for them, the expenditure of substantial sums of scarce public monies and the imposition on the lower classes of taxes to pay for the free public education of the children of the middle and upper classes. The expansion of higher education can create frustrations and psychological hardships among university graduates who are unable to secure the types of jobs to which they believe their education entitles them, and it can also create frustrations and material hardships for nongraduates who are unable to secure jobs which were previously open to them...Should a college education be provided generally because of its possible relation to the constructive discharge of the responsibilities of citizenship? If this question is answered in the affirmative, a program is then necessary to lower the job expectations of those who receive a college education. If the question is answered in the negative, then higher educational institutions should be induced to redesign their programs so as to be geared to the patterns of economic development and future job opportunities. (Crozier et al. 1975, 184)

Less than a decade later, the landmark Jarratt Report, picked up more or less where the Trilateral Commission left off. Clearly concerned to gear universities

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mundanely "financial", would also help to rebuild badly needed democratic capacities that would be key to running an institution more committed to learning than to economic growth and labour market flexibility. Of course, such is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg: I have not touched-upon levels of resource support, faculty-to-student ratios, and the myriad other ways in which universities could be re-focussed around matters more germane to Marx's conception of an emancipated human.

to “the patterns of economic development and future job growth opportunities”, Jarratt recommended a sweeping series of changes: university Vice Chancellors and Provosts were to become Chief Executive Officers; faculty were to be subject to new forms of review and accountability; and various means were to be established so as to ensure that the university’s “clientele” (which does itself indicate a re-imagining of the university’s purpose) were well served, academic freedom be damned:

So far as the universities are concerned, we share their conviction that academic excellence is crucially dependent on academic freedom. But they should be on their guard against confusing freedom with license. Our recommendations are constructed as a package to provide the foundations of policy, resource allocation, delegated responsibility and accountability which must underpin academic judgments. Quite apart from the fact that it is in their own interests to use their resources to the best effect they have a duty to the general public. Only a minority of the population has benefited directly from a university education or can expect their children to do so, yet society as a whole contributes significantly to the cost of universities through taxation. Society needs to be assured that its money is spent to the satisfaction of the authorities which represent it and of the clients the universities serve directly. The requirements of these clients, industry and commerce, the local Education Authorities, the professions, the schools and, not least, present and prospective university students, are undergoing sweeping changes, as are the preoccupations of those authorities – the Government and the UGC – in response to the opportunities and the problems thrown up by social shifts and rapid technological advances. The universities need to show that they are making the appropriate adjustments to their outlook and priorities. (CVCP and Jarratt 1985, 31)

By the turn of the century, a prettier turn of phrase had become the norm, as had a tendency to equivocate along humanist lines. In his 2005 report on higher education in Ontario, the former premier and self-described practitioner of “third-way” social democracy had this to say about higher education:

People have a right to develop to their full potential. Learning is a value in itself. The capacity to be curious and reflective is what allows us to grow as individuals. To be moved by an eloquent passage or poem, to be relentlessly inventive in solving the riddles of natural science, to be learned and practised in a body of knowledge or a skill, to understand the time and discipline it takes to do something well: these are indispensable cultural values that need to be championed. To this we must add the practical fact that education, research and innovation lie at the heart of our economy. This is not new. Every society has relied for its survival on the transfer of skills and abilities from generation to generation. What is new is the level and breadth of knowledge and skill required to make our way in the world. The wealth of Ontario now depends much more on the power of our brains. Today our standard of living, and consequently our quality of life, depend on people having access to education that is on a par with the best in the world. (Rae 2005)

Whatever the rhetoric of love and learning, the “heart” of the programmatic agendas that devolve from such reports as these has been concern over, on the one hand, economic growth, and on the other hand, public expenditures on higher education and research. Such concern for driving economic growth is emblematic of another important sea change that factors very prominently in this dissertation. The sea change to which I am referring is that involving the decline and abandonment of reform liberalism and the ascendancy of neoliberalism (both in terms of theory and policy).

In this chapter I chart the theoretical development of mainstream – and hegemonic - higher education policy. In so doing, I argue that policy debates in and around higher education are based upon analyses that are derivative in that they are built upon ontological and methodological positions first staked out by neo-classical economists and which later found support both outside of the



mainstream in economics and within many other social scientific disciplines. I will also argue that most of the mainstream debates in and around higher education have taken-up the mantle of neoliberal theory unknowingly, sometimes in response to the dictates and demands of a transformed state, and, more frequently, because of the nature of Anglo-American traditions within the social sciences, which have long borne the mark of classical liberalism.<sup>12</sup> In the concluding section of this chapter I will turn again to the issue of quality assessment. Viewed within the context of neoliberal theory in and around higher education, quality assessment must be seen as both 1) an instrument designed to train rather than educate; 2) a necessary evil undertaken by administrators and educators concerned to preserve public funding; 3) an attempt by researchers and students to garner either more research funding or a better return on investment (ROI).

## **2.1 The Neoliberal Take on Higher Education**

In a way, Bob Rae, Ontario's former Premier, who charted, both as Premier and subsequently as a government appointed investigator reporting on higher education, a decidedly neo-liberal course for the Province, alluded to most if not all of the theoretical underpinnings of contemporary, hegemonic, theory

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<sup>12</sup> I discuss this in detail in Chapter 2. For present purposes, Classical Liberalism is described by an ontology that establishes firm theoretical and empirical boundaries between apparent spheres of activity; within each sphere of activity, historical events are explained deductively, generally with reference to some null-time, where actors' actions are explained as a by-product of rational self-interest.

and policy within and around higher education.<sup>13</sup> In writing his review of Ontario's post-secondary system, Rae outlines a policy agenda that is born of, on the one hand, a clear belief in the relative and potential efficiency of markets, and, on the other hand, a series of mild equivocations. Accordingly, markets are described as necessary but not perfect, and the state is therefore said to most appropriately be used as a means through which to deal with such market imperfections. Notably, Rae's Report begins as do many others like it, with the declaration that higher education is a "value in itself" (Rae 2005, 6). But this should not be taken to mean that Rae in any way questions or rejects the logic of the neoliberal policy paradigm. In fact, after simply asserting that education has an inherent value, Rae outlines why it is that Ontario's system needs to be reformed: higher education, he declares, is at the "heart" of Ontario's economy, and reform must be undertaken not so as to ensure a broad-based love of learning, or an informed citizenry, but as a competitive response to what is

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<sup>13</sup> This "decidedly neoliberal" course is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Following Peck and Tickell (2002), and for present purposes, I conceive of a 'decidedly neoliberal' policy program in two senses: 1) a program of cuts to social spending programs, like healthcare and education, and therein the general "roll-back" of the institutions and social services that are identified with the Keynesian Welfare State; and, 2) the imposition of new programs and a new regulatory agenda (which might involve substantial new spending by the state), that are designed to support the power of capital to make investment decisions in areas once closed off to the market (and thus to capital). Often, such programs will come equipped with means-tested supports for the most disenfranchised and insecure members of a population. At the same time, such support marks a move away from the principles of universality that were often associated with public expenditure during the era of the Keynesian Welfare State. For example, during his tenure as Premier of Ontario, Rae cut all up-front grants and bursaries to Ontario students and massively expanded Ontario's student loans program. While Rae argued – much as he still does - that such was necessary to weather a nasty global economic storm, his government also opted to continue to support the previous government's efforts to commercialize university based research. In fact, his government expanded the Ontario Centre's for Excellence program. (Peck and Tickell 2002)

happening in other jurisdictions. Indeed, the need for reform in Ontario, is being driven from outside Ontario:

The world is not standing still. Neither should Ontario. A commitment to change by the province, the Canadian government, students, faculty, the private sector and the wider public would send a clear signal that Ontario is a place that values higher education, research and innovation and wants to be a leader in North America and the world. It will be our competitive advantage. (Rae 2005, 7)

Rae also argues that higher education is, “important enough that we need to encourage students and parents to save and invest in it themselves” (Rae 2005, 7). Instead of high flying rhetoric about Ontario’s fate lying in a collective effort to learn and innovate, Rae’s readers are provided with a vision of intense competition that will, it seems, be won or lost on the basis of how many people understand sufficiently well the *value* of higher education, such that they will opt to purchase some kind of higher education commodity. At the same time, Rae is careful to set-out that the state has a role to play in helping students and parents come to such an understanding, thereby indicating that markets, by themselves, are not the answer. Among Rae’s various recommendations is a call for the regulated (phased) deregulation of tuition-fees alongside “educational” campaigns designed to help students and parents understand the *value* of their investment. In other words, if perfectly competitive markets replete with perfectly informed and rational agents do not exist, then the state’s resources must be leveraged in order to bring such markets into existence (Rae 2005, 7).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Rae’s report is unmistakably neoliberal in its orientation. Among other things, Rae calls for the staged de-regulation of tuition-fees and the imposition of an income indexed loan

Such assertions are the hallmarks of mainstream theory in and around higher education and of neoliberalism in general, and they are born directly of the following assertions:

- 1) Individuals are inherently - but not perfectly - rational, self-serving, and utility-cum-profit maximizing;
- 2) Markets are both imperfectly competitive and relatively efficient processors of information and mechanisms of resource allocation, (i.e. “non-market practices” restrict the kind of free and competitive action necessary for markets to operate “more” perfectly/optimally)
- 3) Prices are market-based signals of mostly rational action that enable further such mostly rational action (i.e. marginal productivity theory of distribution);
- 4) The state is fundamental to the progressive perfection of individual rationality and market competition.

Ontologically these assertions map into a particular form of analysis, one which is herein described as “neoliberal”. Neoliberal analyses are both multivariate and

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repayment program, both of which are policies long advocated by, among others, Rose and Milton Friedman, both of whom saw such moves as a means by which to eliminate public funding for higher education. Rae also indicates a terrific fondness for the type of “differentiation” that describes the American system, which is highly deregulated. One wonders what Rae would have recommended had the efforts of the Province’s previous government to introduce new forms of private post-secondary education proved successful. Either way, Rae’s call for an injection of \$6.6 billion over the following four years, was then clearly not going to make-up for the terrific funding shortfall that then plagued (and continues to plague) Ontario’s system. For example, today, Ontario’s students pay the highest tuition-fees in Canada, and levels of per student funding is the lowest in Canada (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2012). Rae also recommended means-tests that would have made it impossible for a dual income household, where both parents worked full-time and minimum wage jobs to qualify for any provincial subsidy!

indeterminate. Outcomes within the political economy are said to result from the complex interaction of rational agents who strategically pursue their own interests. However, because the rationality of such agents is said to be “bounded”, by which the neoliberals mean rational action is contained or directed, outcomes vary from what is predicted by simplistic models that assume perfect rationality and/or perfect competition.<sup>15</sup> What limits the rationality of otherwise rational agents is, for the neoliberals, all manner of “institutions”, which they define as, “systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interaction (Hodgson 2006)”. For the neoliberals, society is described by the presence of a multiplicity of institutions, each of which is said to be embedded within discrete social, political, *or* economic contexts. In other words, ‘institutions’ are ‘social’ or ‘political’ or ‘economic’, but they are never socio-political and economic simultaneously; however much one institution within a discrete “sphere of activity” might impact decisively on outcomes within

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<sup>15</sup> It is absolutely vital to note that notions of “bounded rationality” bear a striking resemblance to, but are not the same thing as conceptions of “imperfect information” and “imperfect competition” one finds being proffered by mainstream, New Keynesian economists. It is also vital to note that the ‘striking resemblance’ is not coincidental. Not only are there common theoretical roots to these different ideas, they all share a common ontology, wherein reality is carved into so many different – *and autonomous* - spheres of activity. This issue of autonomy is key: in seeing outcomes in any one sphere as the result of either/both the internal nature of that sphere and/or one sphere’s inter-relationship with some other sphere, such forms of thought, which I have labelled as neoliberal, preclude any notions of a totality, theoretical or otherwise. This use of institutions is, in other words, much more than just an analytical tool. In Chapter 4, I discuss the theoretical alternative: a “totalizing holism” that understands the non-autonomous nature of the different logics and institutions that describe society. Though, following Marx, I would assert the centrality of production relations in accessing/understanding/analyzing this totality, I would hardly see this as some liberals might, and therein as mode of thought that sees all institutions as inevitably reflective of economic conditions. Simply, there are no strictly “economic” conditions.

another such “sphere”, they are not one and the same. As such, it is not possible to directly correlate a single institution with particular behaviours, especially when seeking to understand the rational action of multiple agents. As much as behaviours are held to be patterned and regular, they nonetheless are the result of the complex and indeterminate interaction of several institutions. Such complexity means that it is not possible to rank-order the relative impact had by a multiplicity of institutions on the determination of any one or a number of outcomes. Again, causality is indeterminate and complex (Mirowski 2009; Fine and Milonakis 2009; Fine and Jomo 2006).

The stark distinction between institutions that are ‘political’ or ‘social’ or ‘cultural’ bears close resemblance to the classical liberal distinctions between “states” and “markets” or “politics” and “economics”. That said, such distinctions also stem from the way in which “markets”, as institutions in their own right, are treated by the neoliberals. Simply, for the neoliberals markets are conceived of as ever-present meeting places for the exchange of goods and services. The mechanisms that make markets work – prices – are said to *potentially* be a-political and a-social. Non-market institutions are however said to be inherently *either* “political” *or* “social” *or* “cultural”, *and* historically particular.<sup>16</sup> Real-lived markets may operate sub-optimally, therefore, but only because rational action is bounded by virtue of the other historically particular institutions at play. The end

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<sup>16</sup> The essential logic of markets is not a-historical, but rather trans-historical and ever-present.

result is that prices are augmented and skewed. For example, a widespread entrepreneurial spirit or a lack of familiarity with the principles of private property, may enable agents to compete in either near-perfect or entirely imperfect ways, but not because of the essential nature of markets.<sup>17</sup> Again, by distinguishing between non-market conditions that block “free” market behavior the neoliberals argue for an allegedly more complex account of causation. Just as the conditions that impose upon the proper operation of markets cannot be explained by reference to the essential nature of markets and prices, so too is it not possible to collapse “political” or “social” or “cultural” institutions into a single category. (Fine and Milonakis 2009; Argent 2007)

It follows then that such analyses must - and do - marshal “facts” from all of the social sciences, for within each disciplinary and sub-disciplinary field lies some greater understanding of the non-market institutions that impact, positively or negatively, on the performance of individuals and/or firms interacting in markets (in regular and patterned ways over time). This explanatory method carries two theoretical consequences of note. First, if behavior is said to be stable and patterned over time, then it is necessary to hold that non-market institutions are also stable, else behavior would be the result of anarchic and fluid conditions, which would make explanation impossible. This stability is explained as a by-product of “path dependence”, wherein historically particular patterns emerge, “harden”, and become “institutionalized”.

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<sup>17</sup> See for instance, Hernando De Soto’s, *The Mystery of Capital* (De Soto 2000)

Institutions are thus said to initially take shape during catalytic moments, generally in the midst of crises, when the purpose, character, and operational culture of such institutions are determined. This kind of temporal weight, means that the (re)formation of an institution is said to happen only occasionally, even though there may be significant flux in other areas. (Kitschelt et al 1999, Soskice 1999, Thelen 1999, Ikenberry 1988).

Second, in as much as institutions are seen as essentially social or political or cultural or economic, their impact on individual rationality is generally proved – and measured – with reference to outcomes in the market. In other words, non-market institutions are ultimately given a price! This has everything to do with the differences between neoliberal conceptions of markets and neoliberal conceptions of the non-market discussed above. The consequence is that neoliberals tend to do precisely that which Rae does in his Report: simultaneously assert some kind of ineffable value to higher learning and then offer some indirect quantification of that ineffable value. Again, Rae provides a clear example: he indicates that participation rates in Ontario are lower amongst students from lower-income backgrounds because such students have not been provided with the appropriate information at the secondary school level. In saying this, Rae relies upon a literature that – without explanation or justification – classifies such informational asymmetries as extra-economic.<sup>18</sup> We see that in Rae's world income is correlated with all manner of other variables, (health,

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<sup>18</sup> See for instance (Looker 2002)



literacy, engagement in learning etc.), but in a manner that makes it impossible to see income as indicative of a larger, structural patterning that speaks to the real nature of capitalist markets. In fact, such an argument would be (and has been) labeled as “reductive”, apparently because it explains (reduces) ‘cultural’ norms and patterns of behavior to the logic of markets. Thus does this allegedly “non-reductive” approach lead to policy that attempts to correct for the apparent “informational deficiencies” from which poor people suffer for reasons that are related to, but not causatively linked with, their poverty (i.e. concern over cost, must not “overshadow a shared understanding of the *value* of higher education...we need to encourage students and parents to save and invest in it [higher education] themselves” (emphasis in original)). But clearly what Rae here means by “value” is not that ineffable form of value he associates with that which higher education is “in itself”.<sup>19</sup> Rather, what Rae here means is the value to individuals and society in terms of their income and, in this case, the Province’s overall economic competitiveness. Again, the “value” to be derived is in terms of high post-graduation income and GDP growth (i.e. to some quantum of capital – a price)! (Fine and Milonakis 2009; Fine and Jomo 2006; Fine 2000)

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<sup>19</sup> When drafting his Report, Rae well understood the difference between “use-value” and “exchange-value”, such that his use of the word in both senses was hardly unintentional. As an aside, during and immediately following the Review, Rae was found referring to Marx with some frequency. Rae asserted that calls for lower or no tuition-fees were but calls for larger subsidies for the rich, who as Marx pointed out (in 1861), were the ones who attended university most frequently.

This second issue suggests that which has frequently been over-looked within the entirety of the literature on higher education: the hegemony of neoliberal theory. As was alluded to above, there is a subtle, but profound difference in the way in which both the market and the state have been and are now conceived of within mainstream and hegemonic liberal accounts. Post-war liberalism was rooted in a more plainly *international* political economy that operated under the auspices of US leadership and in the context of the Cold War. As such, liberal distinctions between states and markets precluded the possibility of total commodification, for the national value of social or political or cultural institutions often superseded notions of economic value. However much states have authored globalization, or participated in the making of a global capitalism, the post-Bretton Woods order has entailed a fundamental conflation of nationalist ideals with the logic of global and ever-more intensely competitive markets. Liberals may still make distinctions between national cultural or social institutions but they must now be parsed in terms of their effect on economic competitiveness. Accordingly, a *value* is given to even that which is said to have value “in itself”. (Sears 2003; Fine and Milonakis 2009; Milonakis and Fine 2009)

Analyses of higher education that reject this logic but nonetheless cling to the ideals of post-war reform liberalism, or classical liberalism (i.e. they make the theoretical/analytical distinction between different ‘spheres of activity’) are, I

would argue, but silent boosters of the neoliberal agenda.<sup>20</sup> The reason for this is straightforward: the reform liberal critics have no consistent theoretical basis upon which to disagree with their neoliberal brethren because in the complex and indeterminate world of liberal theory, “values” and “value” operate alongside each other, in precisely the way that they do in Rae’s analysis. In other words, assertions as to the importance of higher education in creating a sense of civic mindedness and in helping to develop a skilled workforce can both, and simultaneously, be right. But this comes to naught when decisions are made with respect to the allocation of resources, particularly in the growth-obsessed world of neoliberalism. Rather, the law of value is necessarily applied to all of the justifications given as to why scarce resources should be applied to one or another “form of investment”, which is how public programs are re-defined. Put another way, there is a fundamental conflation of the “public good” with economic growth and fiscal prudence. Once civic-mindedness is subject to the law of value, there is no turning back, and those who would cling to the ideals of post-war liberalism have never suggested a means by which to avoid this turn.

At its core, neoliberalism is about the socio-political and economic construction of “homo-economicus”(MacKenzie and Millo 2001), not about austerity or fiscal prudence. And while there has always been a contradiction

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<sup>20</sup> There are many scholars whose work I would place in this category. Among those who have written on quality assessment, I would highlight Robert Brown (R. Brown 2004), and Lee Harvey(L. Harvey 2005). George Fallis’s work on the “multiversity” wreaks of a kind of liberal “practicality” that has made the neoliberal university what it is today (Fallis 2007).

between liberal notions of “free markets” and “market forces” that contradiction is today arguably more pronounced than at any other time (Wood 2005). Government funding for higher education or any other social program may either rise or fall, but so long as such injections or cutbacks are made, even partially, according to a logic that conflates national welfare with the ability of individual citizens to compete and win in ever-more competitive global markets, there will be little room for humanist ideals. Once there has been an acceptance that policy must respond to the exigencies of markets, humanism is made into a kind of idealistic unrealism. One can perhaps still make an appeal to the interests of the state “in itself”, or to some basic notion of “humanity”. In a world where the state is generally conceived of as a kind of uber-capitalist firm, however, such appeals signify precisely that which they seek to transcend: the market. Either way, when analysis is born of liberal dichotomies, more self-consciously neoliberal scholars and policy-makers who currently control the primary levers of power inside key agencies of the state are able to pick at will those observational pearls that deepen and broaden the neoliberal program (Phillip Mirowski 2011; Sears 2003; Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004).

This is the point at which it makes sense to consider mainstream theories in and around higher education.

## **2.2 The Hegemony of the Neoliberal Form in Higher Education**

To the extent that it is possible to speak of a literature on “higher education”, that literature falls under the banner of “comparative and international higher education (CIHE), which is best conceived of as a theoretically eclectic field dominated by a concern for public policy.<sup>21</sup> Within the CIHE literature one finds sub-fields organized around topical and policy-related issues, such as quality assessment or evaluation or university research. I argue that the CIHE literature, both in terms of its mainstream and some of its more critical elements, is either dominated by the kind of neoliberal scholarship described above, or else is born of a logic that is sufficiently similar as to offer little by way of a meaningful challenge.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, the distance between “qualitative” and “quantitative” work is almost non-existent. “Thick” descriptions of cultural or political or social “institutions” or practices are no antidote to more strictly quantitative exercises that seek to “prove” the existence of a relationship between one or another variable. In fact, the opposite is true: from the behaviouralists to those who employed structural functional forms of analysis to

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<sup>21</sup> There are notable and well-published critical elements to this literature. The work of thinkers like Simon Marginson, Phillip Altbach, Sheila Slaughter, Gary Rhoades, and others is worth mentioning here (these works are all referenced throughout this dissertation and are cited in the bibliography. I intentionally exclude this section of the CIHE literature because: a) it occupies a relatively small space within the overall CIHE literature; and, b) because the key agents involved in the maintenance of the CIHE, and the establishment of its disciplinary boundaries totally and completely ignore, even while they sometimes finance (ex. Marginson and Mollis 2001) such critical analyses.

<sup>22</sup> Here I am thinking of the aforementioned work by thinkers like Lee Harvey and George Fallis.

both the early and “new” institutionalists on both the apparently “left” and “right” of the political spectrum, all such analyses depend upon theoretical distinctions between different spheres of activity, and therein upon a logical form that lends itself quite readily to more plainly neoliberal and/or economics type quantitative analysis. Though some critical work has moved beyond crude structural accounts similar to the most polemical writings of World Systems theorists like Gunder-Frank, much of the critical literature within CIHE still operates under the banner of “conflict theory”, and, as such, relies upon a kind of mechanistic and deterministic logic that is the obverse of more mainstream analyses.<sup>23</sup> And post-structural and post-modern accounts far from moving beyond the facile accounts of neoliberal scholars, simply obscure from view the hegemony of neoliberal scholarship (Harker 1995).

Of course, what the foregoing assumes is that it is possible to speak of an extant literature when referring to CIHE. For Bray et al (2007), however, it is simply not possible to delineate any clear disciplinary boundaries or even a core literature of that field. In fact, they argue that to the extent it is possible to speak of a “field” of CIHE, it is a mish mash of scholarship covering a huge array of topics generated by academics from a variety of different disciplinary

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<sup>23</sup> Altbach’s work falls victim to this particularly American reading of Marx and of Marxism (Altbach, Arnove, and Kelly 1982); here that absence of inter-class conflict is often taken to imply a level of consent that may or may not be present. As such the particularities of capitalist accumulation at any juncture are all but ignored (i.e. the complex ways in which the neoliberal program of accumulation, for instance, manufactures consent; reproduces complex feelings of alienation; remakes the ideational field within the academy. This is a gross oversight.

backgrounds. This said, they do suggest that there are indeed some general parameters around which it is possible to speak of a kind of “quasi” field. At the most basic level, the subject, education, and the method, a comparison of educational ‘systems’ in different jurisdictions, are common to work in the field. Whatever the epistemological or ontological leanings of the analyst, therefore, there is a general tendency to accept a common definition of the object to be studied – an educational system - and thereby the legitimacy of the jurisdictional boundaries that de facto define each “system” as such. This issue of jurisdiction in turn means that analysts also tend to accept both the validity and comparability of whatever data is used. Bray et al also suggest a common philosophical subjectivity amongst scholars in the field. Quoting another survey of the field, Bray et al note that scholars in the field,

...tend to rely on similar philosophical assumptions. Concerning the nature of reality, comparative educators would tend to see reality as somewhat subjective and multiple, rather than objective and singular. Epistemologically, comparative educators would tend to interact with that being researched rather than acting independently and in a detached manner from the content. Axiologically, comparative educators would tend not to see research as value free and unbiased; rather, they would accept the notion that their research is value laden and includes the biases of the researcher. (Rust et al. 1999 as quoted in; Bray 2007, 350)

For Bray et al such eclecticism should not, however, be mistaken for anything other than topical diversity. In their opinion, there is no indication of the field generating interdisciplinary insights at the level of methodology or epistemology. On the contrary, the “field” as they see it is home to scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds that employ apparently discipline-specific

methodologies without attempting to develop a common disciplinary discursive terrain. Likening CIHE to the situation commonly found in “multi-disciplinary universities”, they write,

As in multidisciplinary universities where the Faculties of Law, Science, Architecture, Dentistry and Education do not usually have much intellectual interflow, and instead tend to inhabit separate intellectual territories within the same geographic space, the field of comparative education is also compartmentalised. Positivists and neo-Marxists do occasionally clash, and even more occasionally do learn from each other, but in general they ignore each other. Similar remarks may be made about psychologists and anthropologists, and, moving to area specialisms, Africanists and Sinologists, for example.(Bray 2007, 359)

Such assertions tend to obscure more than they actually illustrate. Underlying the kind of methodological and disciplinary diversity Bray et al describe, there are other, less frequently discussed, commonalities and themes. Writing in 1982, before the neoliberal onslaught had reached the other social sciences to the degree it would in the 1990's, Philip Altbach, Gail Kelly, and Robert Arnove (1982) paint a picture of a slightly more coherent disciplinary terrain than that set-out by Bray et al. In describing the orientation of much of the work in the field, Altbach et al describe a decidedly practical and policy-oriented bent:

Comparative education has traditionally served educational planners, policy makers, and others involved with the applied aspects of education policy making. Much of the data base in the field has been developed with the interests of such groups in mind. Comparative education serves as a means to provide information on policy options in planning educational reform and a bench-mark to compare the effectiveness of educational practice. Planners and administrators who use comparative knowledge are for the most part in ministries of education, international agencies, aid organizations, and to some extent in school systems. Although relatively few of these individuals are “producers” of knowledge in the field, they are important in applying research, sponsoring studies, and determining the



shape of comparative education through their funding of research.(Altbach, Arnove, and Kelly 1982, 508)

In terms of methodology, Kelly et al outline a field traditionally dominated by modernization theory, but which began to open-up to other theoretical strands in the mid-1970s when a theoretical vacuum emerged in the wake of so many policy failures in the 1960s and 1970s. Apparently because policy rooted in modernization theory had failed to deliver the kind of results that had been anticipated and predicted, an urgent need to find epistemological tools that could better explain what had taken place rapidly emerged. That said, before the crisis of modernization theory, Altbach et al suggest the development of distinct American and British traditions within the field. Herein the American tradition was linked to increasingly quantitative forms of analysis focused on revealing the law-like rules that allegedly govern educational outcomes (in-school), while the British variant was more rooted in structural-functional forms of analysis that looked more qualitatively at so called “school-society relations”, and how the re-shaping of such relations might, in a more indeterminate fashion, yield better developmental outcomes. (Altbach, Arnove, and Kelly 1982)

With the on-set of crisis (of modernization theory) in the mid-1970s, Altbach et al note the development of distinctive “macro” and “micro” approaches, the former rooted in World Systems Theory and the latter being more concerned to examine the particular context of the classroom in what were conceived of as unique local, regional, and national settings. By the end of the

1970s the beginning of a synthesis between these macro- and micro- analyses began. What emerged was a form of analysis that questioned how structural factors such as social class relations, or the degree to which control over state education was centralized, or the effect of the importing textbooks and curricula from the West, could affect who learns what from whom. (Altbach, Arnove, and Kelly 1982, 523)

This description of a more synthetic approach is illustrative of the nature of so much critical and/or Marxian scholarship at the time. Such apparently “synthetic” forms of analysis saw the lines of causation flow from the top-down wherein the capitalist world system encounters unique and particular local conditions, thereby producing myriad different forms of “under-development”. In the same book, Robert Arnove (1982), this time writing alone, outlines the World Systems approach to the study of comparative and international higher education. While his article is indispensable in so far as it makes clear how fundamental have been American philanthropic institutions such as the Ford and Carnegie Foundations, the developmental agencies of the American state, as well as American-backed international organizations like the World Bank, in delivering an impoverished and misguided form of educational policy, his critique fails entirely to complicate or discuss such factors dialectically. Arnove reduces the under-developed “South” to an impoverished receptor of Western theory and policy intended only to recreate the centrality of the “metropole” (Arnove 1982). This kind of structural determinism is also common to other neo-

Marxian strands within the field, ones that are more typically identified in the field as “conflict theory”, and which account for most of the space taken up by apparently more radical scholarship, which amounts to a small fraction of the total amount of “space” occupied by the CIHE literature.<sup>24</sup> Of course, at the time they were writing, Altbach et al could be forgiven for seeing these apparently synthetic and critical tendencies as becoming more a part of the mainstream of the CIHE literature than they ever did become. Less forgivable, however, is the degree to which they mistake a crude, structural, and mechanistic account of capitalist accumulation for a meaningful analytical step forward. Still, their clear outline of the degree to which the bulk of work within the field was policy-focused and related to the articulation of American power and Anglo-American schools of thought is indispensable not least because it highlights precisely that which Bray et al miss. For all the topical diversity within the field, and despite the apparently impregnable disciplinary boundaries of those working within it, the bulk of work in CIHE is of a “problem-solving”, and policy-oriented nature, where the primary problems that need solving relate to both the expression and preservation of American interest and hegemony.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In fact, in their otherwise useful overview, Bray et al, use this unfortunate term, and do not really look to see whether such analyses track the development of Marxian theory, which they do not.

<sup>25</sup> In not identifying the specific national interests involved in the CIHE literature, Bray et al miss many aspects of what describes the mainstream, (for instance the political economy of economics imperialism, which is so crucial to understanding the present state of the social sciences). They also do not identify the proximity of dominant modes of thought to dominant interests and their particular mode of expression. As I outline in Chapter 4, I see the connections between the globalization of everyday finance, (a process authored by states (and therein by key states)) and QA as fundamental to the normalization of QA. So the expression of dominant states

In this regard, Simon Marginson's and Marcela Mollis's (2001) overview of the CIHE literature is equally indispensable. Writing some 22 years after Altbach et al, they make clear that the "dominant strand" within CIHE hardly became less instrumental and policy-focused from the 1980s on. On the contrary, what they suggest is that through the 1980s and 1990s work within the field became *more* rooted in positivist and quantitative methods. They begin their review with an abstract discussion of the comparative methodology and therein of how comparativists of all stripes necessarily attempt to both describe and explain "sameness" and "difference" between whatever objects are being compared. "When we observe the field [CIHE]," they write,

as it has evolved in practice, we find a tendency for the work to push in the direction of one side of the dyad or the other, either towards sameness (universalism) or difference (ultrarelativism). A universalist method imposes uniform models on all cases, while ultrarelativist approaches treat each case as completely different. (Marginson and Mollis 2001, 586)

Accordingly, Marginson and Mollis argue that, "the dominant strand in comparative education" has always tended to the universalist side of this dyad. They explain that the close articulation between comparativists and organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD, along with a host of American aid agencies linked to the American state and the articulation of the State's geopolitical interests, meant that analyses have tended to understand difference as a degree of departure from what was held to be *the* paradigmatic and virtuous

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interests, in so far as they are obscured by method, are important, at least if we are to identify and/or hierarchically organize the "causative variables" involved in the construction of actual lived neoliberalism.

model: the American system of higher education. Although they indicate that such tendencies were present within the field from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when comparative education was more closely linked to Victorian anthropology and the British Empire, Marginson and Mollis, like Altbach et al, highlight the degree to which the dominant strand was, from the 1960s on, “colonized” by what they term “instrumental positivism”. So it was that the dominant strand’s long-term fascination with the discovery and adumbration of *the* rules and laws that were said to govern the way in which always national systems of higher education operated become wedded to quantitative methodology. In identifying governing “laws”, comparativists were in turn able to measure and compare different “systems” based on the relative presence or absence of those variables that were held to be causatively - and universally - linked to “success”. Of course, the key causative variables were (and still are), as Marginson and Mollis also make clear, artifacts of power, and of American dominance. For example, participation rates (which were highest in the US) could be linked to particular patterns or forms of finance or of secondary education, such that the presence or absence of such patterns and forms in other jurisdictions could be evinced as explanation for lower participation rates in other jurisdictions. Marginson and Mollis point-out that such methods equate difference with inequality, or more pointedly with the relative deficiency of other jurisdictions. By way of illustration, they quickly turn to the subject of this dissertation:

By providing computable data attributable to “performance,” it [the dominant strand/methodology] enables the allocation of deficiency, failure, and blame. It creates data-based hierarchies among national systems to follow a common blueprint for education reform, a single path to “success.” Of course, when success is measured in a hierarchical table of comparative performance, only a minority of national can fully success. The journey is universalized; the destination is not. De facto global homogenization, rather than universal educational achievement, becomes the horizon of policy...When using singular global comparisons, the potential for national variation in system-level criteria is lost. When national systems focus on performance as measured in the common comparison, a homogenizing logic is installed. Over time, all systems tend to become the same. The same homogenizing logic entered university evaluation and quality assurance around the world in the 1990s. (Marginson and Mollis 2001, 594)

In saying this, what Marginson and Mollis fail to highlight is the degree to which scholarship within the ‘dominant strand’ has *appeared* to move away from pure and axiomatic forms of analyses. The work of Noah and Eckstein (1969) (which they highlight and describe) notwithstanding, the current hegemony enjoyed by the kind of neoliberal analyses outlined in the previous section have moved away from analyses that assert simple, uni-linear, and law-like relationships between whatever variables may be under consideration. Indeed, today the ‘dominant strand’ tends to favour a “looser” kind of universalism, one within which causality is held to be complex and indeterminate. Of course, such multivariate forms of analyses are hardly very different from those more straightforward expressions of modernization theory that Marginson and Mollis do highlight. Both forms of analysis are rooted in stalwartly liberal distinctions between different spheres of activity and decidedly a-historical and Weberian accounts of the market (see above). As such, both modernization theory and its newer multivariate forms are

ultimately wedded to a logic that champions the market as an inherently more efficient means by which to organize society. Nonetheless, the difference is profound if only because it has enabled the ‘dominant strand’ to colonize the other social sciences, or within CIHE, to encompass and use the insights of allegedly more critically minded scholarship (see my outline above and (Fine and Milonakis 2009).

Notably, Marginson and Mollis also outline how the “ultrarelativist” counter-tendency, in responding to the dominant strand, bends the stick too far in the opposite direction:

Ultrarelativist forms of “comparative” education obscure what is common to national systems and deny the mutual effects in international relationships. This not only blocks comparison but also handicaps understandings of the dynamics of each system, in which national, international, and global elements are intermeshed. Like homogenization, ultrarelativism ultimately precludes sympathetic engagement with the object of research. It cannot interpret difference. (Marginson and Mollis 2001, 587)

Generally speaking, ultrarelativist analyses tend to focus on themes that are common to post-modern and post-structural thought, namely to the construction of “otherness” through dominant discursive modes. This thematic focus is derived in part by what Harvey describes as a tendency to highlight, “the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic (D. Harvey 1990, 45),” of late (read post) modernity. The key point here is not that the ultrarelativist position makes it impossible to see and interpret difference, but rather

that, in so doing, the role played by the very factors and players that have backstopped the neo-liberal program is completely obscured.

While it would appear that post-structural notions of ephemerality stand in stark contrast to the “totalizing” theories – both critical and not – of the enlightenment (which make-up the ‘dominant strand’), such is not really the case. In privileging the ephemeral and the particular, causality becomes simply unknowable such that any attempt to identify and understand a particular context is itself a kind of historical excision and a distortion of reality that allegedly obscures the complex, ephemeral, and particular nature of causality. Not coincidentally, such arguments bear a striking resemblance to neoliberal arguments concerning the complex and indeterminate nature of causality. Coupled with a focus on discourse, to the exclusion of either or both material realities or structural tendencies, post-structural or ‘ultrarelativist’ analyses have often proved a fecund source of new – and politically expedient - language for the boosters of neoliberalism. (Rodgers 2012)

In summary then, the field of CIHE is dominated by particular logical forms. The designation of work as “qualitative” or “quantitative” frequently brushes over the basic epistemological and ontological similarities that inform both the dominant tendency and a good portion of that which rejects it. The dominant strand in CIHE is descendant of work within the mainstream of American social sciences and therein of neo-classical and New Keynesian economics; however far from neo-classical economics, new- or neo-institutional



analyses might appear, they are hardly very different. As such, it is imperative that an analysis of the dominant strand begin with, and move outward from, the manner in which economists have treated the issue of higher education. Neo-classical and New Keynesian economics is very simply the most straightforward expression of the dominant strand and most of the work within the field of CIHE is usefully understood as falling under the aegis of that most dismal of the “sciences”.

### **2.3 From Human Capital to the “New” Social Sciences and Higher Education**

The purest expression of neo-liberal theory within the field of higher education is Human Capital Theory (HCT). The first articulations of HCT, first by Schultz (1961) and immediately thereafter by Becker (1962), were strictly neo-classical interpretations of labour markets that, according to Botwinick (1993), attempted to address the repeated failure of neo-classical economics to explain persistent wage differentials in the First World on the basis of assumptions about perfect competition and perfect information, the marginal productivity theory of distribution. As such, these initial theorizations of human capital allowed the neo-classicals to describe income differentials as the result of rational choice on the part of workers or on so-called “externalities”, like welfare programs, which skewed the operation of the market. Thus, human capital theories,

...essentially blamed the glaring inequities in the distribution of income not on the system, but on the victims themselves. The argument maintained that if workers really wanted to improve their economic status

within the system, all they had to do was to make the rational choice to “invest” in more education and skill training. This investment in human capital would improve their marginal productivity, and competitive capital mechanisms within the labour market would guarantee their rightful rewards. It was clearly up to them.(Botwinick 1993)

Accordingly, the ability of individual workers to perform different forms of work took on the very same qualities as any other form of capital: it was malleable and subject to growth through investment. And as with other forms of capital, the decision to invest (in things like education) was said to depend on each individual’s estimation of and tolerance for risk and reward. Keynesian criticisms of HCT merely set-up the neo-classical version of HCT as an ideal case to be strived for/realized via wise government policy. In other words, workers were partly, but not wholly to blame, for persistent wage differentials. As was outlined earlier, this line of argument attributed income differentials to myriad factors, such as informational deficits or the presence/absence of peak level coordinated bargaining, things that augmented rational action in correctable ways. The apparent problem, it was argued, was not with the ‘market’ per se, but with the way in which particular markets had evolved in particular places. The state therefore was appropriately used to support the operation of real-lived markets by removing or compensating for whatever was said to have caused their divergence from ideal-typical comparator.

### **2.3.1 The Neo-classical Roots of New Keynesian Human Capital Theory**

In this way, the Keynesian response to the neo-classical articulations of HCT set-up human capital as a quasi-public, quasi-private good. Accordingly, individuals were responsible for their capacity to labour only *to the extent that the real-lived markets in which they attempted to sell their labour operated in ideal typical terms*. But to the extent that rational action was based upon imperfect information because of particular, long-standing, and “institutionalized” practices, the state bore *some* responsibility. This articulation of HCT emerged following the Keynesian response to the failure of Friedman’s monetarism in and around 1980. Having suffered momentous defeats through the 1970s when stagflation, a theoretical impossibility within the Keynesian frame (until it happened), the Keynesians had anxiously jumped at the opportunity for redemption when the US Federal Reserve began targeting the growth rate of the money supply. Friedman, who had causatively linked accommodative monetary policy (and therein the growth rate of the money supply) to inflation via assumptions of perfect competition and perfect information, was apparently wrong (M. Friedman 1977). But as Fine and Milonakis make clear, the Keynesian reaction was couched in terms that effectively ceded the field in their long-standing dispute with the neo-classicals. By holding that the growth rate of the money supply had outstripped the Fed’s targets because of rational behavior under imperfect conditions, the Keynesians hardly provided a revolutionary corrective:

...quite apart from continuing and reinforcing the traditional unworldliness and technicism of economics as a discipline, neoliberalism (and the new classical economics as its academic orthodox counterpart) had the effect of prompting an alternative analytical agenda. It served by way of a reaction against neoliberalism in terms of asking why individuals might not appear to behave rationally, why markets might not work, and why non-market relations exist and might even be desirable beyond minimal provision of secure property rights, defence, etc.(Fine and Milonakis 2009: p.62)

In other words, the Keynesian reaction to Friedman's monetarism, in so far as it was premised upon notions of information asymmetries (i.e. imperfect information) and imperfect competition, simultaneously signaled the Keynesian abandonment of macro-economic considerations, particularly those related to full-employment and aggregate demand. And in abandoning such considerations the Keynesians accepted the parameters of methodological individualism as it had been articulated by the neo-classicals from Hayek on. Crucially, this involved a restatement and reframing of the economic problem.

For the classical and neo-classical economists before Hayek, markets were held to automatically lead to the proper allocation of resources through the simple reconciliation of supply and demand. But, as Mirowski points out, Hayek took this a step further:

The economic problem of society is thus not merely a problem of how to allocate "given" resources...It is rather a problem of how to secure the best use of resources known to any of the members of society, for ends whose relative importance only those individuals know...it is a problem of the integration of knowledge which is not given to anyone in its totality. (Hayek 1945 as quoted in Mirowski 2011)

For Mirowski, Hayek's refinement was crucial, as it meant that markets worked to, "*reconcile participants' mental states* through the computation of prices (Mirowski 2011, 26 italics in original)." In other words, markets and prices were elevated by the Hayek and the neo-classicals after him. Markets and prices were more than just an indication of supply and demand, but were a means by which to comparatively evaluate the issues that impact on any one or set of choices that needs to be made. As Hayek puts it,

We must look at the price system as such a mechanism for communicating information if we want to understand its real function—a function which, of course, it fulfills less perfectly as prices grow more rigid. (Even when quoted prices have become quite rigid, however, the forces which would operate through changes in price still operate to a considerable extent through changes in the other terms of the contract.) The most significant fact about this system is the economy of knowledge with which it operates, or how little the individual participants need to know in order to be able to take the right action. In abbreviated form, by a kind of symbol, only the most essential information is passed on and passed on only to those concerned. It is more than a metaphor to describe the price system as a kind of machinery for registering change, or a system of telecommunications which enables individual producers to watch merely the movement of a few pointers, as an engineer might watch the hands of a few dials, in order to adjust their activities to changes of which they may never know more than is reflected in the price movement. (Hayek 1945)

The market is thus turned into the "mother of all computers (Mirowski 2011, 26)", in so far as it functions to turn an individual's rational estimation of self-interest into a price based on: 1) his unique knowledge; and, 2) other prices, which of course signify other peoples' unique knowledge. In the anarchy of the free market therefore, prices become the basis for: 1) exchange; and, 2) the on-going re-evaluation of individual self-interest. Of course, it is vital to note that

the computational power of markets is ineluctably related to competition. As such, the anarchy of the free-market also leads to: 3) the ranking of commodities, (relative prices), in terms of quality *and* quantity.<sup>26</sup> Herein, Hayek's redefinition amounted to more than just the acceptance of markets as relatively efficient (the efficient market hypothesis is made into law), but also into the revival and the law-like acceptance of marginal utility and the marginal productivity theory of distribution.

Again, the Keynesian corrective to Hayekian neo-classicism asserted that markets were imperfect because rational agents were asymmetrically informed. However, because such asymmetries were said to be the result of so many extra-economic (i.e. social or political or cultural) factors that were endemic to - but removable from - markets, they implied that the computational power of the market could operate if only it were properly supported. Put differently, the Keynesians argued that if the *irrationality* of agents could be dealt with or

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<sup>26</sup> Hayek's pronouncements as to the limits of human rationality relative to the computational power of the market, were and remain complicated by the fact that he did not offer a reasonable explanation of either market-failure or of the emergence of collective and/or individual attempts to control/subvert markets, which are seen as the exclusive causes of sub-optimal outcomes. Hayek, of course, repeatedly made clear that humans often tended to suffer what he called a "fatal conceit", namely the irrational notion that human interaction could be rendered less anarchic and painful through the regulation of markets, but he simply never clarified how this squared with his notion of individual rationality or with his own ability to discern the gestational/computational power of markets. Much the same is true of Public Choice Theory, and therein the work of James Buchanan. Though Buchanan rejected Hayek's notion of a "spontaneous order", and provided a far more prescriptive program for the capitalist state, he too placed ultimate faith in the relative efficiency of markets. In fact, whatever the internal disagreements as to the evolutionary nature of the market (or not), neoliberals have consistently asserted an ontological claim for the relative efficiency of markets. What follows is an ontological claim that much of the literature has failed to emphasize sufficiently, namely the ontological claim made for prices: for the neoliberals, prices take on a kind of ontological pre-eminence that has been utterly central to the neoliberal program; because prices signal the gestational and computational power of markets, they are ontologically significant in their own right as artifacts of the "natural" efficiency of markets (Buchanan 1999; Mirowski 2011; Milonakis and Fine 2009).

compensated for, the cold computational logic of the market could do its job. As such, economic growth and prosperity depended upon forms of state intervention that could unleash the power of the market from the fetters of man-made extra-economic institutions. In this way, considerations related to full-employment faded from the policy agenda of the Keynesians; in trying to effect full-employment states would attempt to rationalize and control the logic and power of the market, which they had accepted was the “fatal conceit”, the result of which was allegedly stagflation. Instead, by focusing on economic growth as a measure of success, state policy could focus on the right things: on the barriers that prevented markets from operating as the neo-classicals had predicted (Fine and Jomo 2006; Fine 2000).

By the late 1980s human capital was therefore cast as a key variable within the frame of what came to be called, New Growth Theory (NGT). Through the 1970s and 1980s as governments’ commitments to full employment and aggregate demand stabilization withered in the face of a persistent strike of capital<sup>27</sup>, it became necessary to outline how, if not through direct transfers, the state was to intervene so as to build human capital and provide a basis for continued economic growth. The shift in focus away from full-employment and

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<sup>27</sup> Though the argument is factually baseless, mainstream economists have, since the 1970’s continuously blamed the economic turbulence of that decade on the “stickyness” of wages, the idea that stagflation in the 1970’s occurred as a result of the unreasonable demands of labour. Shaikh has responded to such arguments definitively. See, Shaikh and Tonak, *The Rise and Fall of the U.S. Welfare State*, in Political Economy and Contemporary Capitalism, Ron Baiman, Heather Boushey, and Dawn Saunders, (eds.), M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York. 2002

towards growth, which occurred both in and outside state agencies and the academy, was the new frame within which government intervention needed to be justified. Of course, this was, in the 1980s, much more a theoretical question than a policy debate, at least in key institutions like the US Federal Reserve, the World Bank, the IMF, and the OECD. There, the 80s and the 90s were more closely associated with the outright rejection of anything even mildly Keynesian and a more thoroughgoing acceptance of 'laissez faire' Hayekian principles (Newstadt 2008).

As its label implies, NGT is primarily concerned with economic growth, not with human capital formation, however much it sees the two issues as being interlinked. And the impetus that led to NGT did not come from Keynesian efforts to deal with neo-classical articulations of HCT, but rather with the neo-classical take on technological development. In the neo-classical frame, technological development and the overall stock of human capital are held to be given exogenously, at some assumed rate. In every sector, competitive firms are said to innovate in order to stay alive. Price taking firms act rationally, and the rate of growth remains seamless. In the absence of any "externalities", competition therefore drives not just innovation, but also the efficient allocation of resources throughout the economy. But following Arrow (1962), the neo-classicals recognized that R&D had "positive externalities". Because technology was a non-rivalrous good (i.e. could be used and re-used by multiple agents in the economy), the argument was made that generalized industrial subsidy could



produce higher rates of growth; undifferentiated injections of capital for the purposes of R&D would produce returns above the rate at which the market would, by itself, generate. This argument posed a significant challenge to neo-classical theory and a rationale for state involvement, which the neo-classicals had roundly rejected. Indeed, outside of the perfection of property rights and generalized industrial subsidy, the neo-classical approach left policy-makers impotent to do anything in order to promote economic growth. Moreover, the neo-classical take on technological change provided no plausible way to explain both the increased rate of innovation evident through the last two centuries, and the fact that both during and following WWII, much private innovation was clearly the result of spillover from often very directed state subsidy and research (military R&D factoring perhaps most prominently). And then there was the obviously foolish assumption that innovation happened at a constant rate and that the generalized effects on the overall rate of productivity growth were equally constant (Fine 2000; Lipsey 2000).

In 1986, Romer (1986) and, shortly thereafter, Lucas (1988) provided the corrective to these problems by developing a model in which technological change was made endogenous, variable, and subject to manipulation (Lucas 1988; Romer 1990). Romer made these arguments based on two assertions: first, Arrow's observation concerning the non-rivalrous and appropriable nature of knowledge was largely correct; and, second, the historically uneven rate of private investment in research and development suggested that the type, nature, and

speed of technological change happened because of prevailing economic conditions. Romer further argued that the post-war experience was also directive in terms of how and under what conditions the rate of technological change could be optimized: First, NGT stresses the importance of perfecting property rights. But getting property rights perfect doesn't mean, in the context of NGT, making them perfectly absolute:

If we give perfect property rights to inventors, we allow them to act as monopolists. They will extract rents, slowing the diffusion of the knowledge of their inventions. If we give no property rights, we maximize diffusion of existing inventions but provide little incentive for inventors to risk their time and money on discovering new applied knowledge. (Lipsey 2000, 53)

What generally follows is the contention that so-called “basic” or “curiosity-driven” research needs to be both publicly funded, at least in part, and maintained within the public domain. However, knowledge that builds upon what sits in public knowledge repositories should be readily appropriable. It is in this context that calls for more public research to be oriented towards the production of readily “commercializable” research have emerged. Such debates are also in large part the context within which champions of various Open Source and Open Access initiatives have emerged within surprisingly mainstream if not conservative places. New forms of contract are now being used to set-up a domain of “public” knowledge that can subsequently be appropriated privately with only mild modifications.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Drawing obviously from Karl Popper's concept of “open science” the new “free culture” movement is finding allies in some unlikely places. For instance, Sun Microsystems maintains a

Second, since all firms use human capital, and since large stocks of human capital will, by virtue of the increasing returns and efficiencies it generates, in turn generate an overall public advantage, it too is to be produced within a publicly subsidized sphere (Lipsey 2000). However, because human capital is human, and because humans are like mini-firms in that they are able to invest in and grow their individual stores of capital (rational agents), it only makes sense that human capital invest in itself (i.e. bears some portion of the cost of producing human capital). Finally, because different economies have different competitive advantages (i.e. are endowed in specific, but not all economic sectors), public subsidy should aim at re-producing and growing such advantages through specific and directed programs. In other words, Ontario's competitive advantage in the auto-sector should be exploited via public subsidy directed at producing more engineers, designers, machinists. Because every industrial sector can become knowledge intensive, it does not follow that historical advantages should be abandoned by seeking to build competitive advantages where none have existed historically, particularly not in the context of a global market based on "free trade". (Fine 2000; Lipsey 2000)

This issue of comparative advantage is largely identical to the work of other New Keynesians, which highlighted the relevance of institutions in discussing informational asymmetries and the imperfect nature of competition in

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massive infrastructure for "open source" software initiatives, many of which have been fundamental to the development of "downstream" and patentable technologies.

“real-lived” markets. Within the NGT, subsidy is necessarily targeted, like all government policy, so as to make up for the historical particularities and deficiencies of markets. In this way, scholars have sought to extend NGT by focusing on any and every “causative variable” that would undermine the virtuous circle of economic growth as Romer envisioned it. This has meant a kind of theoretical intensification by extension. Without surrendering a focus on the need to subsidize both “innovation”, as it is referred to in the hegemonic parlance, and “human capital formation”, the NGT has been prodded and pressed into every nook and cranny of the social sciences, for any “institution” at all can – and often is – held up as the key to unleashing human – and thereby – economic potential. (Fine and Milonakis 2009)

In sectors, like higher education, where the state already played a significant role, NGT emerged as a kind of theoretical saviour. NGT allowed those agencies of the state that were involved in the management and funding of higher education to speak the *lingua franca* of the neoliberal state *and* make demands for additional funding. The same was true for other players within the sector, particularly the universities themselves. In fact, NGT advanced the cause of the universities both in terms of their role as “producers” of human capital, but also, and just as crucially, as producers of new “knowledge”, which has also played a central role in economic growth according to NGT.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A primary example of this is (Rubenson et al. 2000)

### **2.3.2 The New Social Sciences**

In so far as NGT now functions very centrally in neo-liberal policy, the paradigm is, as was mentioned at the outset, more theoretically extensive than either HCT or NGT, than neo-Keynesian and neo-institutional revisions of neo-classical economics. Indeed, though Romer, Lucas, and the army of economists that have followed behind them opened the door to a kind of context-specific multi-variate analysis, the neo-liberal paradigm has also drawn significantly from comparative politics where neo-institutionalist thinkers, often in relation to NGT, had, by the mid-1990's, begun to present a relatively more nuanced and sophisticated picture of the capitalist state, also grounded in neo-weberian ideal types, than had their more economically oriented counterparts. In other words, the "varieties of capitalism" literature provided the neoliberals with a means by which to distinguish between different national contexts in a manner that was usefully circumscribed. Although NGT and HCT had already evolved to the point where the managerial capacity of the state was recognized and stressed, it was still missing a means by which to avoid the kind of endless particularisms that would make the development of a transposable policy program possible. The categorization of different "capitalisms" was indispensable. Without too much effort or theoretical hand-wringing, generic policy could be fit into seemingly well-tailored programs (Hall and Soskice 2001).

At the most general level, the work of neo-institutional comparativists argues that nationally rooted economic structures/institutions effect and contain

a distinct program of accumulation – “economic growth” and “development” in the language used in the literature. Each nationally rooted development program is in turn compared to an essentialized and idealized model of capitalist accumulation. On this basis policy can then be directed to facilitating a convergence between national reality and ideal type. The ideal-types used in this frame have indelible overtones of Parsonian structural-functionalism in that the variables identified as causative of economic growth within the idealizations used are seen to be mutually reinforcing and constitutive. Though scholars working within the VOC frame have recently outlined a slightly more extensive list of different varieties of capitalism, they have traditionally distinguished between only two: Liberal Market Economies (LME’s) and Coordinated Market Economies (CME’s). The former is said to be exemplary of Anglo-American capitalism and the latter exemplary of German and Scandinavian capitalism. Within both LME’s and CME’s institutions are said to be “path dependent” to have an “historical trajectory”. In other words, national economies and institutional structures are held to have a kind of temporal weight, wherein institutions are structured and then restructured only occasionally, even though the social formations underneath and above them are often acknowledged to have changed substantially. As such, path-dependency in the institutionalist/models frame functions to provide a kind of theoretical distance, a closed political economic system, within which things such as firm behaviour and social activity can be readily explained as an ongoing response to dominant

institutional structures or as responses to wholly “exogenous” variables, the sources of which are seldom identified. Path dependency, therefore, operates as the theoretical basis upon which all other variables are thought to depend, creating a recursive form of analysis within which the roots of institutional change are always either among the list of variables identified as significant to the creation of path dependence in the first instance, or are understood as “exogenous” variables, interminably outside the analytic frame. (Hall and Soskice 2001; Kitschelt 1999)

The last theoretical element of neo-liberalism is drawn from the domain of American sociology: social capital. Contemporary theorizations of social capital have roots that are in reality not so distinct from those of neo-institutionalism in so far as it too is a theoretical extension of Weber and Parsonian structural functionalism again pitched at the level of the individual. This time, however, Durkheimian and Tocquevillian sociology are also thrown into the mix. Social capital first emerged with the work of Marxian sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986). However, the entire thrust of Bourdieu’s arguments have been all but lost in more recent theorizations. Contra Bourdieu’s theorization of social capital as a fungible form of capital in turn understood as accumulated labour, American sociologists starting with the work of James Coleman (1988) have presented a cleansed theorization within which, as Alejandro Portes has noted, the distinction between the resources obtained through the use of ‘social capital’ and the accumulation of social capital itself is completely obscured (Portes

2000). In other words, mainstream theorizations maintain in rather circular fashion that the presence of social structures that help to (re)create a kind of civic mindedness and community sees certain political territories (always defined relative to the state, which is set apart from world order) succeed where others, lacking the presence of both such structures and accordant civic mindedness, fail. From where such social structures come and how they translate into “good” (i.e. democratic, egalitarian etc.) forms of civic mindedness/social capital is, in the end, something of an open question which is only infrequently addressed. Instead, this persistent inability to see the historical development and roots of social structures and the significance of capitalism as the defining contextual element of those structures is recreated by scholars who, following Coleman, look to find only more historically proximate structures that might have plausibly conditioned individuals to act in particular ways. It would appear that the desire to preserve and extend methodological individualism obscures the need to outline a theoretically and historically consistent narrative. (Portes 2000)

Most exemplary of more recent work in the frame of Coleman, is that of Robert Putnam (1993; 1996), whose comparison of Italian regions and essay on the decline of ‘associational ties’ in the US has been influential of a massive host of American social scientists, not to mention the OECD and the World Bank.<sup>30</sup> In

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<sup>30</sup> Though less obviously an endeavor to extend methodological individualism than is Coleman’s work, Putnam’s various studies generally rely upon models of individual choice under certain conditions, and are therefore clearly in the same vein. This is exemplified in his work on education with economist John Helliwell (see Helliwell and Putnam 1999).



general, social capital within this frame is defined as a kind of aggregate ‘civic mindedness’, and therein as a set of norms and conventions within society at large that in turn impel individuals to work cooperatively so as to achieve more just and socially beneficial ends (Putnam 1996). Again, though such analyses are always rooted in some important historical moment from which all subsequent forms of civic mindedness flows, there is never a clear indication of why it is that the historical moment chosen is most reasonably cited as generative of what follows. For example, in his work on Italy, Putnam argues that the development of Norman feudalism in the South and of Republican communalism in the North, both during the middle ages, set both regions upon a path dependent trajectory wherein the North became rich in social capital and subsequently in governmental capacity and civic solidarity, while the South became mired in a kind of civic mistrust that continues to hamper efforts intended to create civic solidarity and governmental effectiveness. (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993)

On education, Putnam has written with noted Canadian economist and former president of the Canadian Economics Association, John Helliwell. In that work, plainly called, “*Education and Social Capital*”, Helliwell and Putnam find a positive, if mild, correlation between levels of education and community involvement, political participation, and trust, albeit outside of unions, church groups, and farm organizations, which are held to be forms of political engagement in which only the uneducated participate. Interestingly, this negative correlation between union membership and education is explained also

as a by-product of education: “...with lower average education providing the greater critical mass needed for successful working-class organization (Helliwell and Putnam 1999, 12),” union membership has fallen off with rising levels of participation and completion of post-secondary education. The upshot here is that for theorists of social capital, participation and completion rates relate not only to economic well-being, but to variables that are essentially extra-economic. Participation and completion rates, in other words, are linked not to increasing tuition-fees, but to the absence of good information about the benefits of higher education, an issue that itself stems from the absence of adequate stores of social capital in certain segments of a population. Coupled with rate of return analyses this, therefore, has been at the core of a plethora of initiatives taken at both the national and international level to focus on “basic education”. Indeed, ‘basic education’ becomes the key to transmitting awareness which is foundational in having children from low-income backgrounds begin to look forward to tertiary levels of education.<sup>31</sup>

In summary then, neo-liberal education policy is born of an amalgam of neo-classical, neo-liberal, neo-institutional, and neo-weberian elements drawn variously from the domains of economics, sociology, and political science. Underlying this rather mixed theoretical bag are commitments to private property, free trade, economic growth and, more fundamentally, to

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<sup>31</sup> This is clearly part of Rae’s message in his report on higher education in Ontario (2005). During the consultations that presaged the release of the final report, Rae also released a consultation paper in which he highlighted such research: (Looker 2002).

methodological individualism. This marriage of theoretical eclecticism, on the one hand, and methodological and epistemological myopia on the other hand translates into a policy paradigm that is both extensive and convergent, without necessarily appearing as such. The precepts and principles of neoliberalism are carried forward via analyses that are putatively “sociological”, or “historical”, but which are, in actual fact, but so many neo-classical economic neologisms.

## **2.4 Quality Assessment in the context of Neoliberal Theory and Policy**

As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, it is simply not possible to understand the current state of the academy without considering the role played by QA in the creation and re-production of the current state of affairs. Simply, QA has been the basis upon which governments have leveraged funding in order to press colleges and universities into particular forms of research and modes of instruction. As such, QA has been an instrument of restructuring. Before outlining the theory underlying QA and how even the most “radical” of the mainstream approaches to QA have acted in the manner just described, it is first necessary to outline something of the condition of the science base – both social and natural – throughout the developed world.

Recall, the assertions made at the outset of this chapter related to the degree to which government policy reflected an underlying commitment to neoclassical and new classical theory and thereby to the dominant models advocated by the mainstream of economics and the social sciences. It should

come as little of a surprise then, that the literature on QA, which is a subset of CIHE, is ambiguous: QA is described as both curse and cure, and there is no discussion of epistemological or ontological underpinnings. This ambiguity makes it difficult to characterize *the* literature as such, or to easily hone in on and describe epistemological and methodological roots. In fact, in reviewing the first fifteen years of the INQAAHE's journal, *Quality in Higher Education*, Lee Harvey and James Williams - the journal's editors, and highly regarded experts in the field - manage only to categorize the some 320 articles published since 1995 into one of 17 *topical* categories, many of which they then subdivide further (Harvey and Williams 2010a; Harvey and Williams 2010b). The review is also troubling in that it is largely constructed from article abstracts, which they re-print without attribution and then subject to the aforementioned categorization. Outside of sometimes re-phrasing the conclusions of some of the journal's articles, Harvey and Williams, offer only this pithy insight:

So what has quality assurance done for us? The review suggests that it has resulted in clear documentation and transparency, although external processes could be better aligned to everyday academic activity. Internal processes are still developing and the link between external processes, internal processes and improvements in teaching and learning seem to be tenuous and patchy. What is remarkable is the internationalisation of quality assurance and the standardisation of procedures, even though they leave a lot to be desired. Attempts to push a consumerist approach to higher education have met with indifference and while there are increasing social demands being placed on higher education there remains a strong commitment to autonomy, independence and academic freedom, which quality assurance procedures sometimes rub up against. It has been 15 years with lots of enthusiasm and ideas, as exemplified in the articles in *Quality in Higher Education*, but also 15 years of inertia and compliant indifference among a substantial section of the academic and

administrative community. It begs the question: could the quality of higher education have been enhanced more efficiently and effectively without elaborate quality assurance systems? (L. Harvey and Williams 2010b, 107)

At a level of abstraction somewhat higher than that used by Harvey and Williams in their categorization, one finds within the QA literature there is a tendency to focus on two issues: 1) the fact that an apparent diversity of different definitions of and opinions about quality entails a basic challenge to any QA system; and, 2) the mechanics of measurement (i.e. discussion of the processes and policies needed to support an effective system of QA). The two issues are obviously related. How one measures and provides for quality depends fundamentally on how it is defined and what one seeks to assure through the use of such a definition. Because it is generally accepted in the literature that there are different – and equally legitimate - definitions of quality, the literature tends to deal with both issues in one fell swoop, and in one of two ways: 1) by discussing the utility of different (but equal?) evaluative/assurance systems/mechanisms for different segments of the “productive process” (i.e. one system for the assessment of “basic or curiosity driven research”, and another for “practical and applied research”, or different forms of assessment for different kinds of taught courses); or, 2) by distinguishing between different assessment methodologies (accountability; improvement; total quality management; continuous improvement), the way in which each methodology reflects a different definition of quality, and how such assessment methodologies may be folded into

an overarching system of QA. Here one sees the logic in Harvey's and William's categorization: by dividing the literature by topic Harvey and Williams highlight the tendency of scholars working in the area to focus on different segments of one or multiple QA systems, and/or different stakeholders, again within one or several different QA systems; some work discusses QA systems that are internal (Coyle 2003; Horsburgh 1999; Meade 1995), while other focuses on those that are external (Middlehurst and Woodhouse 1995; Thune 1996; Danø and Stensaker 2007; Leeuw 2002); some work discusses audits (Dill 2000; Cheng 2009), while other work discusses accreditation programs (Haakstad 2001; Westerheijden 2001; Faber and Huisman 2003; Scheele 2004); there are analyses that look at how transnational programs are to be evaluated and assessed (Craft 2004; Walker 1999; Dixon and Scott 2003), and those that look at how national systems have evolved (Franke 2002; Tomusk 2000; Szanto 2004); some work focuses on teaching and learning (Douglas and Douglas 2006; McMillan and Parker 2005; Lomas and Nicholls 2005), and other work which discusses the validity and reliability of student feedback questionnaires (Bean 2005; Popli 2005), and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>32</sup>

In sum then, we may say that with the exception of a few articles which are absolutely critical of QA (discussed below), Harvey's and William's "review" and categorization suggests that which a more detailed examination of the literature

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<sup>32</sup> For this reason, the present examination of the QA literature is conducted at a high level of analysis; it is neither possible within a reasonable amount of space, nor particularly useful to examine the minutiae of this literature.

reveals: it is focused firmly on providing “mid-” or “meso-level” analyses of different and apparently discrete areas of QA, and therein on the development of mechanisms that can aid in the assessment of quality, variously defined.

Whether or not QA may be reproductive of a particular kind of logic or program of capital accumulation is simply not addressed, even if some articles do recognize that the pressures to develop QA have emerged since the 1980’s and in the context of Reagan(ism) and Thatcher(ism).<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, many mainstream analyses do begin by acknowledging that governmental drives for efficiency may potentially jeopardize quality (R. Brown 2004; Franke 2002). Also, scholars frequently highlight the difficulty associated with finding *the* operative definition of quality, given what is claimed to be a diversity of equally legitimate opinions about what constitutes that apparently ineffable thing.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the literature is undergirded by a kind of liberal pluralism that is not so easily described as neoliberal. Because there is no obvious assumption that market based definitions of quality are applicable to

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<sup>33</sup> See for example, Roger Brown’s (2004) book on the subject, as well as that of Diane Green (D. M. Green 1994)

<sup>34</sup> For example, William Stubbs, the former Chief Executive of the PCFC and the FEFC, in his essay, “Quality in Higher Education: A Funding Council Perspective,” ends his piece with this quote, which he borrows from Philip Reynolds, the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Lancaster:

To the committed scholar the quality of higher education is likely to be determined by its ability to produce a steady flow of people with high intelligence and commitment to learning who will continue the process of transmission and advancement of knowledge. To a Secretary of State a high quality system may be one that produces trained scientists, engineers, architects, doctors and so on in numbers judged to be required by society. To an industrialist in the British tradition a high quality educational institution may be one that turns out graduates with wide-ranging, flexible minds, readily able to acquire skills and adapt to new methods and needs. The measurements required, and thus the standards to be applied will be different for each of these notions of quality.(Stubbs 1994, 26)

higher education, not an outright rejection of that logic either, the literature on QA appears “non-ideological”. Indeed, the QA literature tends to be equivocal:

Given the difficulties in defining quality in higher education, some have opted out of trying to find an underlying theory or definition. Vroeijenstijn (1991) says ‘it is a waste of time to try to define quality’. The basis of this argument is that quality is a relative concept, that different interest groups or ‘stakeholders’ in higher education have different priorities and their focus of attention may be different...It is not possible, therefore, to talk about quality as a unitary concept, quality must be defined in terms of qualities, with recognition that an institution may be of high quality in relation to one factor but low quality in relation to another. The best that can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken.(D. M. Green 1994, 17)

Borrowing from Cox, the QA literature is perhaps best conceived of as a kind of “transmission belt”(Cox 1992): in standing between governmental and private sector drives for efficiency and an apparent plurality of opinions around what constitutes quality in higher education, mainstream scholarship attempts to provide a means by which to ensure both economy and quality, without collapsing one into the other. Of course, what this has meant is that the mainstream literature plays a kind of rear-guard action. In the face of government pressures to turn higher education and research into ‘commercializable’ products, the literature attempts to refine – and segment – the QA process and to thereby navigate between “accountability” and “improvement”. The “fix” in other words, is always institutional/procedural.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In discussing the mechanics of measurement, the literature has thus tended to focus on the development of such ‘nuanced’ approaches, as well as the way in which processes can themselves be subject to QA (who will assess the assessors, after-all?). The literature hardly



In this regard, it bears highlighting that the literature is totally unable to track or comment on the degree to which the global science base has been completely transformed under the aegis of neoliberal policy. The re-direction of the science base away from basic and curiosity driven research and the accordant conflation of the public interest with private-sector led economic growth, have entailed a general convergence around what constitutes “quality” or, within that vessel, “fitness for purpose” or “excellence” or however one would like to label it. Moreover, neither students nor the academy have been immune to this transformation. As Bob Rae would have it, there is now a general acceptance that higher education, however much it might be a ‘value-in-itself’, is primarily a practical necessity euphemistically referred to as a form of ‘investment’.

The QA literature therefore is ultimately mimetic of the neoliberal tropes outlined above, albeit at a lower level of analysis. The a-theoretical kind of institutionalism that makes-up the bulk of the mainstream literature, however pluralist its intent, is vacant notions of power, but not simply because it obviously advances a world-view within which causation is complex and indeterminate. The mainstream literature does not meaningfully discuss power because it simply

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approaches this question sarcastically, however, for it sees in this question the issue of relevance and durability: processes of quality assessment must not only serve the diversity of interests to which the university apparently caters, but it must also be careful to assist in the production of meaningful results.

does not attempt to address the sources of stakeholder views on the elements of quality!<sup>36,37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In this way, it may also be said that the literature defines quality as a set of use-values, as defined by different stakeholders. Accordingly, a QA system must be equipped to assess quality without focusing too narrowly on the exchange-values that different use-values might garner in the market. As such the question of resources is, apparently, set-aside; so long as systems of QA function to assess and assure the quality of different and sometimes competing use-values, we can avoid the tendency to rely exclusively or even primarily on assessments that conflate use-value with exchange value. But this merely begs the question: are the humanities generally less excellent than the natural sciences?

<sup>37</sup> Some analyses even flirt with radical theory and therein with trenchant critiques of contemporary capitalism. But even such “radical” scholarship seems most concerned with moderating the effects of what is described as flawed policy, generally through the implementation of QA processes based upon reflexive – and “locally owned” – efforts at quality improvement (i.e. institutional fixes). As such, even the most critical of the mainstream literature ultimately proposes a solution that does not so much reject the logic of measurement, as it does seek to funnel it through a reflexive, democratic and dialectical framework that, we are told, would pay “transformational” dividends. Indeed, the most radical tropes within the mainstream literature maintain that useful and effective mechanisms at QA can be established within the context of a neoliberal world order. Where the proverbial rubber hits the road, however, is in the way such critical strands engage with the mainstream: in the attempt to consciously eschew and subvert neoliberal directives whilst at the same time “optimize” quality, we find simply another managerial strategy; rather than impose strict QA processes, the most radical proponents of QA seek to “steer not row”, and thereby to establish “grass roots buy-in” in the quest to build an enduring “quality culture”.

## **Chapter 3 - Assessing the Methods of Assessment**

In this chapter I examine in turn all of the measures used to assess and evaluate quality in higher education. The following sub-sections indicate my own efforts to distinguish between and categorize the various measures and assessment tools in use today. In most of these sub-sections I have made some effort to examine all of the measures usefully slotted in each category. However, in sub-sections where an exhaustive analysis would be too voluminous and redundant I have chosen to examine seminal examples of each category. For those measures which I do not examine, I have referenced key sources and given a brief overview of key debates and which side(s) in those debates I believe to be the most convincing. In all, what I demonstrate again and again through each sub-section is the way in which contemporary efforts to assess quality enable the reproduction of the neo-liberal university and therein the production of labour-power and forms of knowledge best suited for the contemporary advanced- and/or post-industrial economy.

### **3.1 Quality as Returns to Investment in Higher Education**

Although not generally a part of governmental or quasi-governmental QA programs, private sector rankings frequently make use of data on post-graduation incomes as an indication of excellence and thus quality. And many institutions, in many jurisdictions, do in fact compile and make public such data

on a routine basis.<sup>38</sup> As well, virtually every recent governmental report on higher education attests to both the private and social returns on investment (ROI) realized through investment in higher education. Indeed, even the OECD gets in on this action, most notably in its annual “Education at a Glance” series. The argument for the use of such data is simple enough: it demonstrates that investment in higher education makes sense, both for individuals and for governments (thus the “private” (read “individuals”) and “social” (read “public”) ROIs). For present purposes, it is both the alleged ROI on higher education and the basis upon which that measure is calculated/derived, that are key. The wage premium (and thus tax-revenue premium) generated by investment in higher education is generally said to indicate that one obtains something of *qualitative* value/significance through higher education. The OECD, and many governments, generally parse this in terms of the so-called “knowledge based economy”, the emergence and evolution of which has allegedly involved an endless thirst for highly skilled individuals. The OECD puts it succinctly:

Over the past decade across OECD countries, the percentage of adults who have attained higher education has grown at a rapid clip, from 22% in 2000 to 31% in 2010. Yet despite this burgeoning supply of well-educated individuals – as well as the faltering market conditions from 2008 forward – most people with higher education have continued to reap very good economic benefits. This signals that, overall, the demand for highly-skilled employees to meet the needs of the knowledge economy in OECD countries has continued to grow, even during the crisis. (OECD 2012)

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the University of California at Berkeley compiles data on post-graduation incomes by program. This data is available via their “Career Center” website at <https://career.berkeley.edu/default.stm>. Program specific data is presented under the heading, “What can I do with a degree in...?”.

On the basis of this data the OECD subsequently reasons that higher education bestows upon individuals a level of skill necessary to succeed in the knowledge economy. As the logic goes, because individuals who “invest” in higher education meet the continually expanding needs of the knowledge economy, they must be learning the requisite skills necessary to participate in that economy. Therefore, the wage premium (ROI) that such smart “investors” realize reflects their qualitative advance (i.e. the acquisition of new skills). In this way, the OECD - and governments everywhere - conflate knowledge and prices. While this is a subject to which I will return in greater detail in the next chapter, it is important to note here that the significance of QA lies in this conflation. It is therefore necessary to begin with the core of that conflation: the literature that attempts to describe and measure the ROI in higher education.

Measuring with any precision the ROI in higher education is a complicated affair. As with all ROI calculations, calculating the ROI on, for example, a bachelor’s degree must be done relative to all other forms of investment available (like a college rather than a university education) such that the economic value of any one kind of investment can be judged relative to the size of both the initial investment (i.e. tuition-fees, living expenses etc.), and also relative to the value, or potential value, of other alternative forms of “investment”. Again, “value” is taken to mean some estimation of post-graduation income over some express period of time, generally the entirety of a person’s working life. As such, the calculation of the ROI on higher education for use *today* is a matter of delivering

a reasonable *projection* of the “present future value” of that investment.<sup>39</sup> In developing this kind of projection historical data, while potentially useful for comparative and *historical* analysis, are not necessarily so useful in calculating the “present *future* value” of investment in higher education. And so, in order to understand the ROI on different forms of investment, analyses take historical data and make a series of assumptions around how and whether or not any discernable historical patterns will change over time.<sup>40</sup> Within the mainstream, this involves first, the “explanation” (via a series of assumptions) of historical patterns. By putatively explaining the nature of historical patterns, mainstream analysts claim an ability to test theoretical nostrums, like those recounted above about the apparent utility of investment in higher education (by virtue of its transformative effects). In other words, if the present future value of a university degree has historically been significant, mainstream scholars “explain” this significance as a by-product of a worker’s increased skill and of the markets unquenchable thirst for such workers; the wage premium is said to demonstrate, at least historically, the apparent validity of Say’s Law, at least with respect to the so-called “knowledge based economy”. But as the quote from the OECD above

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<sup>39</sup> i.e. a 17 year-old deciding in 2013 between university and college needs to know how much they are likely to earn as a) a university graduate over the course of the rest of their lives; and, b) a college graduate over the course of the rest of their lives. The present future value of a university degree is the difference between those two numbers.

<sup>40</sup> The historical spread is simply a by-product of cross tabulating data on average regular weekly earnings with levels of education attained, something which is either derived from census data (where both data are compiled), or through the use of industry survey data gathered by national statistical agencies, which also compiles both data-sets. At no point do such calculations constitute explanations.

suggests, this kind of explanation and proof (of Say's Law) is in turn used as a justification for *assuming* that the present future value of a university degree will either hold constant or grow (i.e. given that the knowledge based economy has always soaked up highly skilled labour, we can assume, given our assumptions of how the knowledge based economy works, that the same pattern will continue ad infinitum).

One seminal example of how mainstream analysts calculate the present future value of investment in higher education is an award-winning paper produced under the umbrella of the Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network, "The Evolution of Returns to Human Capital in Canada: 1980 -2006". In that paper, Bourdarbat, Lemieux, and Riddell find that although other studies of the wage premium earned by university grads have found that the wage premium for university grads has been stable (or decreasing) since 1980, their latest study indicates the opposite: the wage premium for university grads has accelerated since 1980 (Bourdarbat, Lemieux, and Riddell 2010). On this basis, they then argue for additional, private, investment in higher education. Bourdarbat et al attribute the difference between their findings and others to two things: 1) the use of mean over median income levels; and, 2) their decision to control for work experience. In choosing to use mean income data instead of median data Bourdarbat et al note:

A potential problem with the use of the median is that it is relatively unaffected by increases in the returns to education that take place in the top part of the wage distribution. Since highly educated workers are

mainly located in the top half of the earnings distribution, this is a potentially important limitation of median-based measures. Furthermore, there is evidence that much of the growth in wage inequality during these two decades occurred in the very top of the earnings distribution (Saez and Veall, 2005). Such changes may have little effect on the median earnings of high and low educated workers. (Bourdarbat, Lemieux, and Riddell 2010, 9)

In fact, Bourdarbat et al are right in arguing that the use of “median-based measures” excludes the “top part of the wage distribution”. Upon investigation, however, one finds that what is technically correct, is analytically dishonest, a manipulation necessary to prove an ideological position, but not a point of fact. Presumably, Bourdarbat et al recognize this fact. In the Saez and Veall article that they reference, Saez and Veall (2005) note that the share of national income earned by the top percentile exploded in both Canada and the United States after around 1980. Stunningly, the top 0.01% of the top percentile out-performed everyone else in terms of income growth. More than this, Saez and Veall suggest that this outstanding performance had much more to do with changes to the tax code and to family background than to an individual’s level of education (Saez and Veall 2005). By opting to include this portion of the population from their dataset Bourdarbat et al are able to paint a rosier picture of the private returns to education than has in fact been the case for most “investors”. Because participation rates jumped through the 1980s and 1990s, this rosier revisioning is functional in that it proves the wisdom of investment in higher education even during a period when labour markets are increasingly chock-full of “skilled”



graduates. Thus, Bourdarbat et al essentially apply Say's Law to the calculation of the present future value of investment in higher education.<sup>41</sup>

In "controlling" for experience, Bourdarbat et al, attempt to "gild the lily" still further. Because the rate of participation in post-secondary education has been increasing for some time, the income/wage gap between older un-educated workers (with a high school diploma) and those with a baccalaureate degree, is said to be smaller than Bourdarbat et al *assume* they will become. In other words, given high-levels of participation in higher education, they assume that as the population ages, relatively less educated, but more experienced, older workers will be replaced by increasingly experienced and more educated workers at the top and then the middle rungs of the labour market. Therefore, the wage premium will increase as more and more jobs are closed off to less educated workers (i.e. less educated workers will be ghettoized). In theory, and possibly even in reality, this stands to reason. The BA is arguably becoming a requisite for most jobs. But this hardly says anything about the degree to which a BA confers skill, knowledge or ability. Instead, the fact that employers are increasingly apt to require an undergraduate degree, more straightforwardly reflects what is today socially necessary to access the average wage.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In the US, where the growth of inequality has been more pronounced than in Canada, the use of median over mean data would make the apparent ROI to higher education appear even more appealing than in Canada).

<sup>42</sup> It may well be that graduates do obtain significant skills and knowledge while at university. It is not clear, however, that a more rigorous curriculum at the secondary school level could not impart the same level of skill, or that it did not, once upon a time, do so. Regardless, the point is that employers' decision to replace less educated and retiring workers with more educated workers, and to set entrance requirements at a higher level does not indicate anything

All this belies the degree to which the calculation of both the private and social ROI is more a political calculation than anything else.<sup>43, 44</sup> In all three of the jurisdictions under investigation, average wages have remained largely stable since at least 1980, if not well before then (Sharpe, Arsenault, and Harrison 2008). Meanwhile, productivity growth rates have been impressive, again in each of the three jurisdictions under investigation (Sharpe, Arsenault, and Harrison 2008). This would indicate that workers – including those more highly educated ones – have not enjoyed the rewards of such productivity increases as much as has capital. This is borne out in multiple measures, including the relative shares of labour and capital of value added. Whatever is the transformative value of higher education, it has not been the generalization of

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very vigorous about the qualitative advances that students/workers make/obtain in attending college or university. Even if survey data indicates that employers are more satisfied with more highly educated employees, we would still have pause to ask questions about the skills and knowledge gained through a university education; to say anything conclusive about what one learns, we would need to examine the nature of “knowledge work”, rates of literacy, and the like. I consider these things immediately.

<sup>43</sup> The difference, or spread, in wages between those who have a university degree and those that do not is said to be the current “wage premium”; the total lifetime gap, less associated expenses, is the overall premium, or private ROI today; and, the social ROI is a calculation of both the increased tax revenues generated by high-income earners (i.e. university grads) alongside some approximation of the relative costs associated with the provision/use of government services, given that better educated people have tended to use relatively fewer such services.

<sup>44</sup> Historically, the wage premium may have reflected the relative availability of university grads, not their relative abilities. Overtime, and as a larger portion of the population has come to participate in higher education, employers may have simply begin using a degree or a diploma as a way of narrowing down the pool of applicants, given a relatively large standing reserve army of labour. Also, in becoming a requisite for most forms of employment, the wage premium paid to university graduates may reflect the ghettoization of less educated workers, rather than an overall improvement in the prosperity of the average worker. This might also explain the relative health of university graduates, whose jobs in the burgeoning services sector may be less taxing and toxic than those available to less educated individuals. Of course, such possibilities are never raised in the mainstream literature. Instead, the transformative effect of higher education (i.e. its quality”) is said to bestow on individuals the advantages necessary to earn the wage premium.

greater prosperity. This does not mean that a higher education is not of great economic value. There is unquestionably a wage premium paid to/earned by university graduates, and for many - though by no means all - this premium is decidedly larger than the investments made (OECD 2012). None of this says anything about “quality”, however, unless we assume, as is done within the mainstream literature, that the premium earned (i.e. access to the average wage), is made accessible by virtue of an individual’s participation in higher education. Is there a demonstrable connection between the skills one learns at university and the types of jobs available in the “New”, “knowledge based” economy?

## **3.2: Direct measures of literacy, knowledge, and other aptitudes**

### **3.2.1 Testing Literacy**

While there has been heated debate over the utility of standardized tests such as the SAT and the GRE, which are said to directly measure literacy as well as other aptitudes such as problem-solving ability<sup>45</sup>, this section is focused more

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<sup>45</sup> Criticism of standardized tests such as the Graduate Record Exam (the GRE) have tended to focus on three sets of issues: 1) the degree to which such tests are ‘in-direct’ and therein no more useful or insightful than grades ; 2) the degree to which such rely upon mainstream social and cultural norms, making it difficult for individuals from certain groups to score high even despite high levels of proficiency; and, 3) the fact that direct measures tend to assess students relative to low and minimum standards, and as a result indicate nothing very meaningful about general levels of literacy, numeracy, problem solving ability and the like. To the extent that the mainstream has considered these criticisms, little has been done to meaningfully address them; the private corporations that write and administer many of the most commonly used forms of standardized tests have gone to great pains to demonstrate the utility of their tests, to create more gender and class neutral questions, and to build some consensus around the idea that they are in fact useful, at least in so far as they are said to accurately predict future performance. But these efforts have been rather superficial and ultimately meaningless, save as evidence of the degree to which corporate interests can be productive of bad science. (see for instance Nairn 1980; Lehman 1999; Sacks 1997; Radhika 2006; Sacks 1999)

myopically on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and its descendants, the Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey (ALL), and more recently the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Though both of these tests have become important in public policy debates, arguably more so than other such direct tests, they have not been subject to very much, if any, critical analysis. Upon examination, what we find is that the IALS and the ALL, are only useful in so far as they function to recreate capital through the development of a standard form of literacy that is both functional to capitalist production and to which individuals, schools, and entire jurisdictions can be held to account.<sup>46</sup> The IALS was first piloted in 1994, ostensibly by the OECD and Statistics Canada in conjunction with eight other member countries (Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US). However, and as with the subsequent tests, the management of the process – and much of the research published in the subject of the surveys, has been performed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), a not-for-profit testing juggernaut owned by specific institutions and interests in America’s higher education sector (discussed in Chapter 5). The first survey (IALS), like every subsequent one, sought to measure levels of adult literacy relative to levels of economic and social success such that the international community could develop a clearer picture of

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<sup>46</sup> The “form of literacy” to which I am referring here, and which I elucidate immediately, is what a representative of the OECD during a presentation on the IALS, described as, “road-sign literacy”, that is an ability to read and follow directions. I would submit that were the dominant form of literacy able to impart an ability to dissect and understand the capitalist mode of production, the future of capitalism would be in most immediate jeopardy.

the degree to which literacy functions as a key causative variable in improving a person's life chances. In so far as the surveys have sought to complicate definitions of literacy by distinguishing different constituent elements/skills and thus levels of literacy, they were intended to "permit policy makers...to concentrate resources in areas that may be amenable to intervention by individuals, employers and governments (Statistics Canada 1997)." Ultimately, and more plainly, the surveys measure the degree to which economic and social success can be correlated with an individual's ability to perform specific types of tasks so as to offer policy-makers insight into which areas governments needed to focus energy and resources.<sup>47</sup> Though the definition of literacy has expanded over time, the IALS identified seven "domains" of literacy: 1) prose literacy; 2) document literacy; 3) numeracy; 4) problem solving; 5) practical cognition; 6) teamwork; 7) information and communication technology. For practical reasons the IALS, ultimately measured only the first three areas, which were defined in the following way:

**Prose Literacy:** The knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks, that is, to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts. Prose examples include editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials.

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<sup>47</sup> According to the OECD, "...previous studies treated literacy as a condition that adults either have or do not have. The IALS no longer defines literacy in terms of an arbitrary standard of reading performance, distinguishing the few who completely fail the test (the "illiterates") from nearly all those growing up in OECD countries who reach a minimum threshold (those who are "literate"). Rather, proficiency levels along a continuum denote how well adults use information to function in society and the economy. Thus, literacy is defined as a particular capacity and mode of behaviour: the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential. (OECD and Statistics Canada 2000, x)

Document Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks, that is, to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats. Document examples include job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug or food labels.

Quantitative Literacy: The knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative literacy tasks, that is, to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials. Quantitative examples include balancing a checkbook, figuring out a tip, completing an order form, or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement. (OECD and Statistics Canada 2000, x)

The IALS scored participants on a 500 point scale and total scores were in turn translated to a 5 point scale, where each point is associated with some gross or aggregate level of skill and/or competency in the three areas just described. The first level, obtained by anyone scoring between 0 and 225 points on the IALS is associated with an extremely low level of skill/competence and thus functional illiteracy. Level five, at the other extreme, denotes a level of skill/competence defined as a, "... command of higher-order information processing skills." (OECD and Statistics Canada 2000, xi).

Subsequently, the IALS was administered in 1996 and 1998, each time in a different set of member states. Ultimately 22 states participated in the IALS and with such success that the OECD, again in conjunction with several member states revised and updated the IALS with the aim of extending and improving the survey. In 2002, six states (Bermuda, Canada, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States) participated in a beefed up IALS, this time labeled the, "Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey" or "ALL". In addition to the three domains of

literacy just described the ALL added a fourth problem solving domain, which was defined as follows:

Problem solving involves goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution procedure is available. The problem solver has a more or less well defined goal, but does not immediately know how to reach it. The incongruence of goals and admissible operators constitutes a problem. The understanding of the problem situation and its step-by-step transformation, based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem solving. (Statistics Canada and OECD 2005, 16)

The PIAAC, which will report on literacy levels in the OECD's 33 member states in late 2013, thereby massively increasing the scope of either the IALS or the ALL, is based upon identical definitions and premises. The primary objectives in performing such a massive survey are decidedly clearer, however:

Data from the Survey of Adult Skills will allow investigation of the links between key information-processing skills and a range of variables, constituting a rich evidence base for policy-relevant analysis. In particular, data from this survey will facilitate a better understanding of:

- Performance of education and training systems
- The extent and dimensions of illiteracy and poor literacy
- Gaps between labour markets and education and training
- Equity levels in access to education and intergenerational mobility
- Young people's transition from education to work
- Identification of at-risk populations
- Links between key cognitive skills and variables, such as demographics, educational background, health, etc. (OECD 2013)

### **3.2.2 Results: Literacy in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States**

Since the mid-1990s, the results of first the IALS and subsequently of the ALL have been parsed in myriad ways and published under rather telling titles: “Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD and Statistics Canada 1995)”; “The Value of Words: Literacy and Economic Security in Canada (Statistics Canada 1998a)” ; “Literacy Utilization in Canadian Workplaces (Statistics Canada 1998b)”; “Schooling, Literacy and Individual Earnings (Statistics Canada 2000)” ; “Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (Statistics Canada and OECD 2005)”.<sup>48</sup> As tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 make clear the results, viewed comparatively suggest broadly similar levels of literacy in each of the three jurisdictions under investigation in this dissertation.

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<sup>48</sup> Reports that were less directly concerned with the intersection of economic success and literacy were also put-out.



Table 2. 149

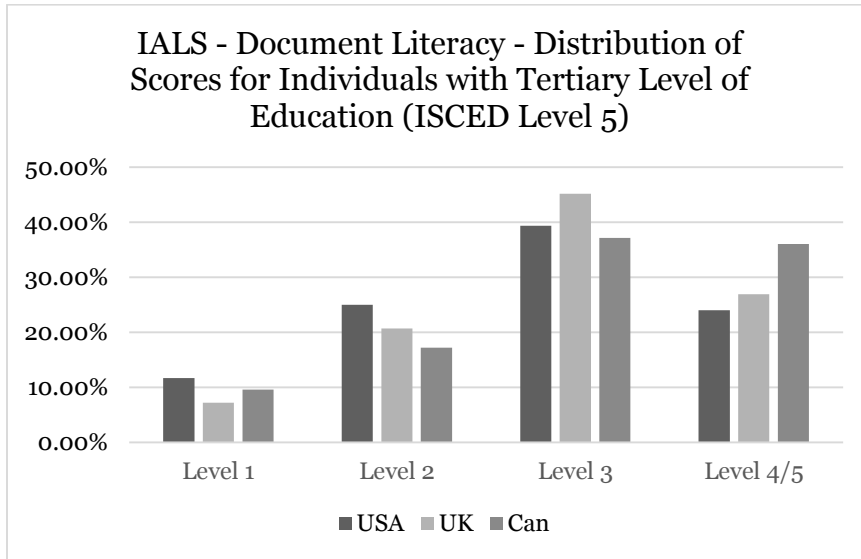
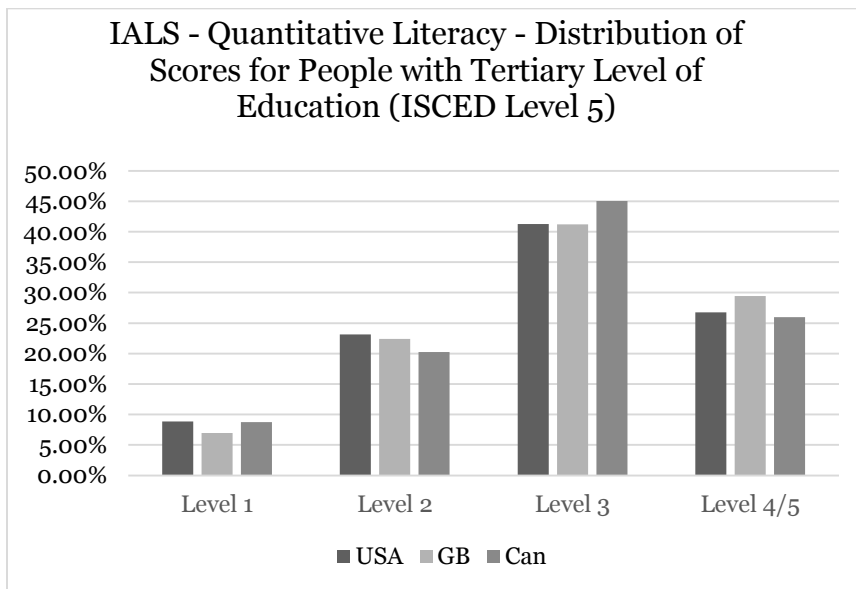
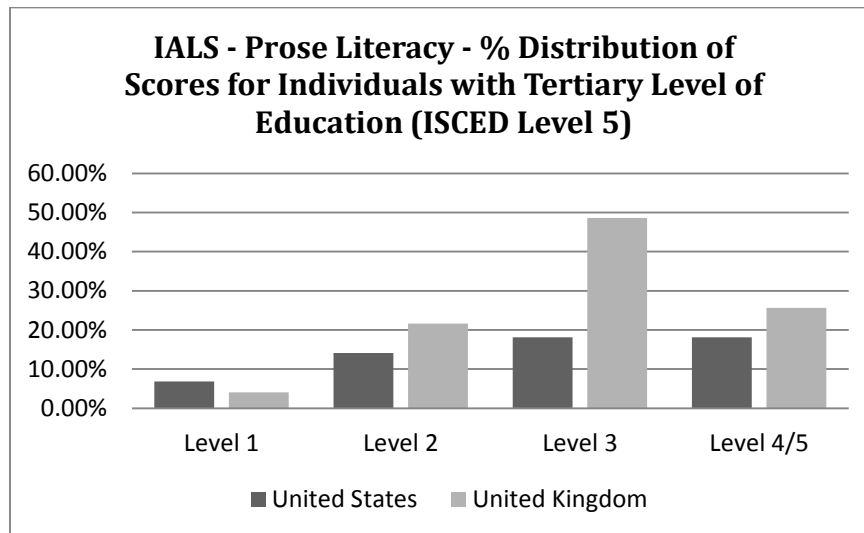


Table 2. 2



<sup>49</sup> All data were taken from OECD and Statistics Canada, ODESI database on IALS study

**Table 2. 3**



Comparative data between the IALS and the ALL, though available, was not used here because the format in which it was reported changed, thereby making it impossible to reproduce a percentage frequency distribution as above.

Nonetheless, the OECD and Statistics Canada report on the results of the ALL, the aforementioned, “Learning a Living” report (Statistics Canada and OECD 2005) note a lower level of “inequality”, which, as the quotation below indicates, means that during the emergence and maturation of the neoliberal university, literacy scores amongst university graduates and the general population have tended to group around the middle:

The results also show that in a few countries or regions the performance of the top five per cent is somewhat lower in ALL than in IALS. The 95th percentile scores are significantly lower in Canada (-10 points), Italian speaking Switzerland (-16 points) and the United States (-23 points) on the prose scale; and Canada (-18 points), French speaking Switzerland (-9 points), Italian speaking Switzerland (-14 points) and the United States (-15 points) on the document scale... Moreover, improvements in performance at the lower end and reductions at the upper ends of

distributions imply less inequality in the distribution of prose and document skills. Reductions in the range of scores from the 5th to the 95th percentiles are substantial in all countries and regions, except in Norway, which already had a low level of inequality in 1998.(Statistics Canada and OECD 2005, 39)

The American Institutes for Research also conducted a more focused study of university graduates, though only in the United States. With money from the Pew Charitable Trusts, which also funded the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE – discussed below), the American Institutes for Research conducted and released its National Survey of America’s College Students, which openly built upon the IALS and the ALL, thereby affirming the latter’s place as *the* standard of literacy assessment in the world. The results of that study confirmed what is set out above in terms of the distribution of scores. More interestingly, the results of that study also tested the relationship between literacy scores and certain measures of “student engagement” (discussed below), and found that, in a statistically relevant number of cases, more engaged students under-performed relative to their less engaged counterparts (American Institutes for Research et al. 2006, 50). Although this was not always the case (in some instances, more engaged students did better), what is perhaps even more telling as to the overall level of literacy amongst university and college graduates is that mean scores never topped 350 on the same 500 point scale used in the IALS!

### **3.2.3 Literacy and Value**

Given the level of literacy at which most university graduates are able to operate in each of the three jurisdictions under investigation it is useful to

consider the nature of the IALS and the ALL in more detail. The ALL, like its precursor, does purport to see literacy as key to both ‘economic and social success’, but it does not, again like the IALS, indicate in any terrific detail what defines such success. Drawing from the OECD’s “DeSeCo project”<sup>50</sup>, which revolved around the development and definition of literacy scales, the OECD and Statistics Canada indicate that literacy will help individuals to function in a society described by a respect for human rights, environmental sustainability; equality; productivity; and social cohesion. Little if anything further is said on these issues in any of the OECD or Statistics Canada reports related to the IALS or the ALL, and the idea that literacy is fundamental to democracy does not receive mention anywhere. In fact, the report overtly supports the idea of, “a

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<sup>50</sup> The “Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo)” project, was an extensive effort undertaken by the OECD and some leading member states to build consensus and support for the newest version of the IALS. Accordingly the DeSeCo project, “was carried out under the leadership of Switzerland and linked to PISA, brought together experts in a wide range of disciplines to work with stakeholders and policy analysts to produce a policy-relevant framework. Individual OECD countries were able to contribute their own views to inform the process. The project acknowledged diversity in values and priorities across countries and cultures, yet also identified universal challenges of the global economy and culture, as well as common values that inform the selection of the most important competencies.” These ‘universal challenges’ are outlined first as strictly economic: the need to boost productivity and market competitiveness; the challenge of developing an adaptive and qualified labor force; and the challenge of being innovative in the midst of an intensely competitive global market. Immediately thereafter there is some consideration other challenges “outside the domain of economics and work”: challenges of democratic participation of social cohesion and justice; and of increasing global inequality of opportunities and increasing individual marginalization. There is, however, no consideration how the development of competencies in respect of one set of challenges – the economic – might be inimical to the other set of challenges – the non-economic. This is in fact the central position articulated in this chapter. See [http://www.oecd.org/document/17/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_39263238\\_2669073\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/17/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_2669073_1_1_1_1,00.html), and the link available on that page to the executive summary of the report that resulted from the Project.

demand-oriented approach to competence” (and thus to literacy), which it subsequently goes on to define as,

the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of knowledge, cognitive skills, but also practice skills, as well as social and behaviour components such as attitudes, emotions, and values and motivations (Murray et al. 2005, 36).

Even a cursory examination of the test, however, reveals that the survey only tests participants’ “functional literacy” in a single context, that of contemporary capitalism and the modern corporation. Indeed, the questions asked on the survey collectively indicate that “success” is defined as an ability to navigate the market, both as a consumer and as a worker. The degree to which literacy is a constituent part of democracy and civic participation is never measured. The examples listed below of actual survey questions are drawn from a statistics Canada report that describes the questions as the hardest ones found on the ALL in each of the three primary categories mentioned above. As concerns prose literacy, the OECD and Statistics Canada report details that the hardest question,

...directs the reader to use the information from a pamphlet about hiring interviews to, ‘write in your own words one difference between the panel and the group interview.’ Here the difficulty does not come from locating the information in the text. Rather than merely locating a fact about each type of interview, readers need to integrate what they have read to infer a characteristic on which the two types of interviews differ. (Statistics Canada and OECD 2005, annex a)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Many OECD and Statistics Canada publications are compilations of work by individual authors. In many cases the work published under the OECD and/or Statistics Canada banner is remarkably similar to work published in other venues and by other organizations. For instance, one of the authors of the ALL report, Irwin Kirsch, is a senior research who works out of ETS’s well-appointed campus in Princeton New Jersey. Dr. Kirsch’s publications under the ETS banner include a report on the IALS which bears notable similarities to the annex cited here. Obviously, the conventions associated with academic honesty do not apply in industry/private sector type

The question that is rated most difficult within the document literacy category,

...asks the reader to identify the average advertised price for the basic clock radio receiving the highest overall score. This task was made more difficult because the reader had to match four rather than three features; the reader also had to process conditional information, and there was a highly plausible distractor in the same node as the correct answer. (Statistics Canada and OECD 2011, 114)

And finally, in what the report describes as among the most difficult questions testing quantitative literacy, we find that the test

...directs the reader to look at a table providing nutritional analysis of food and then, using the information given determine the percentage of calories in a Big Mac that comes from total fat...To answer this question, readers first must cycle through a long table with lots of distracters to identify the correct numbers needed for this task. Next, they must recognize that the information about total fat is provided in grams. Therefore, they must convert the number of fat grams to calories before calculating this number of calories as a percentage of the total calories given for a Big Mac. (Statistics Canada and OECD 2011, 119)

The test's authors would no doubt disagree with my characterization of the test as myopically focused on a single context, likely by maintaining that in so far as the test does measure individuals' ability to track, manage, and use information, which are skills fundamental to civic participation, it does in fact operate as a reasonably good predictor of an individual's ability to participate in democracy. Or else, they might talk about the fact that the test effectively positions people outside of the workplace and in different contexts (like the home, or as a reader of a newspaper). But this actually belies the point: the survey does not complicate

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settings. But it is interesting that "slicing and dicing" (discussed below) is very much a part of the OECD's and Statistics Canada's operational norms. See (Kirsch 2001)

these contexts at all by asking people to, for instance, question the way in which the news are themselves produced, or the fact that so much of what happens in the home revolves around a near constant intersection with commodities. Statistics that attempt to correlate high levels of education with high levels of ‘participation’ (i.e. voter participation), also miss the mark, as civic participation requires much more than the ability to track, manage and use information, that is unless participation is conceived of in the context of capitalist liberal democracy, and therein as an individual’s proclivity to occasionally vote. Regardless, it is perhaps more notable that on a set of tests where the highest levels of literacy indicate an ability to “compare viewpoints in two editorials” (it is never mentioned of what kind of comparison a “highly literate” person is supposed to be capable relative to a less literate person), “interpret a table about blood pressure, age, and physical activity”, and “compute and compare the cost per ounce of food items”, one would expect that more than just 38% of US college graduates from 4-year programs would be able to demonstrate a high level of prose literacy, 40% a high level in document literacy, and 36% a high level in quantitative literacy, but this is not the case. The bulk of US college graduates from four year programs (56%, 55%, and 46% respectively for each of the three categories), are at best only able to “consult reference materials [which are given] to determine which foods contain a particular vitamin”, “identify a specific location on a map,” and, “calculate the total cost of ordering specific office

supplies from a catalogue” (American Institutes for Research et al. 2006, 19).<sup>52</sup> Again, these results are hardly different in Canada and the United Kingdom (see above). This means that more adults can ‘consult reference materials to determine which foods contain a particular vitamin’, than can ‘compare viewpoints in two editorials’. Even if we imagine that university and college graduates could uniformly achieve the highest scores on the ALL, indicating the presence of a “highly literate” population, this would leave us with little about which to be hopeful. Given the degree to which the ALL measures literacy in a functional and utilitarian way, where functionality can only be taken to mean the ability to work and consume effectively within capitalist liberal democracy, we must wonder about the actual ‘utility’ of this test (i.e. for whom it is functional?).

By establishing both a conception and a standard of knowledge against which university and college students (and graduates) can be measured, direct tests hold very clear consequences for curricula design and the management of the university. The boundary of academic freedom becomes the ability of university teachers to reproduce the most important capacities within the contemporary context, namely the ability of graduates to do work, consume, and not upset whatever ‘social cohesiveness’ (read labour unrest) exists or might be created. Moreover, the development of standards, which is a political exercise, albeit one that was totally depoliticized, as was the case with the DeSeCo, means

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<sup>52</sup> These results tend also to skew by race, with African Americans and Hispanic Americans tending to score lower than their White, male and female counterparts. (American Institutes for Research et al. 2006)



that popular ambitions for the university are transformed and managed, as is the capacity of the university to produce anything other than a pliant working-class and/or able managers. Indeed, once relative levels of literacy are correlated - as is the express purpose of the test - with rates of productivity and output (at any level), nothing else of significance can be said to remain. This is so because the operative definition of 'prosperity' is linked first and foremost with gross output and secondly, because the inequitable distribution of goods and services, given a high level of output, is effectively cast as a different kind of policy question, one best resolved through means other than education policy. Thus, the real significance of the results of tests like the ALL are as follows: on an individual basis, the test assesses an individual's potential and willingness to work and/or manage, and thus their value as a worker/manager of workers; at the level of the university, results indicate the degree to which a particular kind of labour-power is being produced (either managers and/or subordinate workers or some combination thereof). Given the ability - and the tendency (discussed below) - to correlate this data with such things as total per-student expenditures, we are given insight into the rate of productivity of labour-power of a particular university. Nationally and internationally, the results of the ALL establish a basis for comparison that is in turn indicative of overall labour market flexibility. Viewed in conjunction with other data (such as gross output or influx of foreign direct investment or the rate of investment in research and development), states may find in the IALS/ALL an excuse to borrow policy from other states. For the

private sector, tests like the IALS/ALL are key to making investment decisions, as it offers an indication of the degree to which firms are likely to find a ready supply of labour, of particular concrete forms, with an attendant willingness, in any particular jurisdiction.<sup>53</sup>

### **3.2.4 Learning outcomes/objectives<sup>54</sup>**

Unlike all of the other methods of QA described in this chapter, there are no numeric artifacts, no “metrics”, associated with the practice of producing learning objectives and outcomes. Instead, learning outcomes are intended as a means by which to ensure that some of the other metrics discussed in this chapter (ex. graduation rates, expenditures per student) are reliable. In other words, learning objectives are quality assurance mechanisms for QA. Perhaps because of the apparent need for this greater degree of assurance, (gross measures of “output”, such as graduation rates are obviously not indicators of learning quality), the development of learning outcomes have been mandated in an increasingly large number of jurisdictions, including those under study in this dissertation. In short, “learning objectives” are statements that outline in relative degrees of detail what and how much a student should know upon finishing a

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<sup>53</sup> As is discussed in more detail below, there is no reason to expect that investment will necessarily flow to jurisdictions associated with high levels of literacy, however it is measured. However, where higher levels of literacy are required to perform job tasks, evidence of such combined with assessments of regional/jurisdictional wage differentials for the same work, and relatively high levels of state support for the production of such labour-power can obviously be rather convincing.

<sup>54</sup> Learning objectives are also frequently referred to as “learning outcomes”. However, because ‘learning outcomes’ are also used to refer to things like graduation and employment rates, I have stuck with “learning objectives” exclusively.

particular course or program. In different jurisdictions, learning outcomes are required at different levels of the educational enterprise. In Ontario, for instance, governmental legislation requires that community college instructors provide students with detailed statements about a course's content, the nature of evaluation for the course, and also what students will be expected to know upon completing that course (Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities 2003). Many universities in Ontario also require instructors to prepare such outlines, though not by virtue of any formal provincial legislative requirements.<sup>55</sup> In the UK, learning outcomes are required both for individual courses and for programs of study; under the auspices of the Quality Audit Agency (QAA) (discussed in Chapter 6), all universities in the UK are expected to uphold standards of knowledge and understanding outlined in its “frameworks for higher education” manual – a periodically updated compendium of discipline specific statements regarding what graduates should know, and be able to demonstrate knowing, upon finishing some form of post-secondary education.

According to Smith and Hussey (2002) the intent in developing learning outcomes is “to distinguish between generic, specific, basic, transferable and non-transferable skills; different kinds of knowledge and understanding and so on: all specifiable as outcomes and hence available for objective assessment (Hussey and Smith 2002)”. Indeed, by enabling assessment, outcomes are intended to

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<sup>55</sup> At York University, for example, the University's policy on Quality Assurance mandates the preparation of learning outcomes for taught courses. (Senate, York University 2010)

facilitate a greater degree of accountability. They are said to operate as clear, concise, and objective qualitative measures of achievement against which students, faculty, and administrators can evaluate success or failure. As a professor at one of Ontario's community colleges put it:

Learning outcomes that accurately assess learner achievement are essential in order to demonstrate accountability to practitioners, learners, employers, and provincial funding agencies. Clearly stated and measurable learning outcomes support equity for all learners by verifying all learners have met the same outcomes. Ultimately, learning outcomes serve as reliable indicators and tangible proof of the quality of education provided by Ontario's community colleges. (Sheridan 1999)

Within the literature, discussion of learning outcomes has hardly paid attention to whether or not they might pervert or undermine the learning process. On the contrary, discussion has tended to focus on how best to establish learning outcomes that reflect the estimations of competence of all "stakeholders", most frequently identified as faculty, students, and business/industry (Palomba and Banta 2001), or how to most effectively organize learning outcome statements and subsequently supervise their imposition (Pennington and O'Neil 1994). In so far as some scholars have indicated that high-quality outcomes "must be underpinned by an effective and comprehensive approach to human resource management," which would include such things as "mandatory induction and continuing development programmes which stress professional proficiency in, and skill acquisition for, teaching," as well as "reward structures and promotion criteria which acknowledge excellence in teaching, (Pennington and O'Neil 1994, 13-18)" discussion has tended to revolve around how interventionist regulatory

measures should and can be given conventions of academic freedom. Resolution to such questions has often come by way of research that, through survey and interview, has constructed some form of popular consensus, a sense of overarching agreement about relatively general competencies and guidelines (see National Postsecondary Education Cooperative 1999). Accordingly, a competency, which is what should be present upon completion of a course of study, is a “combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to accomplish a specific task (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative 1999)”.

As Hussey and Smith assert however, learning objectives and outcomes can never be either very clear or precise. While it may be possible to specify with precision that students should be able to demonstrate a fluency with facts or particular and discrete processes (particular dates or the ability to solve a quadratic equation), an ability to explain, understand, and negotiate increasingly abstract concepts cannot be so easily defined, unless by an instructor’s preconceived understanding of what that means. Hussey and Smith write:

Since understanding can be profound or superficial, sophisticated or naïve, the descriptors, and hence the learning outcomes in which they are used, can only be interpreted in a precise way if we already know what they must signify at each level or grade. Again our claim is that this knowledge cannot be made explicit however careful we are with a prescribed vocabulary of descriptors. The same arguments apply to the specification of analytical and evaluative skills. If the learning outcome for a third-year teaching session on an English Literature degree specified that students will be able to evaluate critically Thomas Hardy’s *At Castle Boterel*, we might be impressed by a student who made an elaborate attempt to employ Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* and a feminist interpretation of guilt, but would fail a student who simply said that the poem was old fashioned rubbish. However, both are critical evaluations

and we praise one and dismiss the other only because we know roughly what is to count as a critical evaluation at this level: the descriptors themselves do not tell us this. (Hussey and Smith 2002, 226)

Hussey and Smith add that learning outcomes cannot be useful as a guide or a general indication of what is to be learned. This is so because learning outcomes need to be specific to each discipline, course, and lesson, a set of prescribed descriptors is not really of much use to teachers because objectives must be set and re-evaluated on an on-going basis. Moreover, learning does not follow a strict hierarchy, one where ‘understanding’ and a students’ ability to critique follow one upon the other. Any attempt to distinguish different levels of understanding will invariably exclude consideration of crucial steps that can happen simultaneously or in an entirely different order. As well, students can only parse the degree to which they must understand a subject through the teaching process. It is useless for them to have some vague or general outline presented to them beforehand. Students and teachers also need to set and inform objectives in light of previous experiences, at a pace dictated by the success or failure of the learning process itself, not by a prescribed set of objectives. Indeed, the prescription of objectives may prevent teachers from being able to explore issues that arise more spontaneously. More than this, prescribed objectives and outcomes provide an incentive for students to meet, but not exceed specified standards. Hussey and Smith note that, “although this is rational behaviour in a market place it is not a sensible or proper approach to education (Hussey and Smith 2002, 228)”.

Accounting for the criticisms above need not mean that teachers and students should avoid discussions about course content and learning objectives as such can indeed be a useful pedagogical device. However, learning outcomes are hardly being used as a pedagogical device. Rather they are intended as a form of supervision and assessment, and therein a means through which to achieve a greater level of accountability inside the university. Learning outcomes cannot be uncoupled from the other instruments of assessment under discussion, nor can they be divorced from the historical context in which they have emerged and are practiced.

Not surprisingly faculty and teachers have already found a plethora of effective means by which to subvert and sabotage requirements that they prepare and submit learning objectives at the outset of a course. Faculty pass-on and inherit learning outcomes from year-to-year, they find discursive tricks that indicate a rhetorical compliance but little else and then simply ignore the objectives once they have been handed in and approved. Of course, though such forms of resistance are telling of the degree to which learning objectives and/or outcomes have been successfully imposed, they are nonetheless additive to already heavy administrative loads instructors face, and are also evidence of the degree to which teaching is being remade as a highly “routinized” process of commodity production. Indeed, as David Harvie (2006) has outlined, learning outcomes are in part what makes it possible to liken teaching to commodity production. By attempting to break entire courses or degrees into a series of

discrete outcomes and pieces of knowledge, learning outcomes remake students as specific set of capacities and teachers as labourers that are productive of those capacities. Thus, in much the same way as factory workers are alienated from the products of their labour, university and college teachers are alienated from the product of their efforts too.<sup>56</sup> For Harvie things such as learning outcomes also facilitate “...first, the commensuration of teaching labour vis-à-vis other teaching labour and completely different concrete labour; and second, the driving-down of these socially necessary labour times. (D. Harvie 2006, 14 emphasis in original)”.

Though learning outcomes are clearly implicated, Harvie writes that,

If class contact hours and assessment methods are standardised across courses for students, then this standardisation frames workload calculations for teachers too (the other key variable is the number of students taught). Managers can (and do) construct workload models on this basis, from which emerges a ‘norm’ for the ‘average’ number of hours required to teach a course unit or module to a certain number of students. It is easy to ridicule such norms, and the workload models through which they are constituted, as ‘made-up’ or ‘abstract’. Of course, they are ridiculous, but they are also real: ‘inefficient’ teachers—those unable to meet or beat the ‘norm’—are usually required to justify their need for additional time and may be pressurised to reduce it or else work in their ‘own time’. Thus, a consequence of standardisation and the use of workload models is the emergence of definitions for socially necessary labour time. (Harvie 2006, 14–15)

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<sup>56</sup> Under the capitalist mode of production, workers become alienated from (i) the act of production, i.e. from their activity; (ii) the product of their labour; (iii) their own species being; and (iv) their fellow workers.



### **3.3 Key Performance Indicators**

#### **3.3.1 Metrics of Productivity**

Key performance indicators (KPIs) have become almost synonymous with institutional and governmental efforts to ensure quality, and are also typically the foundation of the litany of newspaper and magazine rankings now widely available. This is so despite the fact that the vast majority of KPIs have been subject to often rather devastating critique. Governments, institutions, and the private sector more generally have been unwilling to forgo the use of KPIs, no doubt because of their real utility, which is outlined in this sub-section. In Ontario, for instance, the government has mandated that all publicly funded community colleges gather and publicly release the following 5 KPIs: 1) Graduate Employment; 2) Graduate Satisfaction Rate; 3) Employer Satisfaction Rate; 4) Student Satisfaction Rate; 5) Graduation Rate. And Ontario's universities, under pressure from the government, now routinely gather and report similar such performance data via their websites. As well, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities compiles performance data on both the colleges and universities which it too publishes on its website. In the US, many state governments, which provide considerable support for higher education, have required institutions to provide KPI data for many years (OCUFA 2006). Though the federal government has not established any formal requirements regarding the dissemination of KPIs in the US, the US's six privately owned accrediting agencies have developed the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) in response to the federal

government's threats that KPIs were on the horizon (if they did not start reporting them) (Lederman 2013). As well, the number of private-sector rankings exercises that publish KPI data, and the willingness of most universities to provide it, is both dizzying and awe-inspiring. In the UK, the use of KPIs is a fundamental part of self-assessment exercises that are at the core of that country's QA exercise. Since 1998, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the UK's arm's length higher education regulatory body, has, through its "Performance Indicator Steering Group," set out an ever-increasing list of KPIs that universities publish regularly (HEFCE 2013).

Crucially, KPIs are intended to be used in a correlative fashion. "Quality" is generally understood to be evidenced when high rates of student satisfaction are found in the presence of high post-graduation employment rates, high rates of research output, high graduation/retention rates and expenditure per unit (i.e. expenditure on a per-student or per unit of research output). In short, KPIs help to establish a relationship between productivity, expenditure and institution and or sector design/management. By establishing benchmark standards of "excellence" (i.e. those schools that realize high rates of productivity and satisfaction at a relatively low rate of expenditure), KPIs reduce all aspects of higher education to the money form, and thus subject them to the law of value. Of course, this is hardly what the authorities claim. For them, KPIs, when used correctly, can denote the achievement of excellence and enable accountability for public expenditure. It is vital therefore that we enquire as to the validity of each

and every KPI in use today. If KPIs do not indicate anything very meaningful about quality, but are instead only indicative of the degree to which value is being generated, then we can only conclude as I just have: that they must serve another purpose.

For present purposes I have categorized KPIs into two subsidiary groups: satisfaction indices and research related indices. I do not deal at all with graduation rates, completion/retention rates or measures of research output (only where the latter are not judged relative to the results of peer review processes, which I do examine below) because such KPIs denote nothing about the qualitative aspects of teaching methods, of graduates, or of research (unless, of course, “quality” is conflated with “quantity” (which it often is) or else viewed in conjunction with other measures, such as, for example research grants earned/awarded).<sup>57</sup>

### **3.3.2 Satisfaction-related KPIs**

Though there are a wide variety of what I have labeled “satisfaction-related KPIs”, (I would, and do, include measures of student engagement in this category), they are all largely descendent of the same form: customer satisfaction surveys (Guolla 1999; Trout 2000). Purportedly, customer satisfaction surveys

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<sup>57</sup> A relatively productive researcher (i.e. a researcher who puts-out a larger number of research “outputs” that her peers (peer reviewed research papers being the most prized for of such research output),and who is also awarded significant amounts of financial support for the conduct of such research, is generally assumed to be a kind of “research star”. The coincidence of productivity and support are held to denote qualitative and quantitative excellence by virtue of the fact that grant-funds are generally subject to peer review.

are used by the producers of goods and/or services to track the degree to which their customers are satisfied in purchasing whatever it is they are selling. In this way, satisfaction surveys are said to ensure that the great mass of consumers determine what gets produced and in what quantities (or in the case of universities and colleges, who teaches what and how).<sup>58</sup> Of course, satisfaction surveys track more than just general feelings of satisfaction, they seek to determine more precisely what aspects of a commodity a consumer finds satisfying or useful or better than what is on offer elsewhere. In this way, satisfaction surveys are said to still more accurately reflect what the marketing literature refers to as “consumer sovereignty”, or the proposition that consumers – not producers (i.e. the owners of the means of production) – make productive decisions by their consumptive habits. By tracking the particularities of customer satisfaction, firms develop a sense of whether there is no demand for a particular good or service, or simply a distaste for certain aspects of a good or service.<sup>59</sup> This argument is, however, something of a mystification. In so far as satisfaction

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<sup>58</sup> The alleged utility of customer satisfaction surveys is also identical to the arguments offered in support of graduate, and employer satisfaction surveys

<sup>59</sup> In this way satisfaction surveys function in a manner that the price mechanism, cannot (despite what neo-classical economists might argue. Simply, satisfaction surveys give firms (universities) a deeper sense of their competitive advantages and disadvantages than they could otherwise get (i.e. without consulting their customers and instead relying upon the degree to which consumers voted with their feet. Of course, as is explained below, this is not the same thing as sovereignty, consumer or otherwise. Rather satisfaction surveys are recursive mechanisms through which commodity production can be reproduced; by enabling firms (universities) to strategically change their products in response to survey results, firms (universities) offer their customers (students), the appearance of sovereignty (which facilitates buy-in) without actually surrendering any meaningful amount of control. The more vigorous and granular are the survey results, the better able will be a firm to make changes that can, in turn, generate deeper buy-in and/or out-compete other firms. Of course, any survey frames the alternatives as a choice between suggested options; choice is always constrained.

surveys enable firms to better understand and thus respond to consumer preferences (which are fluid) customer satisfaction surveys function excellently to re-create the impression that consumers are sovereign, and, therein that competitive markets are both efficient and just. But unless different groups of individuals have more or less identical preferences it is not possible that consumers could be sovereign within a system of mass production, for in such a system choices are necessarily limited. Instead, what we find is that customer satisfaction surveys are productive only of value.<sup>60</sup>

To understand this point it is necessary first to locate notions of customer satisfaction and consumer sovereignty within their correct historical and ideational context, and therein as solutions to the problems thrown up by mainstream economists' focus on exchange as the source of profit. From Jevons on the Marginalists had assumed that individual preferences were simply given, that is, in the language of neo-classical economics, preferences were held to be "exogenous". This assumption was utterly crucial for the neo-classical exercise primarily, though by no means exclusively, because the endogeneity of

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<sup>60</sup> Were individuals' preferences either similar or identical this would need to be explained. The mainstream literature (i.e. neo-classical economics) says nothing very substantive about consumer preferences. In fact, mainstream economists decompose and gloss over this issue in myriad ways. For instance, some economists maintain that preferences are simply exogenous. Others claim that preferences are endogenous and utilitarian. This second answer merely dresses the same problem differently; after all what constitutes 'usefulness' for different individuals? Other economists merely purport that preferences are entirely subjective (subjective notions of value), but this would therefore have to mean that either markets are entirely inefficient, that people, through time, share a common subjectivity, or that different people find the same things satisfying for subtly different reasons, which makes the whole study of preferences useless. (Benton 1987)

preferences is an intensely complicating notion which makes it impossible to preserve neo-classical price theory and, even more significantly, the principle of methodological individualism upon which the whole neo-classical (and new institutional) program is built. If peoples' preferences are formed, even in part, within and by, for instance, the allocative system in which they exist, it is in turn necessary to explain both theoretically and empirically the causal relationships that condition individuals' preferences (i.e. we actually have to explain, not just assume from whence demand and supply, and therein prices, do come). Put another way, if preferences are shaped by identifiable and structural forces (such as institutionalized agglomerations of power) it makes little sense to argue, as the neo-classicals nonetheless do argue, that preferences are subjective. Thus, even a short jaunt down the theoretical road of preference endogeneity leads to the most un-neo-classical of ideas: 1) prices can only be explained with any theoretical consistency at all via a labour theory of value; and, 2) preferences are thus social issues!<sup>61</sup> This empirical reality is one which the neo-classicals and their "new"

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<sup>61</sup> According to the neo-classicals, prices reflect the conditions of supply and demand. And the amount of effective demand is, in turn, related to individuals perceptions of utility. But the only way to explain why and how an individual can evaluate the marginal utility gained from one additional unit of any product at a given price is via reference to another product available at another price. In other words, neo-classical price theory is tautological and circular, in that all prices can only be derived theoretically and empirically from other prices. By understanding that the common element of all commodities is labour (i.e. that some amount of labour time was required to produce any and all commodities) then one not only escapes the neo-classical tautology, but discovers, as did the classicals and Marx, a means by which to explain much about our social/political/economic condition. But this also means that labour is the ultimate source of value, which the neo-classicals would rather just ignore.

brethren have always avoided assiduously. (Benton 1987; Milonakis and Fine 2009)

Indeed, in the opening stages of the 20th century and in the context of an emerging corporate capitalism defined by obvious agglomerations of economic and political power, the “marketing concept” as it was referred to at the time, provided a means by which to both understand consumer preferences and to justify, in utilitarian terms, the distributional rhythms of a contemporary capitalism. As Benton details, the study of “marketing”, which grew out of applied economics, developed both as “...an effort to compensate for the omissions of existing theory (Bartels 1976 as quoted in; Benton 1987, 419),” and as a means by which to justify “...the emerging distributive practices and institutions (Benton 1987, 419)”. Since then, as Benton also points out, the primary thrust of modern marketing has been to develop and refine “a set of techniques employed by organizations (mostly businesses but increasingly non-business and social cause organizations as well) to elicit desired responses from the other organizations or individuals within the employing organization’s ‘environment’ (Benton 1987, 419–420)”.

Customer satisfaction surveys, in other words, help to bridge the gap between mainstream economics, which would otherwise be largely silent on the issue of preferences, and the reality that firms must produce and respond to consumer demands if they are to compete successfully. Of course, this logic is central to the capitalist mode of production. In pursuit of profit firms must

constantly remake their commodities and the means through which they are produced. Only by offering a commodity that is obviously superior to that produced by competitive firms can businesses avoid being taken to the proverbial wall. And so, in as much as there is some truth to the idea that firms do usefully respond to the results of satisfaction surveys, this does not mean anything about the presumed validity or utility of consumer sovereignty. Rather it indicates that what is being (re)produced is the value relationship itself.

### **3.3.2 Student Evaluations of Teaching**

We are now better equipped to examine particular examples of satisfaction survey based KPIs. Though they hardly deserve particular attention given that employer satisfaction surveys quite obviously ask employers to evaluate workers as producers of value (as the commodity labour-power), it is nonetheless useful to examine at least a single example of such, if only to see the degree to which such surveys are in fact focused on the commodity and not the human.

As was mentioned, Ontario's colleges track employer satisfaction through a privately designed and administered survey that asks employers to rate on a 5-point scale their feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding employee performance in 18 different areas. Of those 18 areas, two deal with specific job related skills or knowledge, two deal with the degree to which employees demonstrate an acceptable level of literacy, three deal each with computer skills, numeracy, and comprehension, two deal with what can best be defined as analytical thinking and data management/manipulation skills, and the remaining



eight ask employers to rate issues most easily categorized as personality, motivation and attitude (Gov. of Ontario, MTCU 2013a).<sup>62,63</sup> Leaving aside for a moment the degree to which a five point scale, not augmented by any critical remarks could ever be very useful but as a measure of value, what should stand out is the degree to which questions related to skills comprise such a small proportion of the survey. The bulk of the survey relates to an employee's willingness to work, that is their willingness to, absent constant supervision, eagerly employ their skills in value producing activities. In this regard, the survey's definition of "critical thinking" is instructive, particularly given that we have not categorized it as a measure of personality, motivation and attitude. Critical thinking is defined as "evaluates his/her own thinking throughout the steps and processes used in problem solving and decision making (Gov. of Ontario, MTCU 2013a)". In other words, workers are said to think critically when they perform self-assessments and evaluations, not when they subject management or the organization of the firm to the same critical eye. Graduate satisfaction surveys are hardly any different. Rather than have employers rate an employee's ability to produce value, graduate satisfaction surveys ask recent and slightly less recent college and university graduates to rank themselves and their

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/serials/eprofile04-05/pdfs/appendixb.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Such attitudinal measures, like an employee's ability to work well in a team, his/her punctuality, his/her adaptability or attention to detail, are all behavioural characteristics that can certainly be learned and/or taught in colleges and universities, but which have little to do with high-level skills and knowledge. The degree to which so-called "knowledge intensive" work relies upon such characteristics is explored in more detail below.

learning experiences only in light of their experience in the workforce and therein their ability to perform as required. In other words, graduates rate their capacity to work, their labour-power. This becomes abundantly clear both because it is explained on the survey, because employers are asked to consent to have their employees participate in the survey, and because “graduates” in the course of the survey discursively become “employees”(Gov. of Ontario, MTCU 2013b).<sup>64</sup>

When it comes to student satisfaction surveys, generally referred to as student evaluations of teaching (SETs), the relationship between them and value production is slightly more obscure. SETs first emerged en masse in the 1960s as part of the students’ movement in the United States (Gray and Bergmann 2003).<sup>65,66</sup> Subsequently, starting in 1970s, but really ramping up in the 1980s and 1990s, university administrations throughout the US, Canada, and the UK, began using student evaluations more formally, as a routine part of faculty

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<sup>64</sup> In Section C of the survey, graduates are asked to rate the program from which they graduated along the same 18 axes as are used in the employer satisfaction survey. The directions in this regard read: “There are a number of skills and abilities that may be required of employees. For each skill and ability, please identify how important that skill and ability is to performing your own work. Please indicate if the skill is extremely important, important, neither important nor unimportant, unimportant or not at all important.”(Gov. of Ontario, MTCU 2013b)

<sup>65</sup> As such, students’ student evaluations carry a fundamentally different significance than they did in the 1960’s, when the students’ movement championed them; students’ student evaluations were initially a kind of repudiation of the elitist and nationalist university that was created in the early post-war era, when the strictures of liberal and institutionalist thought were shown to be wanting. Administrations’ student evaluations, on the other hand, are, as is shown below, functional only in the reproduction of labour power. That said, it is not mildly ironic and quite illustrative, that students’ oppositional tactics would and did take the form of customer satisfaction surveys.

<sup>66</sup> Prior to the 60’s student evaluation surveys (or proximate forms of them) were used at some institutions in the US; According to Centra, student evaluations of teaching first emerged at Purdue University (Centra 1993). Seldin, on the other hand, argues that such surveys were first used at the University of Washington in the 1920’s (Seldin 1993)

evaluation.<sup>67</sup> The timing of this development coincides, therefore, with the significant transformations within and around the University discussed above (i.e. massification, growth of the services sector, managerialism, commercialization, rise of neo-liberalism in and outside of the university). In other words, SETs became an all but compulsory and formalized institution with the emergence of the neo-liberal university. By creating the appearance of a 'student centred' and responsive faculty and administration while radically reshaping the teacher-student relationship and the relative power of the administration to determine the conditions of work, SETs operate in precisely the way customer satisfaction surveys operate to reproduce the mythology of consumer sovereignty.

According to a report prepared for the HEQCO by the Education Policy Institute, a right-of-centre think-tank, research indicates that student evaluation surveys are valid in so far as students are said to be good judges of how much they have learned, of how well information is presented, (clarity, organization etc.), the degree to which active learning techniques are used, the ease or difficulty of their learning experience, the workload in a course, and the value of the assessment used in the course (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf 2008). Though these claims are, in and of themselves, dubious (research also indicates that students are greatly influenced by age, sex, color, the enthusiasm of the

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<sup>67</sup> Seldin (1993), reports that the number of institutions in the United States using student evaluations climbed from 29% in 1973, to 68% in 1983 to 86% in 1993.

instructor in presenting the information) the Report also details that students cannot dependably assess the accuracy of course content, an instructor's knowledge of or competency in his/her discipline, grading practices and methods of delivery, the appropriateness of selected readings, and whether instructors indicate bias (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf 2008). Furthermore, the Report notes that "global" or overall indicators of teacher performance are highly questionable in terms of their accuracy and usefulness. When one considers that "valid" results are only obtained when researchers control for a variety of variables (age, sex, race, grade expectations), that students' ability to evaluate how much they have learned is unquestioned even though there is the clear recognition that students cannot assess the degree to which a particular course covers key issues within a discipline/sub-discipline, the fact that overall rates of literacy, even amongst university and college graduates are appalling (see above), and the fact that there are precious few academics well enough trained to understand and correctly use the results from such teaching evaluations, we must not only give pause to consider the utility of the entire endeavor, but also to why it remains so central a part of the contemporary university (Gravestock and Gregor-Greenleaf 2008).

One indication, brilliantly outlined by Michael Platt (Platt, 1993), is that teaching evaluations teach students some very disturbing things. Without room for students to seriously contemplate the forms' evaluative criteria, SETs indicate that the evaluation of teachers is easy and can be usefully completed in a short

period of time. The awkward use of language and grammatically incorrect/incomplete sentences coupled with short one or two word check-marked answers, indicates that writing – which remains fundamental to contemplative thought – is largely unimportant. Quality becomes quantity in the context of surveys that translate qualitative evaluation to a 5 or 10 point scale, which in turn is held to reflect some value-free ‘truth’ about a particular teacher or his/her course. Questions which focus on the degree to which a teacher sticks to the syllabus, teach students to be upset instead of engaged when teachers pursue leads that may potentially be transformative. Questions which ask students to evaluate a teacher’s knowledge of a subject indicate that students could in fact be teachers and thereby upset the relationship between students and teachers. In filling out SETs anonymously, students learn that it is OK to levy criticism without offering room for a response...Platt goes on quite exhaustively (Platt 1993). But perhaps most illuminating for present purposes is the following passage:

At the heart of evaluations is a confusion of opinion and knowledge that teaches students to be indifferent to knowledge. The ‘lowest-common-denominator’ prose in which these forms are written, their performed answers, and the inarticulate responses that they are satisfied with, all abstract from the differences of intellect, soul, and heart among the students. Where the difference in quality among students makes no difference, every student is being taught that quality makes no difference. Moreover, with no checks in these forms against inaccurate statements, there is no encouragement for students to be scrupulous. Before the jury in an American court files out to judge the accused, the judge instructs them in the law and in their duty. Before students judge their teachers, they receive no such instructions; the forms themselves teach that none are needed. Their easy-smudge, easy-scan mode signals “opinions wanted

here.” What they teach is: “Opinion is knowledge.” Fortunately, the student may be taught elsewhere in college that opinion is not knowledge...Will students feel the contrast between these experiences of knowledge and the opinionated indifference to knowledge inculcated by evaluations? It is safe to say that no teacher who trained reason upon the forms, so as to bring out that contrast, would have much of a chance of succeeding. Merely by allowing the forms, the teacher loses half or more of the authority to teach. Suggestions about the intellectual nullity of the forms might be resented by some students, reported to the administration, and placed in the teacher’s file. Thus is the worldly interest, or the academic ambition, of the teacher set against both his intellectual integrity and his teacherly care. (Platt 1993)

Platt, of course, does not attempt to outline the way in which SETs subject students and teachers to the law of value. But his analysis does point in such a direction. Those things which SETs teach students, which have little or nothing to do with the development of concrete skills, are fundamentally important attributes of labour-power, particularly within the context of the contemporary corporation. The point here need not be taken to the extreme conclusion, namely that SETs are used by governments and university administrators to intentionally teach/train complacent and under-skilled students. It is perhaps useful to think of SETs as being held in place by a kind of digestive process. Stakeholders (instructors, students, governments, university administrators, the public at large) in their thirst for “accountability” and “quality” adhere to conventions without subjecting such conventions to much critical analysis. Given the ubiquity of such satisfaction related forms and of notions of consumer sovereignty, SETs are made an operative mechanism in this recreation of neoliberal education. Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” (Lemke 2002) is also usefully raised

here, as is the work of Lukacs (see Chapter 4). Both would point to a fetishism of measurement by governing authorities as a means of management. In asserting the relevance of a value theoretic my point is to highlight that the effect of SETs is to condition complacency, which I maintain is functional to the recreation of neoliberal capitalism and therein of flexible labour markets (which describe neoliberal capitalism). The point here is that the “value” of SETs is realized in the constant renegotiation of capital, which is necessarily understood as a social relationship (Wood 1981).

### **3.3.3 Surveys of Student Engagement**

Of course, SETs are rapidly becoming rather secondary to other, seemingly different, forms of student evaluation. The latest and most fashionable trend in satisfaction-survey based KPIs is student engagement surveys. Indeed, in each of the jurisdictions under review, student engagement surveys are seen as what the HEQCO describes as a, “a useful baseline for research on learning quality (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2007, 27)”. In North America the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is now *the* engagement survey of choice among higher education institutions. Indeed, a massive number of American colleges and universities participate annually in NSSE, as do all of the 18 universities in Ontario (Jones 2007).<sup>68</sup> The NSSE emerged in 1999 out of an

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<sup>68</sup> As Jones (2007) outlines, all of the publicly assisted universities in Ontario have been administering the NSSE since 2004/5. Annual results are available via each university’s website or by conducting a web-search. I was the President of the York University Graduate Students’ Association at the time that York administered the NSSE for the first time. In speaking with the University’s then Director of Research, Ted Spence, I learned that the administration was initially

effort sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts to find a low-cost and relatively dependable alternative to the plethora of high-profile measures that, as the organization that now coordinates and reports on the test outlines, “centered on the wrong things.” Accordingly,

...institutional accreditation processes, despite their recent emphasis on assessing student learning and development, deal largely with resource and process measures. Government oversight as manifested in license requirements and program review mechanisms, in turn, continues to emphasize regulation and procedural compliance. Third-party judgments of “quality” such as media rankings continue to focus on such matters as student selectivity and faculty credentials. None of these gets at the heart of the matter: the investments that institutions make to foster proven instructional practices and the kinds of activities, experiences, and outcomes that their students receive as a result. (NSSE Foundation 2013)

To focus on the “right things”, the NSSE builds upon Chickering’s and Gamson's (1987) “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education”. In that work, Chickering and Gamson maintain that “deep learning” and high-quality outcomes are related to: 1) the level of contact between students and faculty; 2) the amount of work that students perform together; 3) the frequency with which “active learning” techniques are used; 4) the frequency and immediacy of

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quite reluctant to submit to the same kind of test that was to be administered elsewhere. York was concerned that the test would not highlight those things that made it ‘special’. I also learned that many institutions voiced similar concerns. Any reluctance was, however, short-lived. To the NSSE each institution was provided an opportunity to add a limited number of custom-made questions. Furthermore, resistance was seen as futile – though the Government did not formally mandate participation, Rae (2005), did recommend Ontario’s participation, and the HEQCO, shortly after being created apparently signalled to the universities that participation was mandatory. In response, the COU, in 2006, and likely as another attempt to forestall governmental action, mandated that members participate. The NSSE is administered by a project team consisting of outside consultants and institution-based employees. Freshman and seniors are the only students who participate. Surveys are conducted online. Each university emails requests and reminders to all students beginning in the winter semester.  
<http://nsse.iub.edu/html/origins.cfm>



feedback; 5) the degree to which projects are temporally delimited; 6) the level at which expectations are set and communicated; and, 7) the degree that teachers and students foster a healthy respect for different talents and ways of learning (Chickering and Gamson 1987). To do this, the NSSE asks students to indicate the frequency with which they engage in a series of activities, such as the amount of reading and writing they have done over the past year or the amount of time they have spent with faculty. Students are also asked about their involvement in study abroad and volunteer programs, as well as the kind of institutional supports that are available to help them succeed. And finally, students are asked to comment on their own development and growth. This last set of questions is what the survey in turn builds into its primary correlative argument concerning the relationship between “engagement” and “achievement”. In other words, the survey looks to associate the degree to which students profess satisfaction and growth with the degree of academic challenge, the amount of time they spend with faculty (and how they spend that time), the presence and kind of institutional support etc. And more recent efforts have been to extend the utility and accuracy of NSSE by establishing additional links between NSSE results and other data, such as the degree to which a university can be said to be “research intensive” (NSSE Foundation 2013). The NSSE thus provides a dataset that is used in analyses that are strictly correlative, where the primary correlation is assumed, rarely tested, and never proven. Again, ‘deep learning’ is assumed to have taken place when students self-report high levels of engagement and

satisfaction with their intellectual and academic experiences. (NSSE; NSSE Foundation 2013a)

Obviously, the goal for institutions is to ensure high levels of both engagement and satisfaction at low (and ever lower) unit costs. If students self-report being engaged and satisfied in 1000 person classes then presumably everybody wins. The NSSE is thus held out as the Holy Grail in QA: in helping institutions to correlate high levels of student engagement with particular and ‘proven instructional practices and kinds of activities,’ the NSSE is a veritable ‘how-to’ for faculty, administrators, and bureaucrats. Allegedly, the NSSE sidesteps the problems with SETs (i.e. the reliability of students’ judgments about a course or an instructor), and does not forestall on-going experimentation with mass classes and high-tech education. (NSSE Foundation 2013)<sup>69,70</sup> Of course, the apparent utility of the NSSE only holds if the presumed correlation between student engagement and ‘deep learning’ holds in fact and not just in theory. As a means of assessing the factual nature of the primary correlation (i.e. between engagement and deep learning) NSSE results have been cross tabulated with

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<sup>69</sup> NSSE surveys, in reporting high levels of engagement and satisfaction with large classes taught with the aid of hi-tech audio and video equipment has highlighted that large classes are not a barrier to high-quality education. Thus the effectiveness of the, ‘instructional practices and kinds of activities’ to which the NSSE testifies have been relatively low-cost.

<sup>70</sup> Or as the HEQCO puts it, “insights from these surveys,” are to be used, “as a starting point for assessing value-added, working backward to examine input indicators and forward to examine final output measures.” In other words, various proxies for levels of student engagement are in turn correlated with different inputs (teaching methods and approaches, levels of finance, student to teacher ratios) and in turn to outputs, like the results of program reviews and audits, as well as to labour market conditions, employer satisfaction surveys, or still more macro-indicators like economic growth. (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario 2007, 27)

grades. In other words, in finding a correlation between high NSSE scores (high feelings of engagement) and high grades (even when correcting for widespread grade inflation), the NSSE's authors have argued that their assumption concerning the presence of deep learning has been proven (NSSE Foundation 2010). The NSSE's authors have not routinely attempted to correlate NSSE data with that of the IALS, the ALL, or any other such test. Given the literacy data discussed above however, it would appear that such would be a useful, if not absolutely vital exercise. The average literacy scores of both Canadian and American university graduates would suggest that the correlation between deep learning and engagement is not so tight at the NSSE's authors have suggested.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, the relatively impoverished rates of literacy amongst university and colleges graduates in both Canada and the US would seem to suggest that there is no reliable correlation between engagement and so-called 'deep-learning'. In fact, I would argue that to the extent that students find some courses or programs more engaging than others, such is merely metonymic of the political economy in general. Students' self-assessments will tend to reflect and mimic dominant trends, they will tend to express a greater sense of engagement with vocationally oriented curricula or with curricula that is merely entertaining,

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<sup>71</sup> Shockingly, the NSSE is now trying to develop "information literacy" measures that are based upon the presumed correlation between literacy and things like a student's attendance at the library. In other words, the NSSE will attest to the presence of "information literacy" if students self-report having, "a. Asked a librarian for help (in person, email, chat, etc.); b. Went to a campus library to do academic research c. Used your institution's Web -based library resources in completing class assignments. (Gratch-Lindauer 2007, 433)"

they will tend to cast critical thinking as problem-solving, and they will tend to be less engaged by subjects that challenge the utility of the kinds of conventions to which they are increasingly wedded.

### **3.3.4 Research Related KPIs**

One generally finds four different types of research related KPIs: those which measure the research dollars earned (from different sources), on average, by an institution, by a particular department, or by a particular faculty member; those which examine a faculty member's record of publication; those which track an institutions' ability to attract private research money; and, those which track an institutions success at producing intellectual property, patents, or at more directly leveraging commercializable research in the marketplace (i.e. income from licensing, tech transfer etc.). On the face of it, each of these measures only obtains meaning as a kind of "value-for-money / return on investment" assessment. Even in the absence of lower-level data detailing the productivity of individual faculty, which is nonetheless routinely done and often used to set levels of remuneration, gross measures of research productivity are intended to indicate excellence so as to attract additional investment from governments, from private sector sponsors/donors (i.e. as either/both research partners or as donors), and in the form of students who pay tuition-fees (i.e. investment dollars are well-spent at institution x). As was discussed in the preceding chapter, governments and universities do not produce such measures in the context of straightforward efforts to ensure that public monies are well-spent and that they

are thus productive of public goods. Rather, governments continue to make efforts to leverage their publicly funded university research infrastructures to produce ‘commercializable’ outputs in the stalwart belief that such will in turn generate widespread prosperity (i.e. economic growth is cast as a public good irrespective of how such wealth is distributed). What this means is that research-related KPIs, when linked to the neo-liberal agenda are in turn intended to be read as an indication of overall profitability. And in so far as such KPIs facilitate comparative assessments of research productivity and profitability, they enable the reduction of concrete skills, those of university researchers, to socially necessary labour time (discussed in the following chapter). Moreover, research KPIs, in so far as they are used as inducements to undertake corporately co-sponsored research and/or research with a commercial application, ultimately manifest as what Sheldon Krinsky has usefully called a “normative shift”, that is an overall shift in the way in which both the general public and the scientific community thinks about research and the public good (Krinsky 2004). In other words, KPIs are not just indicative of where value lies, but are also productive of the value form itself.

### **3.3.5 Bibliometrics**

One data-set that purports to transcend the neo-liberal equation of productivity and quality is that of bibliometric indices. Such indices track the frequency with which the work of any particular researcher is referred to by other researchers within a delimited set of journals. Accordingly, knowledge is said to

be of higher quality if it is used more frequently in the generation of other knowledge. Arguably the most widely used source of such data is Thompson Scientific, (formerly Thompson ISI), a subsidiary of global news giant and publishing juggernaut, Thompson-Reuters.<sup>72</sup> Notably, the Thompson ISI citation (“bibliometric”) indices cannot be subject to any kind of substantive scrutiny as the corporation maintains the basis of its selection process and criteria as a trade secret. What this means is that it is simply not possible to test Thomson’s claims that its indices are based upon a selection of journals that represent the “highest quality, most relevant materials (Testa 2003: p.210).” In considering Testa’s claim as to the quality of the journals tracked within Thompson’s indices, it is useful to consider that: 1) Thompson in fact publishes many of the journals that are listed on its own index; and, 2) as a multinational publishing house that owns myriad academic journals, Thompson has a vested interest in preserving those arrangements that would enable private benefactors to maintain ownership of publicly funded research. In other words, any effort to make the results of publicly funded research freely available, for instance, via the huge number of open-source electronic journals now in operation, would fundamentally undermine Thompson’s business model!

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<sup>72</sup> As Mirowski (2011) outlines, Thompson is no longer the only for-profit organization that sells bibliometric data. In fact, several competitors now offer customers up-to-date data drawn from a significantly larger journal-set than does Thompson. However, Thompson’s dominant position remains.

Testa has also clarified that Thompson works hard to select those “core” journals that contain the most frequently cited articles. As such, Thompson’s data-set reflects what academics and experts indicate by their citation practices are the most important journals (Testa 2003). In the current context, where the most frequently cited journals are also the most generously rewarded, this merely means that Thompson helps to create and disseminate the view that particular journals are relatively more important. Even if this were not the case, bibliometric indices could not usefully act as a measure of quality. Again, context is everything: bibliometric indices merely act as a reflection of the dominant tendencies within both the natural and social sciences. As with peer review, the degree to which one academic’s work is cited by other academics could hardly offer a meaningful indication of quality, unless we buy into the assumed correlation (Shore and Wright 1999: p.568-570; Roberts 2007: p.358; Krimsky 2004). As is suggested below, we have ample reason to question the quality of the academic “outputs” produced under the current regime.

These problems are compounded by a host of others. For instance, it is difficult to gauge either productivity or quality when both multi-authored (in many cases over 50 authors) as well as ghost-authored works now occupy a sizeable proportion of what is published within the natural sciences (Sismondo 2007). In both cases, bibliometric indices become decidedly less meaningful or dependable as an indication of any one researcher’s contribution. More significantly, different journals expand and contract at different times and at

different rates; arguably less a function of quality than of funding, this on-going movement is not caught in bibliometric measurements, which thereby act as a kind of obfuscation of what is happening within a particular discipline. And within some disciplines, different journals are hardly representative of the discipline, but instead tend to operate more as a kind of political project with the aim of reproducing extending and/or preserving particular traditions or schools of thought (Mirowski 2009; Mirowski 2011: p.259-287; Silva and Slaughter 1984; Lee and Harley 1998: p.26-30; Harley 2002).

### **3.3.6 Patents and Licensing Revenue**

There is a considerable literature that deals with the utility of patent data and licensing revenue as a means by which to prove the efficacy of investment in university R&D (Mowery and Ziedonis 2002; Rasmussen 2008; Lanjouw and Schankerman 2004; Jensen and Thursby 2001; J. Thursby and Thursby 2000). Unfortunately, the bulk of this literature is of questionable value. Any apparent decline in patent quality is explained-away as a by-product of such things as truncated data-sets or inexperienced market participants (i.e. universities that initially sought to license low-quality IP, only to be disciplined by the market into producing high quality IP). Over time, in other words, market based incentives will drive necessary adjustments and thereby the production of high-quality research (Mowery and Ziedonis 2002). In other words, the champions of “evidenced based policy” maintain that if the data says things are bad we need to just wait awhile, until it says something different.



Evidence from other sources seems to suggest that the quality of patents has indeed declined since the 1980s. For instance, experts in the field estimate that as many as 30% of new patents are redundant and overlap existing patents (Glass 2011). Reports by the US's Food and Drug Administration indicate that only about 15% of new drug patents are for truly original compounds (Mirowski 2011: p.214-215). Moreover, increased licensing revenue may only be an indication of the increased costs associated with conducting research. For instance, universities now extensively use Material Transfer Agreements (MTAs) as a means to earn licensing revenue by charging each other for the use of patented materials necessary for research (Mirowski 2011: p.152-160). Also of note is the fact that the Association of University Technology Managers only publishes data detailing the amount of *gross* revenue earned by universities through licensing. No organization or university publishes net revenue, which would offer some indication of how much is being spent to develop and manage (litigate) IP, relative to how much is earned licensing IP. What data is available seems to corroborate what I have just suggested, that licensing revenue, evaluated on a net basis, makes the whole enterprise appear decidedly less lucrative.<sup>73</sup> In Canada, for example, despite a marked increase in the number of patents being both applied for and granted, patent approvals as a percent of

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<sup>73</sup> Data from a now cancelled survey by Canada's national statistical agency, Statistics Canada, made clear that the costs for universities of administering IP have been rising consistently since 1998. Other data suggests that university IP is receiving patent approval less and less frequently, again since 1998.(Statistics Canada 2008)

applications are trending downward. And universities are spending ever more to administer this IP (Statistics Canada 2008).

Universities have also become upstream providers of IP to a new breed of downstream “user”, so-called, “Non-Practicing Entities” or NPEs. Such NPEs, which are most prevalent in the US, but are present in other jurisdictions too, are firms that simply buy-up as much IP as possible for the sole purpose of establishing monopoly rights. Productive firms wishing to avoid IP and patent infringement litigation, which has become an important competitive tool, pay huge rents to license these patent arsenals, all so as to position themselves to threaten IP and patent infringement litigation when competitors do the same. Although NPEs purport to act as the protectors of scientists lacking business savvy, they appear more so to be the benefactors of the venture capitalists who provide the seed capital for their patent libraries. (Mirowski 2011: p.148; Glass 2011). Indeed, so immense is the cost associated with the kind of protracted litigation one commonly finds around IP that many tech-based firms have found it more economically sensible to pay licensing fees when they are demanded in order to access patent libraries. Or else firms simply opt to amass their own arsenal of patents, most of which they never intend to use. Rather than prove the originality of whatever technologies they have developed or brought in-house or demonstrate the frivolity of claims about encroachment, firms pay to access patent libraries as a kind of insurance (Arthur 2011; Mirowski 2011: p.148; Glass 2011).

Patenting and licensing, in other words, have become precious hostages worth a healthy ransom at least as much as they have mechanisms to ensure that dedicated scientists and inventors receive well-earned rewards for new ideas. We also have yet to mention the influence peddled by powerful institutional forms that only emerged in the neo-liberal era. Aside from the aforementioned NPEs, huge swathes of the universities' institutional apparatus, new forms of arms-length government bodies, private consultants that provide “innovation expertise,” and venture capitalists all exercise considerable power within the neoliberal program and their survival simply depends upon their ability to leverage that power to recreate it (Finder 2008; Glass 2011; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhodes 2004; Pisano 2006). The upshot is simple enough: the “evidence” used to support the neo-liberal program fails utterly to recognize that patents,

...bear economic value for all sorts of reasons unrelated to the progress of science: they may be used to block rivals from entering your market or to frustrate anyone the holder wishes to prevent from further researching the area; they may be used as defensive devices against other big holders or patent portfolios; they can be used as defences in antitrust action; they can be pretexts for parasitical litigation by patent trolls. Thus it would almost always be a travesty to try and “impute backward” the scientific significance of a discovery from some market indicator like license revenue, or patent renewal fees, or the extent of litigation. Value need not reliably map into significance or importance from a scientific perspective. (Mirowski 2011: p.307)

### **3.4 Accreditation, Assessment and Peer Review**

The distinction between accreditation, assessment, and peer review program evaluation processes is difficult to discern. Generally, accreditation

refers to an evaluation by an independent body that is recognized as the governing/accrediting body for some kind of professional and/or disciplinary association, as with the Canadian and American Medical Associations, which accredit and license instructional programs in medicine. Assessment tends, on the other hand, to refer to evaluative procedures that are not operated by a recognized accrediting agency, but rather in accordance with governmental regulations. Indeed, the distinction is often times purely the result of a technical distinction between institutional type and governance structure. In most cases, audits, assessments, and the evaluative procedures that lead to formal accreditation by a recognized accrediting agency, involve a review by an outside panel of experts. The expertise of such panelists is generally determined according to a set of selection criteria established by the body that oversees the evaluative process or else by the institution or program that is to be the subject of a given review. In most cases, panelists are outside academics and administrators who are provided some specialized training in program and/or institutional evaluation. “Lay-people” (generally high-powered businessmen), governmental officials, and students are, however, becoming mandatory members of evaluative panels in an ever larger number of jurisdictions. Either way, evaluations generally involve a series of site-visits during which panelists are provided with both select documentary evidence testifying to programmatic quality and an opportunity to interview some of the people involved in all aspects

of program delivery or, in the case of institutional audits, an institution's internal QA processes.

Accreditation first appeared in the US around the turn of the 20th century. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the history of accreditation in the US is linked to the particular nature of the second industrial revolution in the US and to the concerted efforts of a small group of industrialists, engineers, and educationalists intent on designing a national educational system that could efficiently train skilled and pliant labour. Outside of the US, accreditation emerged more recently, generally during the 1960s and 1970s, when state-funded higher education was massively expanded throughout the developed world. In Ontario, for example, program assessment first emerged during the expansion of the 1970s, when long-established universities sought to preserve some level of control over graduate degree granting authority. However, the real push towards large-scale and system-wide programs of accreditation, assessment, and peer review did not come until after 1980. Indeed, since that time, the pace of development in this area has been break-neck. Most states that have developed QA regimes – and many have - have done so through the creation of arms-length government agencies dedicated to the management and design of QA processes, such as those which factor centrally in this thesis.<sup>74</sup> In doing so, states have

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<sup>74</sup> In 1998 the EU adopted legislation recommending that all member states, “introduce quality-assessment and quality-assurance mechanisms into their higher education systems... (Council Recommendation (EC) No 561/98 of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education [Official Journal L 270 of 7.10.1998]).” The same recommendation outlines the autonomy and independence of QA agencies as key. Accordingly,

sought to maintain the appearance that academic freedom and university independence remain secure and unthreatened. In other words, by having evaluation performed by arms-length institutions, the government is able to maintain some level of distance from evaluative procedures which are intended to “help” universities fulfill their responsibilities as public institutions (i.e. to meet government established priorities).

Paradigmatic examples of such agencies are the Quality Audit Agency (QAA) in the UK, which was the first such agency in the world, and the Australian University Quality Agency in Australia (AUQA). The QAA and the AUQA rely heavily on lengthy and often detailed review and assessment exercises within which quality is conceived of in two parts: 1) as a reflection of a university’s own goals and agenda; and, 2) in terms of a broad set of over-arching national goals and standards (generally, a certain - and readily measurable - amount of research, or number of graduates, specifically for the purpose of building a larger stock of human capital or commercializable knowledge). Over time, most jurisdictions have tended to refine their programs of assessment and evaluation, making them more detailed and subject to efforts that aim to further standardize the processes to be followed during assessment. Such developments have, generally speaking, entailed the constant renegotiation of institutional and

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virtually every jurisdiction in the EU has either established a QA agency or is in the process of doing so. Multiple jurisdictions in Eastern Europe have followed suit, as have many in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There is, however, no such agency in the US, nor any immediate plans to create one. That said, the American higher education market is arguably more subject to market type assessments than any other in the world.

programmatic autonomy. In fleshing out evaluative procedures and criteria institutional autonomy and academic freedom have been circumscribed to an ever greater extent, not least through the imposition of new procedural requirements that entail larger workloads and thus less time for actual course development or meaningful forms of student evaluation. In Ontario, the development of assessment entailed first its extension. Review procedures originally pioneered at the graduate level were extended to the undergraduate and college level. More recently, and in response to governmental pressure (i.e. so as to stave-off government legislation) the sector through its representative body, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) has outlined an entirely new quality assurance framework which specifies in more detail than has historically been the case, standards, learning outcomes and the like, for both program review procedures and institutions' internal QA processes. In the UK, institutional audits have been refined via such things as the addition of students to review panels and the adumbration of evaluative criteria and standards, more detailed outlines of review procedures, the collection and publication of program level learning outcomes requirements/expectations etc. Always, the particular developments and refinements undertaken in a given jurisdiction are closely watched and commented on, not least by the OECD, whose annual "education at a glance" reports analyze these and other trends. Similarly the "International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (INQAAHE) also monitors and reports on the evolution of assessment practices around the world.

Governments have also been apt to watch and mimic the development of accreditation, assessment, and peer review programs in other jurisdictions, both through the INQAAHE and via other links, such as international conferences in Comparative and International Higher Education. By way of example, Ontario chose to follow the UK in naming its QA agency the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), albeit sometime after the UK government had renamed and completely reconstituted its Higher Education Quality Council. Not surprisingly then, the processes and procedures around accreditation, assessment, and peer review bear marked similarities (I outline many aspects of the particular processes in place in the US, the UK and Ontario in Chapters 5-8) such that the generalizations I make both above and below are possible.

It is perhaps most useful to think of most jurisdictional assessment and audit programs as a hierarchy of QA processes, that begin, in some cases, with the assessment of individual researchers, but in most cases, with department or program level assessments. As one moves up through the audit/assessment hierarchy, the data collected and used at each subsequent level becomes less granular and specific, and instead becomes a hierarchy of documents mimetic of the whole process. The simple presence (and not the content) of reviews of individual researchers and their performance serve as evidence of “high quality” in the reports prepared by outside consultants during departmental or program review. Likewise, institutional reviews are based on the presence of documentary evidence indicating the administration of regular and “vigorous” department or



program level reviews (that meet prescribed “best-practices” established by arms-length bodies). And system-wide assessments, which are generally undertaken as a kind of self-assessment by the QA agencies, tend to rely on the presence of detailed procedures clearly outlining best practices for reviews and assessments down the line. It bears noting that that the workload involved in this hierarchy of evaluative exercises is significant, and that the most granular and specific information is generally provided by individual teachers/researchers, whose research and/or teaching workload is almost never adjusted to reflect such new responsibilities. Outside of the time and cost associated with such procedures, it is also worth pointing out that whatever the rhetoric coming from QA agencies, the fact that institutions are empowered to evaluate programs or departments in respect of the over-arching institutional mission, which is generally rather vague, must be understood as a kind of stick that can be used to discipline individual academics or rogue departments. Indeed, at least a couple of academics have likened the UK’s system of QA (and therein institutional audit, program review, and the like) to the system of incentives involved in the operation of COCOM.<sup>75</sup>

### **3.4.1 Program Review and Assessment**

Though, as I have said, the specific procedural details are different from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, program review and assessment generally operates on the basis of both self-assessment and peer-review. In Ontario, for instance, the

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<sup>75</sup> See for example (Amann 2003; Radice 2008)

sub-division of the COU that is now responsible for the sector's QA processes, provides the COU's, Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), with a list of potential auditors that is based entirely on nominations made by the institutions themselves. The OCAV then whittles down the list of potential auditors depending on the number of audits/assessments that are to be performed in a given period. The auditors, normally a group of academics, then set about preparing a report reviewing the performance of a particular program that is in turn, based upon, first and foremost, the set of criteria set-out by the COU, and, secondarily, a series of site visits during which the auditors are provided with curricular outlines, writing samples, documentary evidence of self-study, and other internal QA processes. Site visits also enable the auditors to conduct interviews with researchers and teachers, as well as a collection of graduate or undergraduate students. The evaluative processes followed, and the standards against which the auditors evaluate a program's performance are prescribed, not by the Province, but by the COU, which has administered and refined assessment procedures in a constant bid to keep the government at bay (i.e. while the COU's standards and procedures are perhaps slightly less prescriptive than the Governments might be, they have been designed so as to satisfy the Government such that it feels sufficiently comfortable with the COU's assessments. (Council of Ontario Universities 2010)

In other jurisdictions, program reviews and/or institutional audits involve auditors over whose selection the institutions have less control than is the case in

Ontario. In the UK, for example, the QAA – an agency of the Government - appoints auditors based on a set of established criteria, which includes, “a continuing and meaningful engagement with the assurance of academic standards and quality beyond any involvement they may have/have had with QAA; previous experience in managing and assuring academic standards and the quality of higher education provision in a senior academic or professional support capacity at organisational and/or faculty or school level” (QAA 2013). Of course, whether or not the auditors that conduct program and/or institutional reviews are picked by the institutions themselves or by an agency of the Government likely does not matter – evaluations are performed relative to a set of externally determined standards. Indeed, given both the degree to which most assessment programs operate in respect of externally determined priorities and standards, and the degree to which such assessments are but a small piece of the larger QA puzzle, it is reasonable to suggest that such assessments are rarely, if ever, revelatory, or, more to the point, potentially able to unsettle the qualitative (i.e. neoliberal) bent of the larger QA enterprise. On the contrary, program assessments appear to operate as a kind of disciplinary mechanism designed to reinforce the QA program.

### **3.4.2 Institutional Assessments and Accreditation**

Institutional assessments and accreditation processes are meta-assessments performed by sector-level governmental or quasi-governmental organizations and/or discipline specific regulatory bodies, as with engineering,

medicine, architecture and the like. Such meta-assessments rely largely upon the documentary evidence developed via lower-level assessments and KPIs. One significant exception here is the tendency for institutional assessments and accreditation reviews to also involve stand-alone assessments of an institution's managerial practices and finances, generally with an eye towards commenting on and rating on some kind of scale, an institution's strategic and competitive plan (i.e. how is an institution going to respond to the exigencies of public policy and/or anticipated declines in public funding). For instance, the UK's Committee of University Chairmen has identified ten of what are described as "top-level" indicators of institutional performance (Committee of University Chairmen 2006). The first two, which are described as summary indicators or "super KPIs", are measures of institutional sustainability and market position, that is, gross measures of the financial health of an institution and of its reputation and attractiveness to prospective students and faculty (2006, 5). The eight additional measures, which inform the top two, are themselves based upon other, lower-level KPIs (such as those discussed above) and are intended to be used by governing boards in conjunction with a series of self-assessment questions so as to enable the board to better steer and direct their institution (2006, 5-8). Thus, the results of student satisfaction and engagement surveys are combined with the results of KPIs measuring research performance (i.e. research dollars earned/awarded, # of publications etc.) as well as the presence/absence and relative size of what are referred to as, "knowledge transfer relationships"

(Committee of University Chairmen 2006, 3), that is, private research contracts or other mechanisms for the commercialization of publicly funded research. All of this information is also reviewed alongside details of an institution's financial health, as well as that of its physical infrastructure. Staff and human resource development programs are similarly assessed, as are governance structures and an institution's leadership and management. Again, all of this is intended to inform the two super-KPIs listed above: institutional sustainability and academic profile and market position. Of course, outside of an institution's financial health, which is not necessarily tied to its academic profile and market position, the first of the two super-KPIs is reducible to the second – the solipsism of quality through this kind of institutional assessment is that nothing of value exists outside the market (i.e. if an institution is highly regarded academically and well positioned in the market, such will attract faculty, students as well as private-sector investment and charitable support which will in turn make an institution sustainable). As a result, governing boards are encouraged to steer their institutions as they would any kind of competitive firm. (Committee of University Chairmen 2006)

Meta-assessment and reviews thus attempt to impose a degree of coherence in terms of an institutions internal QA processes and the results thereof, and an institution's over-arching and strategic direction. In other words, institutional assessments permit system level authorities to ensure that the QA regimes used by individual universities are used to direct outcomes that reflect

rationally determined goals and standards. This kind of approach, sometimes called “steering not rowing”, is intended to marshal the cooperation of university administrators and academics without appearing to encroach on institutional autonomy or academic freedom.

In so far as institutional assessments and accreditation procedures purport to measure institutional performance relative to an institution’s own mission statement and broader, system-wide, governmentally determined criteria, it is notable that most Universities around the world have similar mission statements. Again, speaking generally, university mission statements tend to discuss the advancement of knowledge, the importance of serving the public good, or democracy, or some such ensemble of important, but vaguely defined things.<sup>76</sup> University mission statements are, to put it another way, so broad as to be meaningless. The structure of statements provides space for autonomy and academic freedom. At the same time, system wide goals and needs tend to be far more specific: there is the need for greater efficiency and greater productivity, both understood in terms of both graduates:costs and research-outputs:expenditures. Indeed, the KPIs that are used in institutional assessments provide the veritable “meat” on the proverbial assessment bone. What this means is that institutional assessment is in fact rather directive, both

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<sup>76</sup> See for instance the different mission statements of Oxford University (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/aboutoxford/annualreview/mission.shtml>) and that of York University in Toronto (<http://www.yorku.ca/ycom/yms/>)

in terms of what constitutes “quality” and in terms of understanding/defining more narrowly, a university’s mission statement.

Of course, by working to ensure that a university’s mission statement is part of an evaluative exercise, QA agencies are able to leverage broad based and popular support for the QA enterprise. Again, the directive nature of QA is sufficiently disguised as to seem unthreatening to many academics who see more carrots than they do sticks for their cooperation in audits. This is particularly so given the fact that highly ranked and rated institutions tend also to receive more in terms of both governmental and private-sector support. The point here is that the QA agencies must necessarily be conceived of as mediating agencies that help reconcile the seemingly disparate logics of highly autonomous institutions with the logic of capitalist accumulation. The QA agencies are therefore aptly understood as, to borrow Robert Cox’s term, “transmission belts” (Cox 1992)<sup>77</sup> or perhaps, more simply, “translation belts” between increasingly global capital and everyday life.

### **3.4.3 Research Assessment**

Government programs designed to evaluate and assess quality in a more thorough manner than is possible with the more simplistic quantitative measures listed above are also seriously flawed. Pioneering among the various research

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<sup>77</sup> Cox was roundly criticized for his use of this term generally because it failed to identify the agents involved in the process of restructuring. In fact, Cox used the term ‘nebuleuse’ to describe the agents of global capitalism. Here the term is used differently, to indicate the degree to which governments are responding to the exigencies of both national and international capitalists who look very favourably upon ‘flexible’ labour markets

quality assessment programs undertaken by governments around the world has been the UK's Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The RAE or Research Excellence Framework (REF), as it is now called, was first introduced in 1986 and followed hotly on the heels of legislation that effectively ended tenure in the United Kingdom (Willmott 2003, 132). Every 4-6 years since that time, faculty that have been designated by their departments as "active researchers" have had to submit one paper from each of the preceding years which they or their department feel is representative of their best work. Though the evaluative criteria were initially kept secret, the government has, since the third round of the RAE, progressively opened things up. Currently, submitted works are subject to evaluation by panels of academics and experts who have in turn been guided in their evaluations by criteria established through consultation with the government's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). In this way, peer review, which is problematic for the reasons outlined above, has also been effectively confined and directed via a process that is ultimately decided upon by an agency that has long established its support for commercialization (Shore and Wright 1999: p.569-570). The results of panel evaluations are compiled and turned into an overall score on a five-point scale. Government research money has then been apportioned to each department or program based on both that department's score and the number of researchers to which the department is home (Willmott 2003; Lee and Harley 1998; Harley 2002; Morgan 2004; Baimbridge; Elton 2000; Rolfe 2003).



As much as the evaluative criteria used in the initial rounds of the RAE were kept secret, it was nonetheless made clear that higher grades would be given to research that was, “of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry” (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2011, 48).<sup>78</sup> To this statement, the HEFCE has recently added other, less instrumental descriptors. Still, this expanded notion of excellence is now placed within a new evaluative category – “impact” (Higher Education Funding Council for England 2011) – which will hardly help to prevent the on-going conflation of ‘excellent’ research with that which is ‘useful’ (I discuss the inclusion of “impact” further in Chapter 6).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that in as much as the RAE/REF has provoked researchers to be more “productive”, at least in terms of the number of articles generated, the quality of such research remains an open question. Not only have publishers indicated feeling pressured to publish the work of their British colleagues before it is sufficiently refined, lest their colleagues become unemployed or still more poorly paid, scholars themselves admit to “slicing and dicing” their work, dividing one paper into several so as to meet publication schedules and productivity requirements (Smith 2000). Many academics in the UK have also raised concern over the fact the RAE/REF has undermined their ability to undertake long-form work or to take significant amounts of time to

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<sup>78</sup> Recently, this phrase, which first appeared in 1995, has been used in conjunction with other statements which are ostensibly intended to broaden the definition of “excellence”. In a way, this change reflects both the efforts of oppositional groups and some of the deleterious consequences that the RAE has had. It is also worth mentioning that recent pronouncements from the Government in the UK have demonstrated that the drive to press universities

properly gather and reflect on data (Harley 2002, 323–333; Smith 2000; Lee and Harley 1998). The RAE/REF, in other words, has helped to reproduce as normal the kind of ‘just-in-time’ science that has not been demonstrably linked with meaningful forms of economic growth or innovation (Smith 2000; Willmott 2003; Harley 2002).<sup>79</sup> Others have found that the RAE has worked to create and reinforce a divide between research winners and losers that both undermines the potential expansion of cutting-edge scientific inquiry and punishes those academics and students who work at and attend less resourced institutions (Rolfe 2003; Elton 2000; Morgan 2004). Of course, the results of the REF are most useful when linked to other data, specifically to measures of the apparent utility of the knowledge being generated under the auspices of the RAE/REF regime. Thus, outside of efforts like the RAE/REF, governments and other NGOs have also been apt to want to “prove” the efficacy of the neo-liberal research enterprise by looking at the tendency of universities to produce IP, which is tracked either through patent applications and grants or through the income generated by licensing such IP. Here again, “more” is always and everywhere construed as “better” – more patents and more revenues are held up as evidence of more quality, more innovation, or so the logic goes. As was demonstrated (see section

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<sup>79</sup> Recent policy pronouncements from the British government also suggest that there are other ways to skin this proverbial cat. The conservative government has announced plans to make student support available to students so long as their programs are evaluated as fit-for-their-purpose, which is then defined as practically applicable in labour markets (Great Britain, 2011). Thus, by both rewarding particular kinds of research and by funding particular kinds of taught programs will the government be able to fundamentally affect the direction of scientific research in the UK.

3.3.2 above), whatever the logic, it simply does not reflect the facts on the ground: the tendency to patent has neither generated much in the way of income, nor innovation. It goes without saying that the RAE/REF is but one example of how peer review is not so easily linked to “quality”, even when one defines such in strictly utilitarian terms. Though the US lacks a similar system, “accreditation”, in so far as it too relies on peer review, would be subject to the same critique, as would the US’s and Canada’s system for distributing research funding.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Before preceding to flesh-out the theoretical foundations of this dissertation, which I do in the next chapter, it is useful to pause momentarily and summarize to this point. In Chapter 2, I sought to link the development of QA to the emergence of neoliberalism and therein to the neo-classical theories of economics in which I maintain the neoliberal policy program is rooted. In so doing what I highlighted was the degree to which QA is inextricably linked to theories that see virtue in the protection of intellectual property, in labour market flexibility, in theories of distribution that are supported more by “parables”, to borrow from Paul Samuelson (1962), than by anything founded in historically informed analysis of the facts on the ground. In other words, QA is an ideological and a political exercise.

Since proof is better in pudding, I looked in Chapter 3 to extend the argument made in Chapter 2 by examining many of the primary measures and mechanisms of quality and quality assessment in higher education. In so doing, I

looked to test whether governmental and scholarly claims as to the reliability of QA hold water. I looked to ask whether QA provides any valid indication of quality, which I defined in the manner that the neoliberals define it, in strictly utilitarian terms. Through this imminent critique my intent was to examine precisely what, if not quality, is measured through QA processes and what such processes in fact allow us to say about the qualitative aspects of graduates, research, instructional programs, and systems of institutional management. What I demonstrated was that QA allows us to say very little about the qualitative aspects of the contemporary university, save perhaps for that fact. This is no small thing. As I made clear at the outset of this dissertation, QA is today a notable preoccupation of the university and of governments around the world. That the enterprise assures little in the way of quality, understood as real innovation, highly literate graduates etc. is stunning. That the entire enterprise relies upon a dense web of self-referential research<sup>80</sup> to produce such vacuous measures at great expense is similarly significant. Such significance is what now needs to be explained.

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<sup>80</sup> Here I mean “self-referential” in several senses. First, the mainstream literature tends to equate quality with prices (i.e. with research dollars earned, grants awarded etc.). In so doing, quality is rendered entirely relative: the relative quality of different research is the price it fetches either at market or through systems of peer review that have been pressed into the production of commercializable research. The mainstream literature and the QA enterprise is also self-referential in a more straightforward manner: not only is policy constantly borrowed between jurisdictions via tight national and international policy networks, but the research that underscores that policy is borne of decidedly closed theoretical programs (like the behaviouralism that underlies the NSSE), that maintain almost no visible relationship with what could reasonably be described as an open and pluralist discussion.

In Chapter 2, I suggested what might be this significance. In linking neoclassical economics with New Growth Theory and in turn with QA, I asserted that QA was derivative of theory that was self-consciously imperial and a projection of power. Ironically enough, the theory underlying such imperial exercises has no coherent way to access power because the claims it makes around causal complexity vitiates our ability to rank-order causal variables and to thereby obtain some indication of who's interests QA serves. In Chapter 4, I take-up the issue of power directly, and provide a theoretical outline of capitalist accumulation within which we can understand QA more completely and more coherently. In so doing, I seek to avoid two things: 1) an overly reductive conceptualization of power that militates against more systemic and structural account of power and its location within contemporary capitalism; and, 2) the reverse. In other words, the theoretical outline that follows attempts to navigate a line that permits us to see and understand the systematic features of contemporary capitalism that facilitate the recreation of QA while also maintaining a bead on the particular players (individuals and institutions) that consciously re-create and support neoliberal patterns of accumulation in an unending effort to secure their own positions of power. Obviously, this theoretical approach is but a recasting of the structure-agency dilemma that has long plagued the social sciences and which is putatively and frequently answered with reference to Marx (i.e. "men make their own history, but they do not make it

just as they please”). Still, such a theoretical take is sorely lacking from both mainstream and heterodox accounts of QA.

## **Chapter 4: Theorizing QA and Neo-liberal University: the law of value and its measurement**

Capitalism has become universal. It has totalized itself both intensively and extensively. It's global in reach, and it penetrates to the heart and soul of social life and nature.

-Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Empire of Capital*

Understanding the significance of QA from a critical perspective is hardly the exclusive domain of this dissertation. In fact, a small, but notable literature does exist which is usefully critical of QA and which, furthermore, attempts to theorize the emergence and evolution of the neoliberal university. Unfortunately, only a select few have raised the issue of value as I have and will continue to do in this dissertation wherein QA is conceived of as a managerial strategy that attempts to attach exchange value to work done in the university, and to thereby render all such work as a commodity and thus commensurable (De Angelis and Harvie 2009; Harvie 2006). I argue that the omission of value from considerations of QA is a serious one, for it prevents us from seeing the essential nature of QA and, in turn, prevents us from being able to accurately evaluate its potential (within the current context) to improve quality, meaningfully defined. Put still another way, what I am arguing for is an approach to the study of QA and the university that, at the level of ontology, begins by recognizing: a) the

centrality of production to the organization of human affairs; b) understands the historic specificity and structural tendencies of capitalist production/accumulation in general; c) understands the historic specificity of neoliberalism both conjuncturally and spatially (i.e. as a particular program of capitalist production/accumulation within which certain structural tendencies evident in capitalism more generally are either relatively more evident or muted than at other times/in other places) because; d) the, “objective determinations of class do not impose themselves on blank and passive raw material but on active and conscious historical beings.” In other words, the structural and tendential movements of capitalism in general manifest in particular ways in particular places and at particular times because of the way, “men and women live their productive relations and experience their determinate situations, within 'the ensemble of the social relations,' with their inherited culture and expectations, and as they handle these experiences in cultural ways.”(Wood 1982, 49)

Such analysis, like any analysis can never be exhaustive. Not only does higher education play a number of cultural, ideological, and political functions, which can be usefully analyzed more discretely, but the task just set-out is necessarily stylized. This is because the analytical lens for which I advocate, in as much as it seeks a totalizing and holistic picture of the world in which the university is today situated, is inescapably partial. Moreover, it is not just neoliberal theory that is ‘for someone or some purpose’. My theoretical lens is rooted in an underlying sense of morality, that is defined, first and foremost, in



opposition to the savagery of capitalism and to the manner in which such savagery is obfuscated and thereby condoned within both mainstream and even some critical writings. More than this, since neoliberalism centrally involves the commodification of all domains of social life, particularly those that revolve around the production of knowledge, I would argue that we are rendered theoretically disabled and empirically blinded when it comes to the current conjuncture if we do not pay at least some attention to the issue of value. (De Angelis and Harvie 2009; Harvey 2005)

As I outlined in Chapter 2, the mainstream literature operates with a fundamentally different ontology. The amalgam of neo-weberian and liberal tropes within the mainstream literature makes it impossible to discern the historic specificity of either neoliberalism or capitalism and also reduces reality to a series of discrete black boxes (“causative variables”) that interact in a complex, indeterminate and ultimately, inexplicable way (in terms of power). The upshot is that the rational estimations of individuals is likewise never explained, or, in the worst case, reduced to the point where individuals become quite unhuman (Mirowski 2002). In terms of QA, little of anything is delivered or achieved, save for a misplaced faith in the measures reviewed in Chapter 3.

The critical literature within CIHE tends to employ – but not discuss or openly develop - a more nuanced ontology (though the issue of methodology is

taken-up frequently).<sup>81</sup> To differing degrees, the scholarship that makes up this critical literature – and it is a small body of work – tends to employ an ontology that is only shades different from that used in the mainstream literature. Rather than posit a strict separation between different institutions operating in different non-reducible spheres of activity, the critical scholars tend to see more fluidity in the connections between what are still conceived of as, to borrow from Marxian debates, “relatively autonomous” spheres of activity (see for instance, Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Sheila Slaughter 2001; Klees 1991; Altback 2006). Though there is a clear sense that “the market” is a historically novel social formation, the conception of that space nonetheless bears a striking resemblance to the Weberian understanding of it (see chapter 2). More than this, there is an overarching tendency to conflate capitalism with neoliberalism, wherein the university is from the 1980s on - both from without and from within - increasingly subject to the logic of profit seeking behavior. It is as though: 1) such behavior is what defines neoliberalism in toto; and, 2) during the immediate post-war era the university was not just sheltered from such patterns but to a large extent somehow non-capitalist; and, 3) there remain areas of the university that reside in spaces that are “relatively far from the market”(Marginson and Rhoades 2002, 287).

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<sup>81</sup> For instance, the 2001 special edition of “Higher Education”, in which a series of more critically minded scholars, including some of those referred to here, have pieces. Vol. 41, No. 4, 2001

In many respects, this approach and this historiography is appealing, certainly more so than what is on offer in the mainstream of that literature. On the one hand, there is a willingness to see neoliberalism as historically novel, and within that, to similarly complicate the institutions, social forces, and everyday practices that support and promote neoliberal forms of accumulation (Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004). In many respects this provides for a theory that is “good enough”. For example, on a whole, the literature is able to obtain a good picture of the increasing relevance of key constituencies: biotech firms, so-called “interstitial organizations” such as departments of tech transfer, or the phalanx of lawyers that now populate ever larger in-house legal departments etc. (Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004; S. Slaughter and Rhoades 1996; Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Marginson and van der Wende 2007). They are also able to prompt a series of useful questions, as with those around the development and normalization of new practices and conventions around university based research (Krimsky 2004). Herein, agency is also usefully complicated. The re-making of the university is described from the inside-out, the outside-in, as well as from the top-down and the bottom-up too. Thus, while the desire to see outcomes as the result of the complex interplay of agents and agency at the global, national, and local levels has been rooted in an often unfortunate turn of phrase (such as Marginson’s and Rhoades’ (2002) “glonacal agency heuristic”), the degree to which such approaches capture the dynamism and interconnectedness of events both in and outside the university is indispensable.

On the other hand, without a totalizing theory of capitalism that begins as I maintain it must, with the social relations of production, the literature does a less spectacular job of pin-pointing what in fact makes neoliberalism so special (hint: it is not just the spread of profit/rent seeking behaviour). In turn, the increasing centrality of the university to capital accumulation under neoliberalism is sometimes over-stated, at least relative to the centrality of the university in the reproduction of post-war capitalism (particularly in the jurisdictions under investigation). Indeed, the conflation of neoliberalism with capitalism, and therein the use of what can only be read as an ideal-typical model of capitalism, betrays a kind of a-historicism that in turn speaks to the ontological weaknesses that are arguably at root in these problems. Put differently, the structural tendencies within capitalist accumulation are not usefully read as simply the incursion of the market or of profit seeking behaviour into otherwise non-capitalist areas.<sup>82</sup> Rather, real-lived capitalism is about the particular and contingent conflicts and contradictions that inevitably arise in the context of capitalism, and the particular and contingent ways in which such conflicts and contradictions are resolved. Anti-capitalist or ‘far from the market fields,’ are today very much rooted in capitalism, and their potential to uproot rather than

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<sup>82</sup> In the introduction, I pointed to the work of Sears (2003) as an example of what I am talking about. Sears usefully complicates our understanding of the university in the immediate post-war period such that we can see how the university was fundamental to the reproduction of what was a different program of capitalist accumulation. Such an understanding is also available in Noble’s work (1977), albeit of an earlier era. Mirowski (2011) also describes how the university was key to the reproduction of post-war capitalism in the US, and I have repeatedly referred to his analysis of the DOD’s “developmental program by stealth”.

preserve such, can only be evaluated from a perspective that considers this rootedness. (Fine and Milonakis 2009) In as much as nothing within the university can be understood merely with reference to the so-called “economy”, so too is a full understanding made impossible without reference to it. But even this is not quite good enough. A totalizing holism requires that production relations be privileged, for the alternative is what was described in Chapter 2, a flat ontology that obscures the power-relations that describe capitalism in general and neoliberal capitalism in particular.<sup>83</sup> The apparent complexity of the critical literature is, in other words, reductive along multiple vectors, and thereby provides little guidance as to how to access any particular object of inquiry.<sup>84</sup> Thus, there is neither the ability to obtain the essential nature of things like QA, or to usefully assess and strategically inform oppositional social forces and movements.

By way of a more concrete example, and so as to more fully contextualize and understand the neoliberal university, it is necessary to understand the centrality of global finance to neoliberal accumulation (i.e. it is necessary to

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<sup>83</sup> Again, in privileging production relations, I call for an ontology that sees reality as stratified and production as the only non-reducible domain of human relations (i.e. not reducible to any other causative variable or group of such). This is in contrast to mainstream and some critical work that does not assert the stratification of reducibility of different domains, but instead maintains their autonomy.

<sup>84</sup> When “causative variables” are reduced to the cultural, political, or social phenomena, such classification is rarely explained, at least historically. An object of analysis, must then be taken up because of its immediate appearance instead of because of its location within the political economy. The difference is this: the university either becomes an object of interest because it has become an object of interest or because it occupies a particular position within neoliberal capitalist accumulation.

understand the role played by global finance in the determination of investment decisions and production). Not only does this highlight some of the principal levers through which working class movements have been defeated and dissembled, it also helps to provide some insight into the broader ideological/ideational backdrop that has informed the shift towards neoliberalism both in and outside of the university. Within this context, the numerical representation of qualitative phenomena takes on a different significance: it is inescapably about the commodification of both research and teaching. If the preceding chapter were not convincing enough, this chapter lends theoretical weight to the argument that there cannot be, within the current context, “clean” measures of quality, where cleanliness is defined by the degree to which measures are generative of outcomes that de-commodify and/or recreate a university that can function in service of human emancipation. Simply, the processes of capitalist accumulation under neoliberalism (i.e. global finance) are so deeply inscribed within the logic of everyday life and the organization of the contemporary university, that it is all but impossible to imagine measurement being used progressively and in a manner that does not at the same time serve to reproduce less benign forms of measurement.<sup>85</sup> In making this point I also mean to highlight the need to account for (more deeply than is the norm) the kind of autonomy that Western academics did enjoy during the era of the New Left as, in

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<sup>85</sup> Marginson and Van de Wende (2007) imagine “clean” rankings as being useful and productive of a less instrumental approach to higher education than they admit global rankings exercises currently encourage.

part, a by-product of the American states' pursuit of an industrial policy by stealth (Mirowski 2011). Just as it is not possible to imagine "clean" forms of QA, it is also necessary to explain how critically minded scholars have done precisely that, and, in the process extended forms of thought that are thoroughly imbricated by liberal humanist ideals that, in the 1960s, arguably forestalled more fundamental change.

#### **4.1 Towards a Totalizing Holism: The Social Relations of Production**

As I have signaled throughout, chief among the fundamental ontological differences that separate the neoliberal analyses described in the previous chapter from the kind of Marxian lens used here is what I have referred to above as a "totalizing holism". Recall that in as much as the neoliberals have argued for concepts of endogenous causation (as with technological change), they nonetheless maintain strict distinctions – both theoretical and empirical – between the institutions that comprise whatever conception of a larger political economy they claim exists. In other words, the logics that compel individual behavior within the larger political economy are conceived of as being autonomous from other such institutionally rooted logics. So it is that causation is seen as being multiple and complex, without being conceived of as part of unifying and totalizing logic.<sup>86</sup> So it is that power relations are obscured: in the

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<sup>86</sup> As David McNally usefully pointed out to me, Marx referred to this totality of complex and multiple causality, where each "causative variable" appears to operate according to an autonomous logic as, "the unity of the diverse". (Grundrisse)

complex world of competing or mutual reinforcing but nonetheless autonomous institutionalized logics, power is seen as being, at best, diffused, and at worst, totally unassailable.<sup>87</sup>

In opposition to this Marxists have argued for a more totalizing ontology, one within which the constitutive elements of the larger political economy are inextricably tied together, even in instances where different elements might appear to be in direct opposition to one another (Wood 1981; Ollman 2003; Lebowitz 2003). This contention, in turn feeds into the equally important notion that reality is stratified. The fabric that stitches together the non-autonomous elements within the political economy constitutes the essential characteristic of the/a political economic system. For Marx, ontological primacy must be given to the social relations of (re)production only because human beings must organize in some manner to produce (and reproduce) the necessities of life. Put another way, the social relations of production are irreducible to any other set of social relations such that they are necessarily given analytical privilege. This neither means that everything is so reducible to the social relations of production, or that the ontological primacy given to the social relations of production is conceived of in static terms.<sup>88</sup> On the contrary, it is precisely the social characteristic of any

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<sup>87</sup> For instance, in the neo-classical world, the relationship between workers and owners/managers is one totally absent of any notion of power, save for the ridiculous notion that workers enter into negotiations with their employers on an equal footing (i.e. with the power to walk away and find another job).

<sup>88</sup> Though this is discussed in more detail below, it is necessary to say something about this idea that not everything is reducible to the social relations of production. First, to the extent that some phenomena cannot be usefully explained with reference to the social relations of production, the question raised by given the ontological primacy to the social relations of



mode of production that makes it dynamic – the socio-historical processes through which a dominant mode of production is constituted are precisely the subject matter with which Marx and Marxists are most concerned. (Ollman 2003)<sup>89</sup>

Far too frequently, this notion of ontological primacy has been read as cause to distinguish an apparent “base” from some over-arching “super-structure”, or, in more liberal quarters, to level the accusation of “economic reductionism”. Ironically, this is precisely the tendency against which Marx was writing:

Marx’s purpose, then, is to stress not the dualism of the ‘material’ and the ‘social’ but the definition of the material by the social; to define the material process of production not in opposition to the social process of production but as a social process; to focus attention not on ‘abstract matter’ but on the social form that gives it reality; to indicate not the usefulness but the emptiness of this abstraction; and insofar as he draws our attention to the abstraction of material production from its particular social form, he does so to stress not what the abstraction reveals but what it conceals. (Wood 1981, 72)

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production, is how it is that some non-capitalist phenomenon exists within a world where, for example, capitalist social relations are all but universally present. It is also vital to examine how the prevailing social relations of production might have been transformed within the context of prevailing social relations of production. To choose an example that is germane to the subject of this thesis, while it is true that many of the social relations of knowledge production in the university pre-date the emergence of capitalism (say conventions around departmental hierarchies) is it really the case that they remain, within capitalism, qualitatively and functionally, non-capitalist?

<sup>89</sup> Marx put it this way:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1977, 06/20/2013)

Here Wood is alluding to Marx's totalizing ontology while also raising the specter of Marx's analysis of capitalism as a distinct and historically novel mode of production within which the "social" appears separated from the 'political' and the 'economic'. Against the charge of "economic reductionism", Marxists simply reply that production is not "economic"!

#### **4.1.1 The Capital-Labour Relationship**

It hardly needs repeating that in analyzing the capitalist mode of production via an analytical lens that privileges the social relations of production, Marx begins with the relationship between capital and labour. In this section, and the two sections that follow, I set out what I see as the relevant structural motive forces at play in the making and remaking of QA and the neoliberal university. In describing these structural tendencies I would highlight a few things for the reader. This chapter follows my examination of the methods of QA and precedes my examination of the particular histories of QA in the US, the UK and Ontario intentionally, and as an indication of the method I have used in coming to understand the essential nature of QA. Recall, I began by setting out the parameters of neoliberal thought and its role in the determination of education policy and in the emergence and evolution of QA. I then proceeded to demonstrate how the dominant modes and measures of QA are reproducing both a common and low level of literacy and the rate at which new, but instrumentally weak, IP/knowledge is put-out, precisely the opposite of what neoliberal analyses claim QA will help to accomplish. I have, therefore, highlighted the need for a

different analytical lens than that used in the mainstream and some critical circles.

Necessarily, this was much more than a theoretical exercise. On the contrary, it was an empirical and historical exercise that tested – and refuted – the truth-claims made in the mainstream. The subsequent three chapters will take-up the particular cases in turn and thereby present an alternative historical narrative to that available in mainstream debates, and which will thereby enable us to understand the essential nature of QA *in situ*. In outlining the structural tendencies that form the backdrop to this narrative in between the two tasks just outlined, I am therefore able to avoid reading theory into history. In saying this I mean to briefly raise the fact that Marxists have long argued about how – and whether or not – any part of the history of capitalism can be read via a strictly structural dissection of capitalist accumulation, whether such must somehow be combined with an analysis that highlights the particular and the conjunctural, or whether the particular and conjunctural is really all that we have to consult in constructing an historical narrative. (Wood 1982) While in the introduction of this chapter I signaled where in this debate I would situate myself, QA and the university do present something of a special case, particularly in so far as the apparent emergence of the “knowledge-based economy”, which some Marxists have referred to as “cognitive capitalism”, indicates a new stage of development and evolution in both the capitalist mode of production and the social relations of that process (Vercellone 2007; Hardt and Negri 2000). While I do agree that we

have witnessed the emergence of a services-based economy that is based, in increasingly large part, on the commodification of immaterial objects, and on the psycho-social and intellectual capacities of some workers, I would argue that the basic structural motive forces at play are the same as they were/are in more materially based productive processes. Whether we are talking about the mass production of widgets under capitalist social relations or about the mass production of commercializable research or a skilled workforce, both are fundamentally capitalist in nature. Indeed, both productive processes are premised upon the social division of labour between those that own the means of production and those that do not. I would further maintain that some Marxists have perhaps made too much of the degree to which *some* workers are putatively tasked with the conception of immaterial commodities and are thereby able to enjoy relatively more freedom and power than are those workers that produce tangible things. Indeed, the apparent weakness of managerial efforts to control “knowledge-based production” or, more plainly, knowledge production, is the very obfuscation with which this dissertation is most concerned. Taylor’s time and motion studies are but a hair’s breadth from modes and methods of QA that are today leveraged by capital in the pursuit of profit.<sup>90</sup> As David Harvey puts it,

The concrete forms of technology, organization and authority can vary greatly from one place to another, from one firm to another, as long as such variations do not challenge the accumulation process. There are, evidently, more ways to make a profit than there are to skin a cat. And if the value productivity of labour can be better secured by some reasonable

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<sup>90</sup> This issue is discussed in greater detail below. I would, however, point to some work that helps to clarify these points. (Huws 2003; Harvey 2005; Harvey 1999 esp. p. 116)

level of worker autonomy, then so be it. Capital is, presumably, indifferent to how the value productivity of labour is preserved and enhanced. (Harvey 1999, 116)

To get at the centrality of the capital-labour relationship within capitalism Marx begins with an analysis of the commodity, and commodity production. While it is not my intent to run through his analysis in any detail, there are two aspects of Marx's analysis that are central to this dissertation and which are therefore usefully reviewed below. The first has to do with the nature and production of value within capitalism and the associated need for capital to constantly measure. The second issue concerns – in very broad terms – the nature of class relations and the social relations of production that lead to the normalization and internalization of capital's efforts at measurement.

#### **4.1.2 Managing Value Production & the Drive to Measure**

Arguably, Marx's signal contribution to political economy was the idea that the exchange value of any commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour time required to produce it. Indeed, it is this idea, in turn built upon Marx's distinction between use-value, exchange-value, and value from which the rest of his analysis flows. Marx's argument is simple: under conditions of commodity production and exchange in competitive markets (i.e. capitalism), different use-values are rendered commensurable (and thus exchangeable) not because their use-values are quantitatively equivalent, which is impossible to know, but because each commodity both has a specific 'social use-value' and has

been produced by some amount of socially necessary labour time. In other words, for Marx, prices are correlated to “the labour required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time.”(Marx 1887, 6/15/2013) Accordingly, money acts as a kind of yardstick, reducing all socially necessary use-values to a numerical representation of the socially necessary labour time required to produce them (i.e. to commensurable exchange-values).

Several issues stem from this dissection. First, we see that value, according to Marx, is a social relationship, which is developed through capitalist production and exchange. ‘Value’ is that process which renders different forms of concrete labour commensurable by reducing them to socially necessary labour time. Second, the process through which value is created and exchanged, renders the conditions of production invisible:

The exchange of commodities for money is real enough, yet it conceals our social relationships with others behind a mere thing - the money form itself. The act of exchange tells us nothing about the conditions of labour of the producers, for example, and keeps us in a state of ignorance concerning our social relations as these are mediated by the market system. We respond solely to the prices of quantities of use values. But this also suggests that, when we exchange things, ‘we imply the existence of value...without being aware of it.’ The existence of money – the form of value – conceals the social meaning of value itself. ‘Value does not stalk about with a label describing what it is.’ (Marx 1887 as quoted in; Harvey 1999, 17)

Third, the relationship between values and prices is never constant. Rather, prices are correlated to value in the aggregate only, and are otherwise rather

fluid. This is because, exchange-values are themselves built upon two very fluid things: socially necessary use-values and socially necessary labour time. As such and because “the price system permits the formation of values at the same time as it conceals the social basis of values from view, the magnitude of relative prices does not necessarily have to correspond to the magnitude of relative values”(Harvey 1999, 18). Fourth, capitalist production and exchange requires a particular juridical foundation: private property and the capitalist state:

Exchange of commodities presupposes the right of private proprietors to dispose freely of the products of their labour. This juridical relations is ‘but the reflection of the real economic relations of exchange (Capital, vol. 1 p.84). If exchange ratios are to be established and accurately reflect social requirements, then producers must ‘treat each other as private owners of alienable objects and by implication as independent individuals’. This meant that the ‘juridical individuals’ (persons, corporations, etc.) must be able to approach each other on an equal footing in exchange, as sole and exclusive owners of commodities with the freedom to buy from and sell to whomsoever they please. For such a condition to exist supposes not only a solid legal foundation to exchange but also the power to sustain private property rights and enforce contract. This power, of course, reside in the ‘the state’. The state in some form of another is a necessary precondition to the establishment of value. (Harvey 1999, 19)

Of course, none of this gives us a direct link to the source of profit, which is the goal to which every capitalist does – and must – strive. It does, however, give us a clue: because exchange is between equivalents, the source of excess or ‘surplus value’ must be found in the productive process. In so far as labour sells its capacity to do labour (labour-power) to the capitalist for a wage, Marx makes clear that this ‘special commodity’ is necessarily reproduced. And as with all commodities, labour-power is reproduced when socially necessary labour time is

expended. But it does not follow that the amount of socially necessary labour time required to reproduce labour-power is the same as the capacity of labour to produce value. On the contrary, as Marx makes clear, these are simply different magnitudes.

What this means is that capitalists realize profit when the amount paid in wages, materials, and overhead, is less than the exchange value of the commodities produced. Having said this, it is vital to recall that all of the costs involved in production are either reducible to socially necessary labour time or are effectively fixed. This is because inputs (raw materials) trade at prices that correlate to socially necessary labour time (i.e. they are produced as commodities), and, because overhead and management costs are not very fluid.<sup>91</sup> The upshot is that in order to increase the rate of profit, capitalists necessarily have to press down wages, the only truly variable costs on the capitalist's ledger.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Overhead costs may change with the scale of production, but once incurred are effectively sunk, at least for the short-to-medium term; factories cannot be replaced overnight, and fixed capital machinery, particularly in increasingly hi-tech industries, is remarkably expensive; the cost of fixed capital investment may be amortized (and thereby apportioned on a per-unit basis to the costs of production) but it cannot be incurred every day. Thus, although things like energy prices might change, and thus appear on the capitalist's ledger as variable, the rate of consumption of energy for the machines used in production does not. As concerns management expenses, capitalists do have some room to reduce management expenses to increase profitability – but there is a strict limit to this, namely the point at which reductions in worker productivity begin to occur given low levels of supervision.

Marx notes that the tendency to press-wages down is moderated, both by class conflict, and, in the absence of such, by the need to reproduce the basis for on-going accumulation. So it was that Marx talked about the tendency of capital to constitute itself as a class, partly in order to ensure that labour-power is not absolutely destroyed or immiserated by the too fevered competition between capitalists.

<sup>92</sup> Marx notes that the tendency to press-wages down is moderated, both by class conflict, and, in the absence of such, by the need to reproduce the basis for on-going accumulation. So it was that Marx talked about the tendency of capital to constitute itself as a class, partly in order to ensure that labour-power is not absolutely destroyed or immiserated by the too fevered competition between capitalists.



Capitalists do this in one, and generally all, of three ways: 1) they seek to lengthen and/or intensify the work day and drive down wages relative to the rate of production; 2) they may act cooperatively (and generally with help from the state) to reduce the cost of wage goods, thereby making room to press wages lower; and, 3) they may look to drive down their costs of production by introducing labour- and materials-saving technologies, thereby reducing their overall wage bill.<sup>93</sup> In each case, the effect is to create conflict between the working and the ruling classes. Capitalists' attempts to lengthen and/or intensify the workday will tend to engender a reaction, a concerted effort on the part of labour to organize and regulate the working day. Workers will look to realize the benefits of reductions to the cost of wage goods, just as capitalists will. And workers will look to either control the introduction of new technologies, the application of such, or else maintain production guarantees and/or employment levels. Both the opposition of labour and the tendency for individual capitals to destroy labour, in turn pushes capital to constitute itself as a class, and to find ways in which to limit the ability of workers to combine, the effect that they may have once they do combine, and to mitigate against the damaging impact of

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<sup>93</sup> It is possible for capitalists to increase profits without decreasing wages, namely by growing the size of the market for a particular commodity. This may increase profits overall, but will not generally effect an increase to the rate of profit. To the extent that the growth of a market segment is large, capitalists may be able to ramp-up production and introduce labour- and materials-saving technologies without actually lowering their wage bill. In as much as this may mean that that the wage bill in absolute terms may remain the same or even increase, particularly given the need for additional raw materials, we must recognize that the productivity increase is in effect a wage reduction. And moreover, this method of growth has strict limits, ones that are reached quickly in competitive markets.

errant capitalists or of unremitting competition between them. This means that capitalist production is an anarchic balancing act. We find competing capitalists looking for ways in which to reduce wages, and ameliorate class conflict and tension (both inter- and intra-). As such, capitalists have interests that are at once the same and inimical. We also find wage labour as not just the object of capitalists' often competing and often concerted efforts, but as a class sometimes constituted as a disparate group of individual workers, more or less subject to the effects of capitalist competition on both a macro- and a micro-level, at other times as a cohesive class able to effect and contain the program of capitalist accumulation, and at still other times, as a divided and structurally separated class wherein some groups are able to leverage high levels of organization at the expense of more disorganized workers. And of course we also find the capitalist state, effectively the institutionalization of capitalist social relations in the shape of so many bureaucratic agencies, each with different and sometimes competing interests, generally tied to specific class groups, but structurally reliant upon capital to invest in and grow the economy. Whatever the relative power of key agencies within the state, or the nature of their competing interests, the state is, overall, bound to ensure that the conditions for growth and investment are always in place.

## **4.2 The Social Relations of Production: Consciousness, Alienation, and Reification**

### **4.2.1 Consciousness and the Labour Process: Marx and Lukacs**

To an extent I have already anticipated some of what is discussed in more detail immediately: how and why it is that class conflict will tend to be resolved in a manner most beneficial to capital. On the one hand, the objective conditions of capitalist production and exchange, and the history of how such came to exist, favour capital. Capital's dominion over the state, pose significant obstacles to the ability of workers to combine. Of course, for Marx, the objective conditions of capitalist production, are but one side of the story. The other side has to do with the way in which the objective conditions of capitalist production are linked to a hegemonic – but far from absolute - form of consciousness that compromises workers' willingness and ability to organize in opposition to capital so as to create a more egalitarian social order. That 'form of consciousness' was described by Marx as a sense of internal (subjective) division and sub-division, whereby a worker was alienated from their work, from the products of their work, from each other, and from their basic humanity. In other words, commodity production affects a form of consciousness that mitigates workers' (and capitalist's) ability to see and understand the complex of social relationships and power structures that constitute and reproduce their social whole (Ollman 1976, 06/25/2013). So it is that Ollman talks about, in describing Marx's concept of alienation, someone so cleaved into separate parts that they are, "isolated from the social whole (Ollman 1976, 06/23/2013)". The ramifications for worker's ability to successfully oppose

capital are obvious and severe. Without an ability to stitch together a complete and holistic picture of the way in which capitalism works, the efforts of workers to resist and oppose capital's unending drive to squeeze ever more surplus value out of them, are, at best, also partial and incomplete.

In describing the mechanisms by which capitalist production affects the kind of consciousness just described, Marx was referring to the realities of capitalist production that workers in the North then faced: increasingly large-scale forms of commodity production. Accordingly, workers' consciousness was transformed in a manner that roughly corresponded to such processes. First, because workers no longer participated directly in communal processes that yielded the necessities of life, but were instead forced to trade at market for the commodities necessary to survive, the relationship between workers, like the conditions under which such commodities were produced, appeared, as, "material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx 1887, 06/20/2013)". Such "social relations between things" Marx identified as leading to "commodity fetishism", wherein workers would ascribe to commodities an inherent value separate and apart from the value that workers created by their efforts. Workers' willingness to combine in opposition to the conditions of production was undermined because they were at once blind to the conditions faced by most workers and simultaneously conditioned to covet commodities. Second, workers were alienated both from their work and from the products of their work in so far as they no longer enjoyed control over the

productive process. On the contrary, workers played either no or an increasingly minor role in envisioning the end result of their efforts, and they were thereby divested of any concern for the overall product of their work, (save of course, for that level of concern the capitalist was able to purchase, given the willingness of other workers to so apply themselves). (Ollman 1976, 6/20/2013)

Similarly, and third, workers were alienated from other human beings in so far as the product of their work was owned by the capitalist, whose interests were directly opposite to that of the worker. Because the workers efforts are disposed of in a manner that preserves her life but which serves the interests of capital, the worker is alienated from her fellow human beings (i.e. in the same manner that capitalists see labourers as but labour power, and thus as akin to mere machines, workers are alienated from capitalists). Ollman puts it this way:

The worker faces the capitalist with the very same attitudes, but whereas his employer is able to act toward him with the callous and reckless abandon of the strong, the worker shows his weakness only too clearly through sullen and hateful acquiescence. Their social alienation is a two-way street. Pulling in opposite directions, at the command of competing interests, their relations are necessarily antagonistic. (Ollman 1976, 6/20/2013)

Likewise, workers confront capital not as ‘workers’ per se, but as different concrete capacities, with different tolerances for hard-work and abuse, all coordinated by the capitalist in a competitive market (i.e. with a standing army of reserve labour). As such, even the co-location of workers (on, for instance, an assembly line), does not necessarily lead to the recognition of their common

humanity. On the contrary, for Marx, the manner in which workers confront other workers manifests as a different aspect of the alienated worker (i.e. the alienation of workers from other workers). It follows then that Marx also saw commodity production as a process of separating workers from their own humanity. In being rendered as labour-power, a worker's capacity to work (and any associated skills) were separated from her and objectified as commodities possessed outside themselves. (Ollman 1976, 06/20/2013; Lukacs 1967, 06/20/2013)

Marx's commentary on consciousness and alienation was scattered throughout his work. A more sustained and focused analysis of this process was subsequently delivered by Lukacs (1967). Instead of alienation, however, Lukacs was most concerned with "reification", which he described as a process of objectification, or "thingification" that is correctly understood as deepening of particular aspects of Marx's larger theory of alienation (May 2006). Lukacs draws from both Marx and Weber and focuses much of his attention on the ever evolving division of labour under capitalism. For Lukacs capitalist production entailed the extension of Taylorist techniques and the triumph of what Weber described as "formal" (bureaucratic) rationality. Like Marx, Lukacs argued that such Taylorist processes (Marx, of course, did not refer to Taylor) led to the segmentation and division of reality (i.e. the productive process, and the workers that work within it) into myriad constitutive and machine-like parts, each of which was manipulated in the never-ending drive to increase productivity. As

such, and again like Marx, Lukacs argued that “our vision of the social whole” (Lukacs 1967a, 6/20/2013) was thereby fragmented, obscured, made all but invisible. To the extent that Lukacs departed at all from Marx, it was with respect to the degree to which he conceived of this process of segmenting reality as more than just a subjective perspective that corresponded to the capitalist mode of production, but rather as an increasingly objective and thus real force. Lukacs describes this process:

The commodity character of the commodity, the abstract, quantitative mode of calculability shows itself here in its purest form: the reified mind necessarily sees it as the form in which its own authentic immediacy becomes manifest and - as reified consciousness - does not even attempt to transcend it. On the contrary, it is concerned to make it permanent by ‘scientifically deepening’ the laws at work. Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man. (Lukacs 1967, 6/20/2013)

Lukacs was abundantly clear with respect to what this meant for the primary focus of capitalists. In a passage that is germane to the subject at hand, Lukacs quotes Marx:

Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives. Therefore we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the incarnation of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity is everything. (Marx 1999 as quoted in; Lukacs 1967)

Immediately thereafter Lukacs continues, making clear the process of reification just described:

Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality: in short, it becomes space. In this environment where time is transformed into abstract, exactly measurable, physical space, an environment at once the cause and effect of the scientifically and mechanically fragmented and specialised production of the object of labour, the subjects of labour must likewise be rationally fragmented. On the one hand, the objectification of their labour-power into something opposed to their total personality (a process already accomplished with the sale of that labour-power as a commodity) is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life. Here, too, the personality can do no more than look on helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system. On the other hand, the mechanical disintegration of the process of production into its components also destroys those bonds that had bound individuals to a community in the days when production was still 'organic'. In this respect, too, makes them isolated abstract atoms whose work no longer brings them together directly and organically; it becomes mediated to an increasing extent exclusively by the abstract laws of the mechanism which imprisons them. (Lukacs 1967, 6/20/2013)

#### **4.2.2 From Industrial Production to Knowledge Production**

It goes almost without saying that Marx's theory of alienation and its subsequent interpretation by Marxists, not least by Lukacs, has generated a great deal of debate within Marxian circles.<sup>94</sup> While I did touch on some of the aspects of this debate earlier in this chapter, when I discussed the advent of 'cognitive capitalism', it is necessary to, at this point, deepen that discussion somewhat, if

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<sup>94</sup> David Harvey (1999) provides an outstanding overview of these debates. See (Harvey 1999 see esp. p. 106-119)



only to make clear the linkages I am asserting exist between the process of alienation and the advent of QA in and around the university.

Marx's analysis of the objective and subjective manifestations of capitalist production (i.e. the division of labour, the drive to increase productivity, and the process of alienation to which both workers and capitalists are subject), has obvious implications for how we conceive of agency. In short, there would appear to be some antimony between Marx's conception of the alienated worker and his call for workers to emancipate themselves from the bondages of capitalism. This is so in that Marx's theorization seems to suggest that workers will be rendered incapable of challenging the power of capital both because capitalist production entails the progressive "de-skilling" of workers and the transformation of their subjectivity (i.e. the form of consciousness just described). What is problematic about this theorization of capitalist production is the degree to which it appears to depart from the history of capitalism, which is rife with example after example of workers combining and opposing, with varying degrees of success, the efforts of capitalists to transform the workplace- and the workers in it – as Marx described. Indeed, the history of capitalism is what many of Marx's critics, and particularly those more trained on Braverman's seminal, "Labour and Monopoly Capital" (1998), have leveraged in seeking to demonstrate the weakness of Marx's analysis and his revolutionary aims. Rather than the secular and terminal de-skilling of workers and the complete subjugation of workers' consciousness, capitalist history is full of examples where workers have creatively organized in

opposition to capital, thereby seizing some greater measure of control over the productive process than they may otherwise have had. Accordingly, Marx's critics highlight that the push and pull between workers and capitalists is not only constant, but also the driving force behind the evolution of capitalist technologies and methods of production. Instead of emerging as a result of capitalists' responses to the exigencies created by market-based competition, capitalists and workers, by their opposition and/or cooperation, create and amend the capitalist mode of production. (Burawoy 1979; Friedman 1977; Harvey 1999)

As Harvey notes, in mounting these criticisms,

“it is as if, having got inside the labour process in a most instructive way, they [the critics of Marx's theorization of the capitalist labour process and its consequences] then forget there is a whole world out there of competitive pricing, disinvestment and reinvestment, mobility of money capital, etc.” (Harvey 1999, 136)

In other words, and as Harvey also makes clear, in focusing so closely as they do on the particularities of a labour process, critics of Marx's theorization ignore the broader, structural tendencies of capitalist accumulation. Again, what Marx enables us to obtain is a sense of capitalism's totality. Of course, this theoretical stick can be bent too far, for, as Thompson famously put it,

...no worker known to historians ever had surplus-value taken out of his hide without finding some way of fighting back (there are plenty of ways of going slow); and, paradoxically, by his fighting back the tendencies were diverted and the “forms of development” were themselves developed in unexpected ways (Thompson 1978, 346 as quoted in; Harvey 1999, 115)

Thankfully, Harvey proposes a way out, a means by which to preserve Marx's theoretical insights and holism, which goes beyond simply describing Marx's work as a description of so many "structural tendencies". For Harvey, commodity production both obscures from view the conditions of production and entails a technical division of labour that transforms the *nature* and *type* of skills workers possess:

We should note in this how the word 'skill' undergoes a subtle transformation of meaning. On the one hand, there is the traditional craft and artisan skill which confers a certain power upon whoever possesses it because it is, to some degree, monopolizable. Such skills are anathema to capital. They can act as a barrier to the accumulation of capital (wage rates are sensitive to their scarcity) and prevent the penetration of capitalist social relations of domination and subordination within production. These are the skills that have to be eliminated if capitalism is to survive. On the other hand, it is important for capital that new skills emerge: skills which allow for flexibility and adaptability and, above all, substitutability – that are non-monopolizable. The 'de-skilling' of which Marx writes often entails a direct transformation from monopolizable to non-monopolizable skills. But the former kind of skill can never disappear totally. The skills of the engineers, the scientists, managers, designers and so on often become monopolizable. The only question is, then, whether the monopoly powers that attach to such skills are totally absorbed as a power of capital, through the formation of a distinctive faction of the bourgeoisie (the managers and scientists), or whether they can be captured as part of the collective powers of labour. (Harvey 1999, 109)

What Harvey suggests, in other words, is that the "de-skilling" hypothesis proposed by Marx and taken to the extreme by Braverman is perhaps the by-product of, "too facile a transition from the abstraction to the very concrete strategies of deskilling" (Harvey 1999, 115). Instead the expression of this tendency is best seen as a battle over skill, its definition, and the control thereof,

which Harvey conceives of as the tendency to replace “monopolizable” skill, with “non-monopolizable skills” or highly reproducible and/or substitutable skills. On this score, the tendency is abundantly clear:

All of the evidence suggests that this has been the direction in which capitalism has been moving, with substantial islands of resistance here and innumerable pockets of resistance there. To the extent that the reduction of skilled to simple labour is still in the course of being accomplished, we have to conclude that capitalism is in the course of becoming more true to the law of value implied in its dominant mode of production. From this standpoint, at least, there seems to be little ground for disputing Marx’s or Braverman’s basic line of argumentation. (Harvey 1999, 119)

We are now at the point at which we can consider QA as a managerial strategy designed to increase the productivity of universities in putting-out sufficiently well skilled/trained workers and/or commercializable research. First, it bears keeping in mind that, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2, mainstream neoliberal theory is clearly the by-product of the kind of battle over and re-definition of skill just described. Recall that in the mainstream literature, reality is seen to be made-up of so many discrete and autonomous spheres of activity. In turn, causation is held to be a matter of correlation between events in one or multiple such spheres, where “events” are conceived of in terms of rational individual action under conditions of bounded rationality. As such, reality is rendered into a kind model that can be reproduced and used to predict behaviour in similar such conditions such that wise public policy can be developed. Thus, to the criticisms that I have already leveled against such modes of thought we must add

the degree to which it is not just a-historic, but also, and by both its design and intent, formulaic. In other words, mainstream theory seeks to obtain a kind of universality of form and of content (i.e. rational actors are plugged into autonomous institutional milieu such that human behaviour can thus be at once “gamed-out” and explained). Recall too that such modes of thought have developed and been extended to all of the social sciences within the context of a politically charged process - economics imperialism. Omitted in such imperial exercises has been the history of such imperial activities (for instance, the Cambridge Capital Controversy, like so many courses on the history of economics, has simply been cut from both undergraduate and graduate economics curricula).<sup>95</sup> As such, many contemporary practitioners of mainstream theories are not conscious of their disciplinary history, or of the degree to which the practice of social science has been transformed into a readily reproducible and *scientific* exercise. This was, of course, part of the basic thrust of Marx’s critique of political economy.

The point here is to highlight that to which Harvey draws our attention in his discussion of skill and its redefinition under capitalism. The instrumental rationalities (i.e. the skills) that QA both represents and aims to reproduce are precisely those which are non-monopolizable and thus substitutable. In this regard, it may be helpful to quickly recall some of the evidence that was examined

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<sup>95</sup> It stands to reason that, in introducing students to the discipline of economics, Mankiw’s (2012) textbook would introduce students to the history of economic thought and therein to things like the Cambridge Capital Controversy. It does no such thing. (Mankiw 2012)

in Chapter 3. During the era when QA has become ubiquitous in the jurisdictions under investigation (and indeed throughout the world), literacy levels among college graduates have tended to solidify at a low level. Similarly, on the research front, less and less IP is hitting the commons, and the rate at which sound science is being produced appears to have declined markedly. And in both cases, the methods and mechanisms of QA demonstrably encourage such trends and tendencies.

In discussing Marx's concept of 'value' and the capitalist's obsession with measurement, what I necessarily highlighted was the way in which 'value' was determined via a constant process of negotiation between labour and capital over, on the one hand, socially necessary labour time, and, on the other hand, surplus value. Irrespective of the (im)materiality of the manufacture, QA is, in multiple respects, an effective tool in the regulation of socially necessary labour time. First, it is, as Shore and Wright (1999) have highlighted, an effective social technology, a kind of "panopticon", that can be used to establish a benchmark set of expectations against which workers (in this case students, academics and university administrators) will tend regulate and/or police their own behavior, specifically around the "productivity" of their various efforts (research dollars earned, levels of student satisfaction, patents generated, awards won, publication counts etc.). Relatedly, and second, in so far as QA is consistently linked with both levels of resource and remuneration, it operates as both a direct measure of efficiency and as disciplinary mechanism, establishing and then enforcing a

benchmark of socially necessary labour time (De Angelis and Harvie 2009). Further, as resources are tightened, QA operates as a means by which to impose greater productivity requirements, and thereby as a mechanism to reduce the socially necessary labour time involved in the production of graduates and commercializable research (De Angelis and Harvie 2009). Third, and finally, QA affects a transformation in the forms of inquiry and thought that take place within the university. This goes well beyond the kind of transformation affected by the QA “panopticon”, where departmental chairs and program directors, or quality assessment officers seek to “incentivize” around particular output targets, or colleagues compete for acclaim, remuneration, and job security. Indeed, QA affects the shape of thought in the same way that economics imperialism has and continues to transform the social sciences: QA presses academe into the commodity form, into non-monopolizable and ever more easily substitutable forms of knowledge and inquiry. Mirowski, drawing on the work of others, conceives of this as the intentional “production of ignorance”(agnotoly) (Mirowski 2011). But this is a subsidiary effect of QA, the larger, more important being the reproduction of conventions of manipulation around the negotiation of socially necessary labour time.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> As Huws notes in her immensely useful examination of “knowledge work”,

The skills required to operate a computer and its various communications accessories should not, of course, be mistaken for the totality of the requirements of any given job. They are often ancillary to other “core” skills – the skills required to do “the job itself.” However, these too may be undergoing a process of modification (which could take the form of routinization, of full commodification) that is changing their nature. Social workers, for instance, may find themselves filling out standard forms on-screen instead of

### 4.3 The Social Relations of Capitalist Production and the University

To this point I have argued for a “totalizing holism,” wherein we begin an analysis of social phenomena (in this case the university and QA) by first enquiring as to the primary and irreducible social relationships of production so as to illuminate the constitutive logic of secondary, tertiary (and so on) social relationships. The question taken up in this section is necessarily posed at a slightly lower level of analysis (in terms of the stratification just mentioned): how are we to conceive of the university within capitalism in general? In some measure I have already provided something of an answer to this question. My critique of thinkers like Marginson, Rhoades, and Slaughter, was centred around their willingness to conceive of certain phenomena within the university as somehow non-capitalist because such phenomena did not appear to be directly

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writing or delivering in person more nuanced and qualitative professional reports on their clients; teachers may find themselves administering standard tests; insurance loss adjusters may have lost the discretion to decide what compensation a claimant should receive; Internet journalists may be required to write tightly defined standard formats; and architects may be reduced to recombining standard components.(Huws 2003, 167)

Much the same could be said of other forms of “knowledge work” too: software designers increasingly rely upon standard “linguistic” forms in the design of similarly standardized user-interfaces; physicians are increasingly taught to rely on a variety of diagnostic technologies instead of their own diagnostic skills; and indeed, engineers and architects are taught to use increasingly conventional and standardized forms in the generation of designs and technologies. The same is true of work in jobs that some scholars have argued require specific “managerial” skills: retail store managers rely on computer generated sales and productivity reports, on human resources management manuals that detail how workers are to be managed, spoken too, and disciplined. Even body language and linguistic form are increasingly directed. Not only does this add an interesting fold to the extent to which “knowledge work” in fact requires the “production of knowledge,” or the use of, “problem solving skills, communication skills, organizational skills, and the ability to work in teams...,” it thereby indicates the extent to which mere, “problem solving skills,” exercised within remarkably structured and directive contexts, have been cast as “creative” and “inventive.”



reproductive of capitalist social relations. However direct or indirect are the reproductive functions of the university, the development and universality of capitalism prior to the neoliberal era, suggests that the university was nonetheless implicated in the reproduction of post-war capitalism, in ways that transcended the university's nonetheless crucial role as the source of new knowledge for the military industrial complex.

Again, my point is that the university must be conceived of as having some function/role within capitalism and, further, that such a function can only be discerned historically. It may well be that the university, either in part or in whole, historically or presently, operates far from the apex of capitalist production and reproduction. Some within the university may even work in the university to undermine capitalist social relations. However, the residue or reflection of capitalist social relations, whether those relations are more or less proximate to the operation of the university, is nonetheless fundamentally inscribed therein. When the function of the university has appeared to be relatively far from capitalist production, we must account for this apparent distance, first and foremost, by reference to the history of capitalism and of capital. And we must do this in three senses: 1) with regard to the historical moment when the commodity-form and thus capitalist social relations became universal within any particular political economy (i.e. the moment when the social division of labour between workers and capital became central to the productive activities in a given society); 2) with regard to the way in which

capitalist social relations are reflected in both dominant and heterodox modes of thought, which will bear indelibly the marks of capital (i.e. we must understand the way in which the kind and level of consciousness promoted within all sectors of the university reflect capital, even where the intent of developing a particular kind of consciousness seeks to undo capital); and, 3) with regard to the way in which and the degree to which the university is the fount of new knowledge and “human capital” for capitalist production.

In other words, the university has long reproduced/reflected a form of consciousness fundamental to capitalist production (Noble 1977). More recently, the university has become increasingly central to both the ideological reproduction of capitalist social relations and the forms of consciousness such entails, as well as to the production of commodities (including labour-power). The university has thus taken on a significance that it did not always have: as an industrial enterprise all its own. Where the ideological reproductive function that the university once played did not require close management by capital or the capitalist state, the commodity- and ideology- reproducing roles that it now plays do require more and better forms of management. Because this functional repositioning of the university has happened in the context of an increasingly global capitalist political economy described by the re-emergence and hegemony of global finance, the managerial strategies employed by and in the contemporary university have appeared more natural and necessary than might have otherwise been the case. Indeed, the ubiquity of QA speaks to both the functional

repositioning of the university within capitalism and to the extent to which dominant modes of thought /consciousness reflect the apparently natural logic of global finance, which is built entirely on the numerical representation of qualitative phenomena.

#### **4.4 The Social Relations of Neoliberal Capitalist Production and the University**

Given the historical accounts that follow immediately, I will conclude this chapter with only a brief outline of the broad brush-strokes of the real-lived history from which the theorization just provided stems. As the political economies of the advanced capitalist states have matured, capitalism has expanded both in terms of breadth and depth; the large-scale deindustrialization of the Global North has involved parallel processes of intensive commodification (i.e. the commodification of “immaterial objects”), and the emergence of new sites for the production of material commodities (Gindin and Panitch 2012). Thus, the rise of the so-called “weightless economy”(Quah 1999) has by no means entailed a diminution of material production (quite the opposite) but it has seen the progressive commodification of immaterial ‘objects’, like futures contracts, insurance policies, as well as of different forms of labour-power, as the fount of growth in, among others, those jurisdictions under investigation. Whether productive of surplus value or not, to the extent that the production of such immaterial manufacture does have costs and is critical to the earning of profit, it

is simply vital that those costs be quantified and measured relative to the returns they help to generate.

Not coincidentally, mainstream economists have, since 1973, been puzzled by the so-called “productivity paradox” (Gordon 2000). In essence the ‘paradox’ has to do with the fact that despite massive investments in high-tech fixed capital, productivity growth rates in the OECD dropped rather suddenly and precipitously and have remained historically low since then. It is generally agreed that the issue remains one of measurement: how do you measure output in a services based economy, where ‘products’ are immaterial? This actually elides another problem: the measurement of inputs (i.e. how to measure the value of the cognitive skills necessary to produce immaterial products). Without getting into the details of how economists are inventing ways to apportion value to things such as computers that replace slightly older, but generally just as functional computers, the “knowledge economy” requires that there be an ability to measure the value that “knowledge workers” add to a productive process that results in immaterial commodities (Scarpetta and OECD 2003; Sharpe, Arsenault, and Harrison 2008; OECD 1996).

At the same time (the 1970s), higher rates of participation in post-secondary education sector, which had taken shape within the context of the Keynesian compromise, posed significant challenges to the existing order. Not only did the sector itself require additional support, but, as the Trilateral Commission clearly acknowledged (see intro to Chapter 2), traditionally high

post-graduation incomes could not be provided to the average graduate, given the expanded size of the sector, without a massive transfer of wealth (from rich to poor) also taking place. Of course, this recognition took place in the context of larger concerns about, on the one hand, the strength of organized labour, which had been identified as a key driver of historically high-rates of inflation, and, on the other hand, declining corporate profit rates. (Crozier et al. 1975) In the US, the sense of crisis was further augmented by the catch-up of Germany and Japan, and its emerging balance of payments deficit, most clearly manifest in the inability of the US to maintain the Gold Standard (Gindin and Panitch 2012). As was discussed, the resolution to this crisis was offered in direct opposition to its apparent cause: “over-loaded” government, itself a by-product of Keynesian macro-economic policy and the “nanny state”, rising wages (relative to capital’s portion of value-added), and the apparent inflexibility of labour-markets (Gindin and Panitch 2012; Fine and Milonakis 2009; Dumenil and Levy 2005). As was outlined at the outset of this chapter, other, more derivative, transformations were at play here too. In the US, for example, increasingly focused military spending upset the US government’s ability to finance the huge amount of industry and university based R&D in the manner that it had throughout the Cold War (Mirowski 2011). And, the concerted interests of Big Pharma, agri-business, health-care, and the military-industrial cum consumer goods industry, all came in the 1970s and 1980s to see the resurrection – and indeed massive improvement – of their corporate profitability in outsourcing and offshoring, to,

among other sites, publicly funded universities (Mirowski 2011; S. Slaughter and Rhoades 1996). This of course, gelled perfectly with the *modus operandi* then being pursued by finance capital and an increasingly large portion of American productive capital, which had itself either/both fallen under the thumb of finance or merged with/morphed into powerful amalgams of both fractions (Gindin and Panitch 2012; Leys 1985).

The “capital strike” that began in the US in 1980, not only had global ramifications, it was but one salvo (albeit a key one) in an historic attack on the working class, and a thorough re-engineering of the capitalist state and the international cum global political economy according to the strictures and logic of global finance (Gindin and Panitch 2012; Newstadt 2008). In this context, universities throughout the world, and most certainly in the three jurisdictions under investigation, first faced massive cut-backs and then escalating pressure to increase their productive efficiency in terms of graduates (trained workers) and commercializable research. Such pressure entailed a re-engineering of the university itself: the transformation of the governance and administrative apparatus, the imposition of the “publish or perish” orthodoxy, an increased reliance on non-tenured and contract faculty, and QA (Sheila Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Marginson and Rhoades 2002; Rajagopal 2002; Walker 1999). The university, in other words, emerged as an increasingly important site in the reproduction of capitalism along multiple vectors. The imposition of QA, in as much as it was and remains a political project and a social technology, was also a

structural requirement. Capital needed to be, and was, negotiated in new ways. New forms of value therefore also needed to be found, measured, and managed (De Angelis and Harvie 2009; Harvie 2006; Shore and Wright 1999).

We find four mutually reinforcing phenomena which have and continue to be causative in both states' and the capitals' drive to develop and enhance mechanisms of QA: 1) a process of commodity production (which includes commodification) as a structural element within capitalist accumulation; 2) the political necessity to commodify labour-power in the services sector; 3) the drive to extend the domain of mainstream neo- and new-classical economics, and the relative success of that project; and, 4) capital's reaction to the massification of the university which happened in part as a result of popular demands for such (and the simultaneous attack on organized labour). We must, of course, remain cognizant of the degree to which there have been and still are popular calls for governments to develop QA, as well as for private sector initiatives that do the same. As the foregoing has made clear, part of the neoliberal experiment has been the drive to (re)produce labour market flexibility by building popular support for such. And the consequences for "everyday life" of global finance and the unfolding of American led neo-liberalism can hardly be under-estimated (Langley 2008). That the consciousness of workers would, in part, reflect the interests of capital, particularly given the emergence of increasingly competitive and global labour markets, which force workers to find ways to differentiate themselves, should come as no surprise.

## **Chapter 5: The Long History of QA in America and the Political Economy of American Higher Education**

The “system” of quality assessment at play in American higher education is heavily decentred, arguably more so than in any other jurisdiction. Indeed, the American system is not operated according to the dictates of any central governmental agency, there is no central repository of information about the system, and no single set of standards are applied in the assessment of even similar institutions across the country. Far from create any kind of informational deficit however, the availability of QA related information in the US is astounding. Through various media, and often via aggressive marketing campaigns undertaken by the institutions themselves, rankings and league tables that ostensibly describe America’s institutions of higher education are everywhere. For the proponents of America’s system of QA the decentred nature of that system is touted as a strength. It is said that the sheer density and variety of different measures and approaches to QA is indicative of the variety and alleged dynamism of institutions that make-up American higher education. Such proponents argue that because the higher education landscape in America is so dynamic and variegated it is necessary to assess different institutions differently (Brittingham 2009; Lombardi et al. 2001). More than this, for the champions of America’s system of QA, the ability to assure quality in a dynamic and highly differentiated system means that American institutions put out a high-quality,



highly differentiated, and flexible labour force. In other words, every labour market demand can be met with a ready supply of highly skilled/trained workers.

As I make clear below, the arguments offered in support of America's system of QA leave much to be desired. America's system of higher education is not so highly "differentiated" as it is stratified, and America's system of QA recreates that stratification.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, all of the apparently diverse mechanisms of QA are uniformly rooted in the logic of value, which, as I also make clear, was the logic that has shaped, both immediately and historically, the design of America's system of QA. Importantly, the heavily decentred nature of

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<sup>97</sup> Those institutions that are generally designated as making up America's system of higher education tend to be accredited through one of six regional accrediting agencies, which in turn operate under a single national banner. The accrediting agencies are also subject to evaluative procedures, which, since the 1950s, have net them recognition by the federal government's Department of Education (U.S. Dept. of Education 2013). Such recognition of the accrediting agencies is critical to the institutions that are, in turn, accredited by such accreditors, for it provides them access to federal funding arrangements, including the federal government's long-standing system of portable student grants and loans. Though the specifics of how the accrediting agencies review and assess institutions is something of a mystery, it is nonetheless clear that all of the agencies rely heavily on some form peer review, which operates in respect of a specified set of evaluative areas and criteria, the relative import/weight of which is not publicly available. Professional programs are also accredited by whatever professional association self-regulates a given profession, as with the American Medical Association (CHEA 2013). Outside of such accreditation evaluations, institutions – and the programs/departments within them – are also assessed by a large number of non-governmental and often private-sector organizations that rank institutions and programs according to a set number of evaluative criteria that are weighted differently for different institution types, disciplines etc. Beneath the program level, students are subject to various forms of mass evaluation, generally via standardized tests. But such standardized forms of student evaluation are read-up through the larger system of QA. For example, measures of student engagement are sometimes reflected in institution and/or program level rankings exercises and evaluations. Similarly, SAT entrance scores are understood to be artifacts of "peer quality", which is also used commonly as an evaluative criteria in the assessment and ranking of institutional and/or program quality (see for instance Morse and Flanigan 2012). Other forms of evaluation track the performance of both institutions and faculty in terms of research, as with data on things like "research dollars earned". And as with the mass evaluations of students, evaluations of faculty also get rolled into the myriad private-sector rankings exercises mentioned above. Also, the eligibility to participate in federally funded research programs relies on assessments of past performance, which has increasingly included measures of the number and value of private-sector partnership and co-sponsorship deals (Mervis 2012).

America's system of QA does make that system appear far more chaotic than it is in fact. Such chaos does seem to support the conventional argument around differentiation, however, for it appears unlikely that hierarchical order could result from so many seemingly discrete and disorganized assessments. Indeed, America's system of QA is described by a terrific number of private- and public-sector actors, whose dense inter-connections are not well-known or highly publicized, such that it is difficult to account for and track, at least at first blush, the relative importance of any single actor, or to assert any kind of direct causative logic that has driven the stratification of the American system. In fact, QA was pioneered in the US specifically as a means by which to discipline the academy, leverage the university in the service of corporate America, and dispense with those institutional alternatives/competitors that might have heralded a different order. Since its earliest articulations through the early part of the last century, QA has always been about capital and the law of value. Indeed, looked at through an historical lens attuned to the rhythms of America's political economy, the chaos of America's system of QA is turned into a logical and well-tuned program that has become ever more formalized and fundamental, not just to the operation of American higher education, but, as we shall see, to the operation of higher education throughout the world.

Having already reviewed the standardized tests and rankings exercises that are ubiquitous in the American system, this chapter begins with an examination of accreditation within the American system. Necessarily, this

review is short because America's system of accreditation is somewhat mysterious and the intricacies of that system are not well publicized (Harvey 2004). In the sections that follow this examination of accreditation I explore a more detailed political economy of American higher education with an eye to explaining the degree to which measurement has long played an absolutely critical role in the development and functioning of American higher education. I conclude by outlining the significance of the American case in terms of other national and sub-national systems of higher education.

## **5.1 Quality Assessment and Accreditation**

Higher education institutions in the United States must be accredited by one of six regional accrediting agencies in order to qualify for participation in federal student grant and loan programs (CHEA 2013). Both the Pell Grants and the National Student Loan Program make up a significant proportion of institutional revenues, and as such are the backbone of America's system of higher education (Moody's Investor Service 2013; College Board 2012). Were accreditation not also a valuable reputational commodity in and of itself, the relative importance of federal student grant and loan programs would make it absolutely vital for institutions to be accredited.<sup>98</sup> As is discussed in greater

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<sup>98</sup> Though tuition-fees now make-up the majority of operating revenues at US universities (both public and private), this was not always the case. In any event, though government transfers for operating purposes have declined, as both Moody's and the College Board make clear, student aid from state and federal agencies has increased. Thus, the state continues to support higher education in the US, albeit in a manner than has students bear ultimate responsibility for those costs.

detail below, the American system of accreditation emerged in the closing decades of the 19th century (Brittingham 2009). The motive forces behind the emergence of accreditation are not comprehensively discussed anywhere. Mainstream accounts describe the emergence of accreditation as a by-product of, on the one hand, an intensely competitive higher education market that was plagued by the emergence of myriad “diploma mills”, and, on the other hand, a pantheon of “great” institutions intent on proving their value (Brittingham 2009; CHEA 2013). In what is essentially a story about consumer protection, reputable institutions are said to have pursued accreditation as a means by which to assure the general public of the quality of the product that they were going to purchase, or which they had previously purchased. The corollary is that the sector itself sought to preserve and promote excellence and to develop some consensus around what constituted a university or college level education. As the state became increasingly involved in the financing of higher education, it too apparently benefitted from the process of accreditation, and in precisely the manner as did/do individual consumers and the institutions they attend (Brittingham 2009).

One such example of this line of argument is provided by Barbara Brittingham, the Director of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’, Committee of Institutions of Higher Education. In her trenchant defense of accreditation, Brittingham begins not with an historical account, but rather with an outline of the apparent advantages of the American system of

accreditation, which is then read into the history she subsequently provides. For Brittingham, the American system of accreditation is unique in that:

- 1) Accreditation is a nongovernmental, self-regulatory, peer review system.
- 2) Nearly all of the work is done by volunteers.
- 3) Accreditation relies on the candor of institutions to assess themselves against a set of standards, viewed in the light of their mission, and identify their strengths and concerns, using the process itself for improvement.(Brittingham 2009, 10)

Accordingly, Brittingham argues that the pattern of self-regulatory governance that describes American accreditation is derivative of, first, the U.S. constitution, which made education a matter of state authority, and secondly, two Supreme Court decisions, which subsequently had the effect of limiting the authority of state governments in respect of the administration of US colleges and universities. Thus,

...while the federal government has become more prominent in matters of education, the early development of the education system in this country was left free of government control, allowing the establishment of a diverse array of colleges and universities. The lack of government regulation also meant there was no clear and uniform floor on the minimum expectations for a college or a college education, leaving a vacuum that accreditation grew to fill. Thus, the social interest in having a sense of minimum standards was in part responsible for the development of accreditation. (Brittingham 2009: p.10)

While the relative absence of the state set the stage for the development of accreditation, what for Brittingham really drove the development of that process was what she describes as the unique nature of “American values”. Apparently, and unlike other jurisdictions,

American's value problem-solving and entrepreneurship...Americans also believe in the ability of the individual to achieve a self-identified goal...Volunteering is, of course, a great American tradition: Americans volunteer in schools, hospitals, fire departments, and settlement houses...Americans also believe in self-improvement, an activity requiring self-evaluation and identification of areas that could benefit from enhancement.(Brittingham 2009: p.10-12)

It follows that, as higher education became increasingly important and the market more varied, institutions – though generally those occupying positions of pre-eminence in each region - grouped together and developed standards of accreditation that relied on peer review. Brittingham notes that the review processes evolved over-time: they became less quantitative and more qualitative; they became less prescriptive and more “mission centred”; and, they become increasingly aspirational and “focused on the future”. In fact, as the number and type of institutions expanded, the enforcement of prescriptive standards did shift towards a more “mission-centred” approach, wherein accrediting agencies evaluated an institution’s performance relative to its own mission and purpose statement.<sup>99</sup> As I clarify below, it is unlikely that the motive forces behind the development of this “qualitative” and “mission centred” approach were related to what Brittingham would presumably describe as American’s unique craving for, and defense of, freedom.

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<sup>99</sup> As is outlined in more detail below, the 6 regional accrediting bodies, all of which publish some version of a “principles of accreditation” document tend to describe quality as a balance between what are always vaguely defined “normal” or “generally accepted collegiate standards” with an evaluation of how well taught courses and research reflect an institution’s mission.

Critical accounts of the development of accreditation in the US simply do not exist. But critical accounts of the development of the American system of higher education do exist, and they hint at the process through which accreditation actually came to be.<sup>100</sup> Noble (1977), for example, highlights the role played by people such as Charles Mann in a huge variety of efforts that were designed to push the universities closer to industry and turn them into would-be production facilities for corporate America. Mann, who trained as a physicist, quickly went on to win favour with corporate America and with the captains of the corporation school movement after becoming a champion of “practical” higher education. In this regard, Mann’s story is typical of many others who emerged as “educational engineers” (Barrow 1990, 111) in and around the first few decades of the 20th century, when corporate America undertook to re-engineer American higher education.<sup>101</sup>

In a similar vein, Clyde Barrow (1990) and Barbara Ann Scott (1983) have separately documented how the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of

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<sup>100</sup> In what follows I rely heavily on David Noble’s (1977) book, *America by Design*, Slaughter’s and Da Silva’s (1984) work, *Serving Power: The Making of the Academic Science Expert*, Clyde Barrow’s (1990) book, *Higher Education and the Capitalist State*, and Barbara Ann Scott’s (1983). *Crisis Management in American Higher Education*

<sup>101</sup> Among other notable roles that he played, Mann sat on the board of the very same accrediting agency that Barbara Brittingham now directs, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. He was also instrumental in the development of the military take-over of American higher education during WWI, which he subsequently spun into a program of testing that built upon and extended similar such programs in the corporation schools. He also authored the first national report on the state of engineering education, which, as is discussed below, he was clear about wanting to make more industry oriented. Mann was outspoken when it came to the content and direction of higher education and it defies belief that he would ever have championed a regulatory program that was not designed to press the university closer to the private sector. (Noble 1977)

Teaching (CFAT), and Rockefeller's, General Education Board (GEB), along with numerous and densely related corporately endowed philanthropic organizations, operated both in conjunction with, and under the auspices of, the US Bureau of Education, to place first states' and then the nation's entire system of higher education under the thumb of corporate America. Herein, both Barrow and Scott highlight that, in the early 1920s the Bureau of Education took-up the CFAT's plan for a streamlined and rationalized national system of higher education, and, with resources from the CFAT, created the capacity to conduct surveys (assessments/audits) of both individual higher education institutions as well as whole state systems (Barrow 1990, Chap 4; Scott 1983, Chap. 2). On the basis of Taylorist principles and the measurement of, among other things, "student clock-hours" (Barrow 1990, 70), the Bureau of Education subjected myriad institutions and state systems of higher education to value-for-money type assessments aimed at increasing the productive efficiency of American higher education. In the process, the Bureau of Education not only become what Barrow describes as a kind of intellectual centre of gravity for educational policy, it also set in motion processes that took dead-aim at those progressive and socialist academics that stood in the way of the Bureau's efforts to rationalize higher education (Barrow 1990, 122). In other words, corporate America and the American state cooperated closely to create not just an integrated and efficient system of higher education, but also, and just as significantly, a particular kind of academic, one disposed to the "manufacture" in response to the needs of American capitalism.



It also bears keeping in mind that the American social sciences were consciously constructed to “serve power” such that the academy organized to circumscribe academic freedom (E. Silva and Slaughter 1984). Not only did this bolster the aspirations of corporate America with respect to the structure and operation of higher education, it also meant that peer review could hardly have operated only as a measure of the degree to which curricular standards had and would continue to be met. For Silva and Slaughter, the scope of academic freedom in America was limited in primarily, though not exclusively, two ways: 1) the social scientists either directly sanctioned some of their more radically minded colleagues, or else they allowed such colleagues to be sanctioned by university managers and trustees; and, 2) by defining – and narrowing – the scope of what became increasingly segmented and specialized areas of study so as to aid in the reproduction of industrial capitalism (again leaving aside radical ideas). Such efforts and allowances were undertaken by social scientists in a bid to professionalize the academy and, thereby, to position social scientists as “experts” able to provide sound guidance to the public and decision makers on all manner of issues. In short, the social scientists cultivated popular notions of expertise in a manner that guaranteed them the on-going financial support of the corporate elite (who were often key benefactors of the institutions where they worked or else trustees at the same), and the managers of their institutions, who were either similarly concerned or else were dedicated to the principles of higher

education championed by corporate America.<sup>102</sup> Though their work did not extend to the present, Silva and Slaughter, writing in 1984, make clear that the legacy of these efforts still remains intact. (Silva and Slaughter 1984)

In sum then, the history of the American academy suggests that accreditation and peer review can hardly be conceived of as relatively benign mechanisms of self-regulation and consumer protection. Accreditation is rooted in both the ambitions of corporate America, which saw in that process the promise of an almost mechanized program of human capital (re)production, and in the ambitions of an academy intent on controlling both access to the ivory tower and the status that is conferred by such access. In this light, the processes employed by the accrediting agencies – which rely heavily on peer review – appear as something of a sideshow.

While it would undoubtedly be useful in the context of this examination to look more deeply at how it is the accrediting agencies actually use peer review, such is not possible.<sup>103</sup> None of the accrediting agencies provide much in the way

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<sup>102</sup> In many cases the presidents and vice-chancellors of the most prestigious universities were the very engineers who, as Noble has outlined, built American higher education “by design.”

<sup>103</sup> Clyde Barrow’s (1990) does a spectacular job of outlining how it is peer review used to work. He notes that,

In 1918, only forty-four universities, or about 8 percent of all four-year higher institutions, awarded Ph.D.’s in the United States. Sixty one percent of these forty-four were private universities located mainly in the industrial Northeast and consisting precisely of those universities most closely and directly attached to the major northeastern financial groups. These private universities awarded 74 percent of all Ph.D.’s granted in the United States in 1918. Moreover, of the Ph.D.’s awarded by this group of private universities, two-thirds were granted by only five institutions: Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, and the University of Chicago. (Barrow 1990, 122)

of detail with respect to their assessment and accreditation procedures and protocols. For example, the so-called “public disclosure statements” issued by the accrediting bodies following accreditation reviews lack any kind of substantive detail. By way of a more specific example, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) in its public disclosure statement regarding the decision of SACSOC assessors to place the Birmingham-Southern College on “continued warning”, and thus in potential jeopardy of losing their accreditation, the SACSCOC rather vaguely explained:

**Why was Birmingham-Southern College continued on Warning?** Birmingham-Southern College was continued on Warning because the Commission’s Board of Trustees determined that the institution had failed to demonstrate compliance with Core Requirement 2.11.1 (Financial Resources) and Comprehensive Standard 3.10.1 (Financial Stability) of the Principles of Accreditation. These standards expect an institution to provide evidence that it has a sound financial base and demonstrated financial stability. (SACS Commission on Colleges 2012 emphasis in original)<sup>104</sup>

The “Principles of Accreditation” to which this explanation refers are de rigueur for all of the regional accreditation bodies. In fact, each of the six regional accreditors makes publicly available an outline of what standards an institution must meet in order to become and remain accredited. Such statements, however, provide little of the kind of detail made public by the by the UK’s Quality Audit Agency, subsequent to its institutional reviews (these reviews are described in

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In other words, the development of the American intelligentsia was, at least, initially, something of a family affair.

<sup>104</sup> To read the full statement for the standards cited above, access the Principles of Accreditation at <http://www.sacscoc.org/principles.asp>.

Chapter 6). This, of course, is entirely intentional. Statements regarding the principles of accreditation are left vague and open because accreditation is related first and foremost to an institution's self-expressed "mission and purpose", which, as the statement above suggests, universities and colleges fulfill by being financially stable and viable. In other words, accrediting agencies are not able to say anything substantive about the maintenance of high academic standards at any institution because high academic standards are ultimately reduced to "prudent" financial management; by establishing financial viability as a core concern within an evaluative procedure that claims to focus on an institutions' own mission statement, the accrediting agencies assert a respect for institutional autonomy that defines such autonomy strictly in terms of success at market. This is not to suggest that an institution will have as its mission the maintenance of low academic standards. Rather, because some accredited institutions look to achieve high standards in, for example, vocational forms of training, which have an obvious utility in a highly "differentiated" system, "academic excellence" must take on an entirely different meaning and relevance if the accreditation procedure is to reproduce that differentiation. Of course, and as was alluded to earlier, institutional "differentiation" has not developed in the United States on the basis of what could aptly be described as a "free" or "natural" expression of market logic. On the contrary, corporate America, through the CFAT and the GEB, and in close cooperation with the American state, channeled resources to a handful of private and public institutions

specifically so as to facilitate such “differentiation”, notably on the basis of what were held to be qualitative assessments of individual students, of particular faculty, and indeed entire institutions (Barrow 1990; Scott 1983, 34). In ignoring both the history of “selective philanthropy” (Scott 1983, 34), and the significance of contemporary forms of conditional finance, while emphasizing an institution’s “self-defined” mission statement, accreditation processes by-pass any consideration of the hierarchical nature of American higher education while simultaneously laying claim to the idea that accreditation fuels “differentiation” and quality. In other words, accreditation in the US is a disciplinary form of valuation. What are described as qualitative assessments of institutions’ taught programs merely assess how well or how poorly an institution is able to produce exchange value.

Again, all of this is done via an initial, and all important obfuscation: the apparent respect for institutional autonomy via an evaluative process that measures excellence relative to an institution’s own definition of such (i.e. its mission statement). For a sense of how much emphasis is placed on a university’s mission statement relative to academic standards, I have quoted below from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation manual. Of the eleven standards that institutions must meet in order to obtain and maintain accreditation, the “Mission and Purposes” is outlined as the first:

**STANDARD ONE: MISSION AND PURPOSES**

The institution's mission and purposes are appropriate to higher education, consistent with its charter or other operating authority, and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. The institution's mission gives direction to its activities and provides a basis for the assessment and enhancement of the institution's effectiveness.

1.1 The mission of the institution defines its distinctive character, addresses the needs of society and identifies the students the institution seeks to serve, and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. The institution's mission provides the basis upon which the institution identifies its priorities, plans its future and evaluates its endeavors; it provides a basis for the evaluation of the institution against the Commission's Standards.

1.2 The institution's mission is set forth in a concise statement that is formally adopted by the governing board and appears in appropriate institutional publications.

1.3 The institution's purposes are concrete and realistic and further define its educational and other dimensions, including scholarship, research, and public service. Consistent with its mission, the institution endeavors to enhance the communities it serves.

1.4 The mission and purposes of the institution are accepted and widely understood by its governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and students. They provide direction to the curricula and other activities and form the basis on which expectations for student learning are developed. Specific objectives, reflective of the institution's overall mission and purposes, are developed by the institution's individual units.

#### Institutional Effectiveness

1.5 The institution periodically re-evaluates the content and pertinence of its mission and purposes, assessing their usefulness in providing overall direction in planning and resource allocation. The results of this evaluation are used to enhance institutional effectiveness. (NEASC 2011)

As is clear from the above, the first 'standard' outlined in the NEASC's 'Standards for Accreditation' is one to which most of the 10 other standards refer. For example, in outlining, "Standard Four: The Academic Program" the NEACS

document begins with this: “The institution’s academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes” (NEASC 2011). Where the principles do refer to a more, “general academic or collegiate standard or level of achievement” (NEASC 2011), the NEACS document is entirely unclear about what constitutes such a ‘general academic or collegiate standard or level of achievement’. At best, the document refers to a standard that is, “in keeping with generally accepted practice” (NEASC 2011).

It is also noteworthy that the actual review process appears to be less a process of peer review than it is a review process performed by a select group of volunteers, whose skills as evaluators/auditors are cultivated in training programs operated by the accrediting agencies. Generally speaking, the data used assessments are mimetic of the system as a whole in so far as the data revolves around things like bibliometric indices, research dollars awarded, average student scores on standardized tests etc. And again, any curricular evaluation is performed, as was just outlined, with reference to an institution’s mission statement, and with reference to something akin to “collegiate-level skill”, a euphemism that should by now provoke readers to recall the results of the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (outlined in Chapter 3).

Ultimately, the American system of accreditation hardly offers the kind of assurance that proponents like Brittingham claim it offers. Instead, what the description above suggests is that the process of accreditation in the US is at best reproductive of the American system of higher education, irrespective of what

that might mean in terms of quality. Indeed, in so far as the system of accreditation is mimetic of QA in general, it operates to further embed and normalize the program of measurement with which this dissertation is most concerned. In this regard, it is perhaps the case that accreditation is best understood as a kind of research and development / labour market policy that has been packaged and sold as evidence of excellence. To inquire as to the accuracy of this assertion, we turn now to examine more closely the history of accreditation and QA in the US.

## **5.2 The Political Economy of American of Higher Education and QA**

As is the case in the other jurisdictions under investigation, most excurses on American higher education begin in similar manner, with a few statements that allegedly describe the American system as a whole. Accordingly, we find that America's system of higher education is large, varied, and dynamic. As one source puts it: "The system lacks formal, structural elegance, but it more than compensates with its comprehensive scope and its remarkable resilience and dynamism" (Lombardi et al. 2001, 2). In what follows, I argue that such descriptions are not just inaccurate, for reasons I've outlined above (which are more developed below), they are also incomplete. What has been left out of most mainstream accounts of higher education in America is any indication of how fundamentally it has reflected and supported the development of capitalism, arguably to a greater extent than has any other system of higher education in any



other jurisdiction. In fact, from the beginning of the second industrial revolution, the temper and pace of higher education has been tied to the development of first an industrially based political economy, and more recently, a political economy built upon the pillars of American-cum-global finance. Throughout its history, the American academy has been consistently and effectively marshalled in the production of commercializable research or military hardware and “human capital”. More than this, scholarly inquiry has been plagued by and reproductive of a kind of instrumental scientism that a-historically seeks to obtain scientific rigour and elegance, which it does only in form, but never in substance. In other words, modern American higher education has effectively reproduced both the material and the ideological conditions for capitalist accumulation both at home and abroad. And within that system, QA, generally in the form of testing and accreditation, but in ways that were also – and increasingly - linked to research “productivity” and the measurement thereof, have functioned with increasing centrality in mediating, maintaining, and reinforcing the relationship between knowledge production, research, higher education and the marketplace. As a result of that long-standing relationship between higher education, QA, and American capitalism, the American case is utterly central to this dissertation for it suggests that QA is effective at helping to reproduce the kind of knowledge and labour-power that are fundamental to capitalist accumulation. The economic and political pre-eminence of America coupled with the pre-eminence of America’s research intensive universities on every global ranking exercise, lends

further credence to my argument that systems of QA benchmark against the “achievements” of American institutions, and are furthermore designed to replicate the dynamism and reproductive power of the American system as a whole.

In documenting the history and development of higher education and QA in America, one finds that mainstream analyses are radically incomplete not just because they leave out key facts, but because they tend to employ ontological and epistemological devices that obscure more than they reveal. Similar to the mainstream literatures on QA in general (discussed in Chapters 2 & 3), and on the history of QA in both the UK and Ontario (discussed in Chapters 6&7), mainstream analyses have tended to focus exclusively on the development and evolution of “institutions” writ large, and therein on long-standing conventions of self-regulation and governance, institutional autonomy, and systemic variegation. This focus on institutions is used as a means to prove the long-standing tradition of independence and systemic dynamism, which is generally held-up as evidence of ideological independence / the university as a centre of Truth (Thelin 2004; Cohen 2010; Rudolph 1990). As I indicated above, such ‘independence’ and ‘autonomy’ are illusory.

The American system of higher education developed initially under the guidance of corporate America. As corporate America came by the 1920s to understand the efficacy of using the state’s authority to, in a limited way, compel particular patterns of behaviour, the state’s capacity to manage higher education

was developed and used (Noble 1977; Barrow 1990, 102). But because the levers of corporate control were so deeply inscribed in the design and operation of the system itself, there was never a need for the American state to establish the kind of powers governments in both the UK and Ontario developed. It was simply not necessary for the state to do much more than create a particular kind of juridical backdrop and aid in patterns of research funding established by corporate America.

Levels of government control were also moderated because the academy itself cultivated a popular identity that forestalled any meaningful notion of academic freedom, particularly when that identity crystallized institutionally. With a helping hand from corporate donors the academy sentenced itself to a regime of reproduction, (Silva and Slaughter 1984; Barrow 1990, Chapter 4). Indeed, what I mean to argue is that the mechanisms of reproduction developed apparently within America's heavily decentralized and variegated system of higher education, (and allegedly not under the auspices of the American state), such that America's system of higher education was and remains the envy of capitalist states and capitalists the world over. Again, this is why so many attempts to mimic the efficiency of the American system have looked to impose, frequently through QA, the kind of market-based logic that is often seen as the source of America's dynamism.

It is useful to think of the history of American higher education – and within that of QA – as having moved through four broad phases, each of which

are described by obvious continuities and equally obvious discontinuities. For present purposes, what notably distinguishes one phase from the next is the degree to which the academic enterprise is commodified and subject to measurement. Indeed, while, as Barrow (1990) points out, the “captains of industry and erudition” began the last century with great ambitions concerning the rationalization of American higher education, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that their ambitions were all but fully realized.

The first phase, between the 1890’s and the 1930’s, was one during which the primary conventions of American science took-shape first within corporate laboratories before moving into the natural and managerial sciences in America’s leading colleges and universities. Similarly, many of the pedagogical conventions of contemporary higher education, as much for the social as the natural sciences, were transplanted from the corporation schools that corporate America formed in and around the turn of the last century. The measurement of students in myriad ways played a fundamental role during this phase, as did the program of accreditation. Both were seen as fundamental tools in the development of what was always understood as a kind of industrial exercise, where the manufacture was a particular kind of student and a particular form of research (Noble 1977; Mirowski 2011a; Barrow 1990; Scott 1983).

The crisis of the 1930s proved something of an interregnum. Popular and student dissent through the course of the Great Depression highlighted the contradictions in American capitalism. Through the Great Deperssion, colleges

and universities, where they had previously been regarded as gatekeepers to upper and upper-middle class privilege, proved unable to deliver on the promise of upward mobility. Students, in other words, objected to the promise they were paying for, but which they appeared unlikely to receive. The Great Depression also placed higher education out of reach for many who had prospered during the 1920s. The ferment that these conditions created fizzled however in the run-up to World War Two. Arguably, things rapidly settled down by the late 1930s in part because of internal fissures that emerged within oppositional movements over the anti-war positions that many took, and in part because of the degree to which both the so-called “first” and “second” New Deals took the wind out of working class and student movement sails (Gindin and Panitch 2012, 55). The demobilization of the students’ movement was also helped along by organizations such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which in effect allowed institutional managers and administrators to discipline would be critics of American capitalism (Silva and Slaughter 1984). As a result, the students’ movement was left without a foothold in the academy. In terms of testing and the extension of measurement as a mechanism of “quality control”, the 1930s was similarly a period of relative quiet. While key changes did happen in the 1930s, as with Harvard’s decision to make the SAT a mandatory requirement for applicants, such did not involve larger, system changing events, as would happen in subsequent phases.

World War Two marked the beginning of another notable transition. Both during and following the War the conventions of corporate science were transformed under the auspices of a massively expanded state, albeit in a manner that hardly separated university-based science from industrial interests. Instead, WWII and immediately thereafter the Cold War, prompted the development of a science regime that involved the conflation of the interests of industry, those of the American state, and those of America's most prestigious and trend-setting universities.<sup>105</sup> The result was the massive outgrowth of the state's role in directing the research programs at America's universities, albeit in fits and starts. The first step in this direction happened with massive increases to the military's R&D budget, which it channeled first and foremost to the private sector, but also to the universities (Mirowski 2011, location 1449–1461). Until the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, private sector interests and/or institutions continued to play determinative roles, and not just in terms of the proportion of the available private and public sector funding envelopes that were directed to particular "research intensive" institutions, but also in terms of the overall research agenda (Scott 1983, 34–43). As Noble has outlined, the capacity of the state to direct a national R&D program was initially developed under the auspices of quasi-

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<sup>105</sup> Notably, this should not be taken to mean that the interests of industry were always the interests of particular industrial firms/players. As Mirowski describes, the regime that emerged during and following WWII, created considerable distance between particular industrial interests and the academy, the later having been slated to the performance of "basic" or "pure" research, which the state then pressed into the commons or into its procurement protocols that had the effect of spreading government funded IP to at least two military contractors. In other words, the state funded university research that it then pressed into the service of American capitalism in general. (Mirowski 2011a, location 1442)

governmental organizations, such as the National Research Council, which had relied entirely on corporate based managers – and funding - right up until the post-WWII moment (Noble 1977, location 3363). Through the 1950s the state made a series of legislative moves that pushed corporate America to change-up their R&D practices.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the state developed the bureaucratic capacity to provide peak-level guidance to their corporate partners and therein to operate what has since been described as a “national developmental program by stealth” (discussed below) (Mirowski 2011a, location 1498–1535). The outgrowth of the state’s capacity to regulate the universities’ research program was matched by the further outgrowth of the philanthropic organizations and private-sector players who had always played a decisive role in American higher education (Scott 1983). For instance, a collection of eastern colleges formed the Educational Testing Service in 1947, and several of the most prominent and important foundations in the sector’s history, (ex. The Carnegie and Ford Foundations) began operating abroad with the specific aim of securing American interests around the globe (Nairn 1980).

At around the same time, in 1949, the primary accrediting agencies organized under a couple of national banners, the National Commission on Accrediting (NCA) and the National Committee of Regional Accrediting Agencies

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<sup>106</sup> While I discuss this in more detail below, Mirowski (2011) outlines how the Department of Defence directed corporate America to establish their R&D facilities as separate profit centres. As such, firms in-house R&D facilities operated as contractors to both a firm's other arms as well as to the DoD. See Mirowski (2011).

(NCRAA). On the one hand, such organizations played a largely assistive role in respect of the state's efforts to direct America's R&D program. On the other hand, they played, along with the institutions themselves, a relatively larger role in terms of the management and direction of the universities' taught programs. This was partly an effect of the GI Bill. Because the GI Bill was taken up with such enthusiasm, the state had little choice but to make the funds portable to both public and private institutions. Demand for spaces also outstripped the capacity of the state to regulate and/or manage the expansion of the system. As such, the GI Bill had the effect of empowering the sector to direct its own expansion without much interference from the state (Thelin 2004, location 5929). No doubt, the institutions were also permitted a relatively wide berth in this regard because such expansion was being managed through the use of standardized testing and processes of accreditation pioneered and sanctioned by corporate America. As was outlined above, the increasing ubiquity of standardized testing and the expansion and organization of accreditation were being driven by people with myriad links to the state, and in a manner that fit perfectly with the military's program of personnel management and the state's program of industrial expansion. Indeed, the state's familiarity with and use of standardized testing, which it borrowed from the private sector prior to WWI, was a technology that it had come to understand well and invest in considerably, particularly during and following WWII (Lehman 1999; Frontline 1999).



Thus, this third period was one during which the state's capacity grew, as did the size of its bureaucracy. The state's new found capacities were more focused on the management of university based research however, than they were on the management of other areas of the university. In managing university based research, the state simply extended patterns of conditional finance established earlier on. Thus, although the state was arguably far more willing to fund "basic" research than corporate America had been in the 1920s and 1930s, concerns over national security meant that "basic" research was not framed so much less instrumentally as it did that such research was framed according to a different kind of instrumental logic. And that logic was arguably no less disciplinary and functional to the reproduction of capitalism in early post-war America than was the 'strategic philanthropy' used by corporate leaders slightly earlier. In terms of taught programs, the state sponsored the terrific expansion of America's system of higher education. However, and unlike the direction of state funds for research, it did so without a concomitant commitment to the regulation of that process. Rather, the sector's long-standing practice of self-regulation remained largely untouched, particularly since the sector expanded its ability to self-regulate. Indeed, during this period, the phalanx of NGO's that had acted as the benefactors of higher education expanded their reach, and central and/or national bodies were created to aid in organizing and standardizing self-

regulatory practices and/or support the on-going extension of standardized testing. (Mirowski 2011; Noble 1977; C. W. Barrow 1990)<sup>107</sup>

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, when America's system of higher education appeared to be in crisis, the fourth era in the development of QA began. During this period the American state made a series of regulatory forays into the management of more than just the universities' research programs. Such regulations revolved primarily around hiring and admissions policies (Thelin 2004, 347–350; Bok 1980). The new regulatory environment also ushered in a new era of bureaucratic management. For example, with an eye towards ensuring greater equality of access, the state began to require that the universities and colleges measure and profile their student bodies. Consequently, the universities and colleges added enough bureaucratic capacity to manage census type data for each applicant and potential new hire. At the same time, the federal government also developed capacities with respect to the tracking of the goings on in higher education. In 1965 the federal government established the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The emergence of the IPEDS had the effect of prompting the Carnegie Foundation to develop its

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<sup>107</sup> The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) certainly stands as a significant example of state interventionism. As is outlined in more detail below, however, the initial success of McCarthy's inquiries rested, in part, on a complicit academy. And relative to the sophistication of the technologies (like QA) that the state would come to endorse, the methods of the HUAC were rather blunt, if effective. Again, however, what the HUAC ultimately did in prompting a backlash that one could plausibly link to the heyday of American pluralism (and radicalism), at least within the academy, is precisely what QA has not done. To manufacture consent so effectively would require the further development of state capacities, which is precisely what was underway during this period.

famous system of institutional categorization and differentiation. However, concern over how integrated was the IPEDS data led the Carnegie Foundation in 1973 to develop and release its own classificatory system. Because the IPEDS grouped together what were seen to be fundamentally different institutions into just a couple of categories (public and private), the IPEDS apparently made it impossible to distinguish the relative performance of different institutional types in categories that the Carnegie Foundation wanted desperately to highlight. Simply, the IPEDS made it impossible to outline an on-going rationale for the uneven delivery of funding, research and otherwise, which had been at the core of government and private-sector 'strategic philanthropy'.<sup>108</sup>

A cacophony of issues drove the outgrowth of the governmental efforts mentioned above that aimed at ensuring universities were managed with sufficient fiscal prudence and that both faculty and the student population were appropriately diverse. First, the state was forced to confront the contradictions that the first wave of massification had highlighted, namely the fact that women and visible minorities had not as yet been able to access the university (Thelin

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<sup>108</sup> While for Thelin, the introduction of the Carnegie classificatory system had the "unintended consequence" (Thelin 2004, 320) of creating intense competition between institutions intent of meeting the criteria necessary to obtain what came to be viewed as the pinnacle of the Carnegie system – the research intensive university - both Barrow (1990) and Scott (1983) suggest exactly the opposite (i.e. that the competition that ensued both followed established patterns and drove the hierarchical rationalization of America's system of higher education). According to Barrow, in the 1920s, the Bureau of Education surveys of higher education institutions, which it performed with financial backing and personnel from Carnegie, the General Education Board and other philanthropic organizations, were precisely intended to facilitate both institutional differentiation (rationalization) and competition on an inter-regional basis. See (Barrow 1990, Chap. 4)

2004). At the same time, and second, the universities faced serious financial pressures, to which the state needed to respond, given the role it had staked out following WWII as the largest benefactor of higher education. This financial crisis did of course relate to a much larger and well documented crisis of capitalism, (O'Connor 2002; Offe 1984). The ending of the GI Bill in 1973 appeared to herald the end of the federal transfer program that had financed the massive expansion of America's system of higher education. This was compounded by the first declines in enrollment since the end of WWII. Moderate rates of inflation and an initial wave of faculty unionization also exacerbated the problem, as did the fact that the universities had not yet developed the bureaucratic and managerial apparatus necessary to see their way through such troubled times. Third, the first wave of massification had also failed to deliver the kind of sectoral variegation that would ultimately help to both differentiate institutions and thereby to stream students into particular career paths. As the Trilateral Commission (Crozier et al. 1975) argued, higher rates of participation threatened the stability of Western liberal democracies unless the universities could be leveraged to both produce as well as contain and direct the aspirations of human capital. In other words, further institutional "differentiation" was understood by both the state and the sector as something that was still required in order to placate popular demands for access to higher education and dispel the mythology that higher education was a gateway to the American dream. Fourth, the emergence of the New Social Movements and the

New Left during the 1960s and 1970s further suggested to both state officials and the ruling class what might be the potential problems if the state were not able to organize the sector more “efficiently”. More significant than the state’s new regulatory program, however, were the changes that it triggered within the university. Governmental regulation in effect prompted the sector to re-invigorate their myriad efforts at self-regulation. But such efforts, which reflected the sector’s desire to avoid further regulation, were not taken up either willingly or enthusiastically.

Still, through the 1980s, the self-regulatory efforts of the universities became normalized and regular, more an accepted part of the management of the university than was the case previously (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhodes 2004). The 1980s also marked the emergence of a new consensus around government policy for R&D. Accordingly, military R&D budgets were cut and procurement processes more closely monitored. At the same time, more money was directed into the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and thereby to more “commercializable” areas of research. As a result, the NIH grew into the primary source of government R&D funding in the universities, as well as a key proponent for channeling government funds via conditional arrangements that pressed the university R&D programs closer to those of industry (Mirowski 2011; Slaughter and Rhoades 1996) The phalanx of new administrators that had moved into – and taken over – the university during the crisis of the 1970s – both continued to grow and to respond favourably to the challenge of lean

management. With memes borrowed directly from the private sector, the university was recreated as a customer oriented R&D corporation within which QA was seen as a means of assessing bottom line results, which were simultaneously conflated with the public interest (Birnbaum 2000). The state's concern for "competitiveness" which was piqued by the catch-up of Japan and Germany, was thus also reflected in the tone and behaviour of university administrations. (Mirowski 2011; Sheila Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004)

Other than on the research front, the state's presence in higher education was less obvious through the 1980s. In part, the federal government was hamstrung because then-President Reagan proved unable to pass the kind of legislation he had hoped to pass (Kosar 2011). Of course, it is debatable whether or not more direct forms of intervention were really necessary, given that the universities had already undertaken to restructure themselves in response to the financial incentives created by restructured IP and patent law, which the Reagan administration proved more than capable of transforming (Sheila Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Mirowski 2011; Polster 2001). The efforts of the universities were also aided immeasurably by the context in which this was happening. Crucial to informing what emerged as the "new" approach to higher education was: the historic defeat of working class movements; the popular success of Reaganomics and anti-inflationary policy coupled, shortly thereafter, with strong incentives for successive rounds of debt-based consumption; and, the increasingly obvious

intersection between “everyday life” and global finance. To the extent that Reagan’s educational policies did impact the sector it was with respect to his program of decentralization that empowered state and local governments to pursue “educational excellence” on their own terms, which most frequently involved the still more widespread use of standardized tests at the elementary and secondary level than had been the case before Reagan came to power (Kosar 2011; McNeil 2000). It also bears mentioning that it was during this phase that private sector organizations launched the myriad rankings exercises that have since become a staple of American higher education.

In the 1990s this program of neoliberalization intensified. Most notable among the changes ushered in during this era were the multitude of legislative moves that transformed global intellectual property and patent law in a manner that mimicked American policy through the 1980s. (Mirowski 2011; C. Polster 2001) Clinton also ushered in a new phase of development in the state’s bureaucratic and managerial capacity. For example, early on in Clinton’s tenure, the federal government passed legislation that required all federal departments, including the Department of Education, to prepare performance plans and budgets against which central governmental authorities could in turn evaluate future performance. At the secondary and elementary school levels, Clinton picked-up where Reagan had left off, and authored a full scale attack on unionized educational workers, part of which also involved a host of new performance requirements linked to standardized tests, as well as unprecedented

support for so-called “contract schools”, which became increasingly common. (Brainard, Burd, and Gose 2000; White House 2013)

The universities became, during the 1990s, not just big producers of IP and Patent, not just aggressive vendors of the same, but also big players in global financial markets, to a degree unparalleled in American history. All at once their financial viability was tied to a regime of accumulation based upon the endless securitization of consumer debt, of which tuition-fees made-up an ever-increasing amount. The institutions, the largest Foundations, as well as state and federal governments pressed the logic of education as an investment to its extremes just as they did tuition-fees and levels of student debt, which in turn led to the explosion of private-sector student credit markets (Mezzanotte et al. 1997; Weisbrod 2008). If rankings exercises and standardized test scores mattered through the 1980s, their importance only grew through the 1990s.

While Bush’s efforts to institute a new national and performance related regulatory program for American higher education was met with strong opposition from the sector, such opposition amounted to little more than an on-going bid for self-regulation. The government’s attempts to encroach on self-regulatory regimes, namely on the program of accreditation, saw the accrediting agencies clarify the extent to which their operations – and the institutions themselves - already performed those QA functions that the federal government was want to demand. If it had ever been necessary, the sector clarified that the further encroachment of the federal government was no longer required because



the universities had been and would continue to be usefully reproductive of neoliberalism. (Ruben 2008; Branch-Brioso et al. 2008)

### **5.2.1 The Early Political Economy of American Higher Education**

As Panitch and Gindin outline, the particularities of American capitalist development were such that, relatively early on, “a high wage proletariat,” became, “compatible with and actually functional to industrial capitalism” (Gindin and Panitch 2012, 84). And while higher education and QA do not feature prominently in their narrative, both featured prominently in the history of such development. In short, the advent of intensely competitive and thus highly productive family-based farming in the middle of the 19th century, and particularly after the Civil War, not only generated huge surpluses, able to support urban development, but also led to the revolution of productive methods and technologies. This pattern was reinforced by labour shortages that not only meant higher average wages, but further intensified already terrifically high rates of capital investment. Such rates of capital investment in turn fueled the tremendous concentration of wealth without dampening the competitive pressures that continued to drive such investment. If anything, competition intensified: where firms were not taken to the wall, they were bought-up by increasingly diversified corporate behemoths that rapidly expanded their operational scope both nationally and internationally, particularly after the closure of the frontier and the development of the telecommunications

technologies necessary to support the new program of accumulation. (Gindin and Panitch 2012, 27–30)

Of course, such competition and concentration, coupled as it was with the legal expansion of the corporate form and the transformation of IP in a manner that heavily favoured corporations, only inflamed, “what was then the most militant industrial working class in the world,” as well as a “radicalized farmers’ movement” (Gindin and Panitch 2012, 30). But again these, “many-sided human problems (Nicolar Murray Butler 1916 as quoted in Noble 1977, location 3156)”, did little to dampen the dynamic process then underway. Instead the rate of capital investment only increased as did the drive to alleviate class conflict through the development of the social technologies, such as Taylorism and Fordism, that quickly became (and remained) central to the dynamism of American capitalism. In both cases (capital-investment and the management sciences), higher education featured with increasing prominence. Between the turn of the century and WWI, the universities, though not as central to the program of accumulation as they would become, were nonetheless the subject of increasing scrutiny and concern to corporate leaders who saw in those institutions a potentially fecund source of both commercializable research and human capital (Noble 1977; Barrow 1990). Until that time, the universities had been decidedly less productive of both commercially oriented knowledge and managerial talent. And so, corporate America undertook the task of first transforming and then leveraging the universities in the service of just those

things. Accordingly corporate America channeled money and programmatic support to either existing or newly minted engineering programs. Senior businessman helped create informal mentoring programs in the universities, and also worked to develop and put in place the staff necessary to measure students' attitudes towards, and aptitudes for, particular kinds of work. And corporate America also worked concertedly to raise the status and stature of engineers-cum-businessmen within the context of the liberal-arts dominated universities and colleges. (Noble 1977)

Of course, the first exemplars of American science were the huge corporate labs that dominated the American industrial landscape at the turn of the century. (Noble 1977; Mirowski 2011) With those laboratories came the “corporation schools”, which from their inception were concerned to produce the kind of workers that understood how to manage men, how to drive the R&D process and be constantly mindful of the bottom-line. Indeed, the corporate labs and the corporation schools were understood as but different sides of the same coin. As corporate America became increasingly concerned with higher education, which it did in and around the 1910s and 1920s, and particularly during WWI, it was these examples of efficiency – the corporate lab and the corporation school – to which they turned when overhauling America's universities. As is outlined below, such efforts ultimately led to the bifurcation of both the processes and understanding that have been foundational to what ultimately turned into QA. In other words, considerations related to research and the design of the university

laboratory separated from those that dealt with teaching and evaluation. But the over-arching trajectory of both endeavors was very much the same, as it remains today. (Noble 1977, Chapter 7)

### **5.2.2 From Corporate Lab to Corporation School to Engineering Education to Engineered Education**

Between 1890 and 1920, corporate labs, first in the electrical and chemical industries and then in most other large industries, formed because it was the corporations who could afford to build them (Noble 1977; Mirowski 2011). The aforementioned phase of agglomeration and heated competition drove not only the evolution of IP, but also the competition to generate more IP. Because neither the government nor the universities could yet corral the resources necessary to undertake large-scale research, corporations undertook the job themselves. Thus did organized science from its earliest forms in America have a commercial bent. Mirowski describes the forces that fueled that commercial “bent”:

The prime directives behind many of the innovations growing out of the large corporations were the drive to control markets, render unforeseen events manageable, and stifle external competition. As the government began to block direct attempts at market control such as explicit cartels, pools and other tied arrangements through its antitrust prosecutions, the locus of corporate control began to shift to indirect arenas such as IP, the imposition of technical standards, and the like. One primary reason that large corporations turned their attention to bringing scientific research within their walls in this period is that “invention and innovation were effective defenses against antitrust suits” (Hart 2001, 926) and that patents in particular but IP in general were conceived as the best and most effective means of controlling competition in the early twentieth century. (Mirowski 2011, 100)

As Noble explains, the concentration of research capacity created other problems, ones that the state and industry quickly recognized. First, the corporate need for team-based work posed problems in terms of both authorship and ownership, given that long-standing conventions dictated a high degree of independent attribution and/or ownership of IP. Second, corporate laboratories tended to perform less basic research than was necessary for the on-going generation of “commercializable” research downstream. Third, smaller corporations simply could not afford large laboratories, and as a result needed access to a laboratory/research infrastructure without the huge overhead expenses that only the big corporations could afford to bear. The result was a series of responses: efforts to inculcate a team-based, “corporation man” identity and the revision of IP law; trade association labs; an industrial fellowship program that linked individual, often university based researchers, to corporate research programs and protocols; a series of private and semi-private contracts, again often with universities; a generous support program developed under the aegis of research foundations such as the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations; and also the development of government laboratories, all under the authorship of America’s leading engineers. In other words, almost as soon as the universities began researching and teaching in the “useful arts”, the university laboratory was linked to and modelled after the corporate lab. (Noble 1977, chapter 7)

This was no accident, but was instead very carefully and intentionally crafted. The university lab was modelled after its industrial counterpart in order

that it might produce to spec so much “research manpower”, for which corporate America had developed an almost insatiable thirst in and around the turn of the century. Again, the pattern was initially set within the fold of corporate America:

...the expensive equipment necessary for “state of the art” instruction was available at only a few of the larger schools, and this situation restricted most instruction to blackboard fundamentals. The industries, rather than the schools, were at the forefront of discovery in the field, and the corporation schools thus served the purpose of updating theoretical training in addition to linking the fundamentals to the exigencies of engineering practice. For these reasons, the majority of electrical-engineering graduates flowed into corporation school programs to complete their professional training. Providing the crucial preparation for careers in designing, manufacturing, construction, consulting, research, education, and management, the corporation schools were a necessary part of the training of professional electrical engineers in the United States.(Noble 1977, location 3737)

While the progenitors of the corporation school movement were firms such as GE and Westinghouse, both giant players in the electrical industry, their programs were quickly picked-up and copied by corporations in other sectors and organized under the banner of the National Association of Corporation Schools (NACS) (Noble 1977, location 3118). And the value of the corporation school hardly resided in students’ opportunity to work with cutting edge laboratory equipment. On the contrary, the corporation schools were designed to produce not just technically proficient human capital, but adept and loyal managers. The graduates of the corporation schools would demonstrate: corporate loyalty; an understanding of the centrality of business principles to scientific research; an ability to manage men; and a sense of filial devotion to the class of corporate

leaders to which the corporation schools were designed to provide entrance. In each aspect such human capital was measured:

Elaborate methods of recruiting and evaluating college graduates were devised, and, within the company, personnel files were kept on all testmen in order to chart their progress and determine their potential usefulness. Graduates were tested periodically and rated in terms of technical proficiency, willingness to learn, loyalty, dependability, appearance, tact, efficiency, cooperativeness, and ability to handle men. They were then classified according to job requirements within the organization and the industry. Such techniques of evaluation and selection were constantly refined as more effective means of fitting the individual to the job were developed. In effect, the programs like these within GE and the other large corporations were the pilot programs in personnel development and management which would transform American higher education in the decades to follow.(Noble 1977, location 3791)

From the moment of its inception the NACS was concerned with the nature of education both in and outside of the corporate schools. Noble quotes at length a speech by Lee Galloway, then temporary chairman of the NACS's organizing meeting, which is usefully reproduced here:

We have associations formed for the consideration of various features of manufacturing, we have associations formed for technical work, we have efficiency societies, associations for the advancement of scientific management, etc., but in the last analysis...we find that the whole thing rests finally on some educational feature that must be evolved. I wonder how long we intend to leave the education of the workmen in the hands of the trades unions, in the hands of the I.W.W., and the Socialistic Party?...If a school is organized...within the corporation itself, to bring out the strong, practical purposes of the institution, and to show the art, ability and skill which is necessary to carry on a great industrial institution— if the dissemination of knowledge is carried on in an ordinary educational way within the corporation itself...it would tend greatly to change the attitude of the employees, and more than that, it would tend to change the attitude of the public, because it is the employee...who comes in contact with the public....That seems to be the highest kind of insurance that any industrial corporation can have— to insure itself by creating a strong educational

system among its own industrial forces, and if big industries are to assume the proportions of states, they must assume some of the responsibilities of states, and one of these responsibilities is to educate the people, and the welfare of these big corporations will be insured more safely by the education of their employees than in any other way....(Galloway 1913; as quoted in Noble 1977, location 3924–3927)

The NACS spearheaded the development of cooperative education, initially with university engineering departments, but progressively with other programs – including the liberal arts – at universities across the US. And as cooperative education programs evolved so too did the “technics of evaluation and selection,” that the schools used. A dense set of records were kept on each student cum employee cum manager, with the express aim of evaluating not just their technical skills, but also their attitude and disposition to the kind of work that corporate America wanted them to undertake (Noble 1977, 3791). In addition, the NACS, along with the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education (SPEE), which had formed in 1893 specifically so as to correct for the perceived deficiency in higher education, commissioned a physicist, Charles Mann, to conduct a report on the state of engineering education in the US. In preparing the report, which was ultimately published in 1918, Mann turned first to industry and to the corporation schools. As Noble notes, Mann wanted to better understand what corporate America was demanding, as well as how the corporation schools were compensating for the quality of engineering education inside the universities, so that he could then make recommendations to re-engineer education appropriately. Mann had already proved himself disposed to



such a task – he was the chairman of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, one of the US’s first accrediting agencies, and, “the leader of a national movement among physics teachers to correlate the teaching of science with the realities of industry (Noble 1977, location 4403).” And as Noble usefully highlights, what Mann was “shocked” to find in his consultations with industry was the utility and effect of measurement. The passage quoted by Noble is usefully reproduced at length:

The principal point derived from these records— a point that was quite a shock to me as a schoolman— was that the efficiency of the students who went to those firms from the engineering schools was measured and estimated in terms of initiative, tact, honesty, accuracy, industry, personality, and other qualities of this kind. No schoolman ever thought of rating the students in this way. The question was raised how you are going to make the professional, industrial point of view clear to the schoolman. And, there is only one way to do it, and that is for the industrial professional class to define clearly what it means. This can best be done by means of tests which must be successfully passed by applicants for positions. The answer to your question ... “ How are the industrial men going to help the schools to understand what industry wants and needs?” is the same as the answer to your question “What sort of tests are we going to use for vocational guidance?” If you will devise and put into practice as a condition of admission to each occupation tests which really test the ability of the applicant for that occupation, the school will rapidly modify its instruction so that the pupils will be able to meet those tests, and you will make progress in vocational guidance. The one point that I want to bring out clearly to you is that definite objective tests which define the type of ability which you wish to have developed are most valuable, not only to yourselves as employers in selecting your help, but also as your most powerful means of controlling what is done in the school. (Mann 1915 as quoted in Noble 1977, location 4421–4422)

As it happens, Mann would go on to work with E.F. Lindquist, an “educational leader, scholar, inventor, and teacher,” at the University of Iowa, which bills itself

as the US's first "dedicated college-level department of education" (University of Iowa 2013). Lindquist was an early pioneer of standardized testing. In 1936, along with Mann and the then dean at Columbia, Herbert Hawkes, Lindquist penned, **The Construction and Use of Achievement Examinations: A Manual for Secondary School Teachers**. Subsequently, in 1940, Lindquist wrote, **Statistical Analysis in Educational Research**, and then in 1951 he published the much heralded, **Education Measurement**. Lindquist is also credited with having invented, at IBM laboratories, the first optical scanner that quickly became the bedrock of standardized testing. According to the University of Iowa's website, the optical technology Lindquist developed remains to this day as the University's, "largest technology transfer" (University of Iowa 2013). Lindquist's Iowa Testing Programs was later spun-off as a private for-profit company, Pearson Education, today a subsidiary of Pearson PLC, which is now the largest publishing house in the world. Before spinning off the Iowa Testing Programs to Pearson, however, Lindquist also developed the Academic College Test (ACT), which is today one of the two standardized entrance exams on which college hopefuls must score highly in order to go on to a highly ranked college or university. Lindquist's legacy at the University of Iowa continues to loom large in other ways too. In 1975, George D. Kuh, the founder of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), graduated with his PhD from the University of Iowa program where Lindquist had taught. (University of Iowa 2013; Kuh 2007)

When Mann's report landed in 1918, the SPEE along with the NACS were already rather involved in the extension of standardized testing and measurement beyond the confines of engineering education. Mann's report, in other words, merely echoed and reinforced the processes that were already underway, many of which Mann was either involved in or familiar with. Under the auspices of first the US's preparations for entry into WWI and then its participation in it, the US government set about adapting the personnel testing that had been pioneered within the corporation schools to the army's purposes. The government's efforts to repurpose the personnel testing technologies developed in the corporation schools, involved efforts that were coordinated through specific defense related bureaucracies at the pinnacles of which sat numerous representatives from the NACS, the SPEE, and the National Research Council. Notably, the organization of the National Research Council, was also spearheaded by corporate based engineers and the Carnegie Institute of Technology's Bureau of Salesmanship Research. For instance, the formation of the US Army's, Committee on the Classification of Personnel (CCP) happened under the stewardship of the German trained industrial psychologist, Walter Dill Scott, other leading behaviour psychologists of the day, and the leadership of the NACS as well. Perhaps the most imminent of the psychologists was Walter Yerkes, a one-time president of the American Psychological Association, whose "Alpha and Beta Tests" became the core of the Army's personnel management

system, and who was also teacher to Carl Brigham, the eventual inventor of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). (Noble 1977; Spring 1972)

By the time the US entered the war, the same players, along with a host of highly positioned university administrators (who were organized by the engineers in 1918 under the banner of the “Emergency Council on Education”), had developed not just a vigorous system of personnel testing, but also a related program, the Student Army Training Corps (SATC), which was initially intended to ensure that talented college students would not be brought into the line of fire if they chose to enlist, as many subsequently did. While the core of such personnel testing systems was consistently Yerkes’ alpha and beta tests, they also relied heavily upon the earlier work done either within the personnel and testing departments of the corporation schools, under the auspices of the NACS, under the umbrella of the Carnegie Institute, and often with help from the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>109</sup> When the US instituted the draft, the War Department Committee on Education and Special Training (CEST), which was devised and operated by Mann and others for the purposes just mentioned, again mobilized the support of the federal government, this time to make the SATC mandatory, in effect forcing every college student not just into the Army, but into university and

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<sup>109</sup> Here, it is important to note the Carnegie Institute’s system for the classification of vocational and higher education institutions, which is still used today, as well as the development of detailed job descriptions, which were early precursors to the Standard Occupational Classification system that is also still in use today, and College Survey data, which included statistics on the financing and administration of the university (i.e. the very stuff of current accreditation programs)

college based educational programs that operated under the direction of the Army:

Since the CEST was the War Department agency for educational matters, it now actually took charge of all colleges of liberal arts, technology, business, agriculture, medicine, law, pharmacy, dentistry, veterinary medicine, all graduate schools, and all technical institutes in the United States. American education was placed under the military authority of the educational and personnel directors of corporate industry and the leaders of the new corporate brand of engineering education. (Noble 1977, location 4744)

After the war, the efforts of the CEST, the NACS, the SPEE, as well as the host of private foundations and government agencies, not least the Department of War, – hardly even paused. As Noble notes, “the reformers proceeded under the auspices of four major national agencies: the United States Army, the permanent Emergency Council on Education – renamed the American Council on Education (ACE) - and the SPEE (Noble 1977, location 4901),” with the specific intent of transforming education in America so as to better fit the needs and exigencies of industry. What they meant by this was simple enough: they needed a means by which to reproduce industrial capitalism and therein pliant and sufficiently well-trained workers, a highly trained and effective managerial class, and research that was of value to industrial firms. Among the agencies mentioned above, Noble emphasizes the role played by the ACE as *the* quasi-governmental body with both a national scope and the clear intent of tying America’s universities to industry.

The work of the ACE proceeded along three interwoven lines of activity. The first of these was directed toward a perpetuation of the centralized

authority achieved during the war, and entailed the extension of both governmental and corporate industrial authority over education; the second involved the standardization of American educational procedures and institutional classification, and constituted a continuation of the prewar survey activities undertaken by Capen at the Bureau of Education; the third aimed toward the extension, within the educational institutions, of the testing, rating, and guidance procedures developed by the science-based industries before the war. Brought up to an unprecedented level of sophistication by the CEST, the CCP in the Army, and the various psychology committees during the war, this work on the “personnel problem” became the basis of a new “science of education,” the hallmark of the ACE. (Noble 1977, location 5352)

In each of these three areas the work of the ACE advanced rather rapidly through the 1920s and right-up until the on-set of World War II, when the government agencies picked-up the mantle of testing to a greater degree than they had before, thereby speeding-up the processes that the ACE and corporate America began. Through the 1920s the ACE spearheaded efforts to develop more detailed job specifications with the express intent of outlining for educational institutions what it was industry expected of their graduates. The ACE also developed new and more vigorous testing programs. And the ACE undertook an effort to standardize the accreditation process (and bring it under the ACE umbrella). Finally, the ACE set about working to increase the density of the linkages between industry, education, and the state, not least through the inclusion of corporations and the US Chamber of Commerce as full members of the ACE. (Noble 1977, location 5323–5400)

The 1920s were also an era of unprecedented levels of consumption and productivity. Indeed, successive rounds of debt-based consumption drove

America's still uneven economy forward, ultimately to the Great Depression. In as much as the US had become incredibly productive, economic activity and growth were spread unevenly, and real wages remained low relative to the productivity growth rate. To soak-up the fruits of such productivity increases, consumption was fueled by "installment selling", which Panitch and Gindin (2012, 50) highlight, also had the benefit of providing some degree of labour discipline. However, without any income support programs – or a meaningful capacity to contain the crisis when it emerged after the stock market crash in 1929, such discipline gave way to mass unrest and labour militancy during the Great Depression. In as much as they did significantly advance the rights of workers, the various responses to such unrest, which ultimately culminated in the so-called "second New Deal", are necessarily understood as relatively tepid and temporary working class victories, ones that had the effect of building-up the state's ability to manage subsequent crises and secure the basis for capital accumulation. It is in this light that Panitch and Gindin describe FDR's "sane radicalism" as exemplary of a concerted effort to "reform if you would preserve."(FDR as quoted in Rudge 1959, 53, 146–7, 153 and reproduced in Gindin and Panitch 2012, 55) And it is also in this light that the drive to enhance and promote standardized testing, particularly the SAT, must be viewed.

By the 1930s the industrial psychologists who had pioneered the Alpha and Beta tests and the SAT had renounced eugenics, which they had previously advocated. Their earlier advocacy of eugenics was based on the results of the

Army's early forays into "psychometric" and IQ testing, which had been based on the personnel testing programs of the corporation schools. In renouncing their call for a program of genetic manipulation, however, psychologists like Carl Brigham took-up the cause of social manipulation consistently under the mantle of an American meritocracy (Lehman 1999; Frontline 1999). This gelled perfectly with the program long advocated for by the engineers, university administrators, as well as government and army bureaucrats who had all coalesced under the ACE banner for precisely the same kind of reason. And so it was that in 1933 James Conant, then president at Harvard, made the SAT a mandatory entrance requirement. At the time, Conant, was operating under the guidance of Henry Chauncey, the eventual president of the Educational Testing Service (outlined below), and according to a firm belief in the potential of standardized testing to effect the complete transformation of America along more meritocratic lines (Lehman 1999). Indeed, in 1943 the Atlantic Monthly published an essay by Conant, "Wanted: American Radicals", in which Conant outlined a vision of an American meritocracy that, if nothing else, spoke to the degree to which he, like those around him, leveraged the ideal of meritocracy to specific ends. Indeed, in "Wanted," Conant speaks about "equality of opportunity, not equality of rewards" as well as "...public education, truly universal educational opportunity at every level (Conant 1943)". Of course, there was good reason to question his sincerity: in "Wanted," Conant as much associates himself with such a vision, as he does



distance himself it.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, one must remember that the white establishment had hardly distanced itself entirely from the kind of racism that underlay earlier support amongst people like Conant for the use of eugenics. While it may well have been that Conant had envisioned a racially and ethnically diverse meritocracy, it was a simple fact that white men, not women and not men of colour, were the outstanding individuals who attended Harvard with any regularity during his tenure at that University.

It is also noteworthy that Conant, who also served as the chair of the US Army's National Defence Research Committee, called for the creation of a national testing body as early as 1937 (Nairn 1980, 194). Not until after the war, however, in 1947, did the ACE, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the College Entrance Board Exam, cooperatively form the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which from that point on sold and administered the suite of tests that had been developed under other corporate or quasi-governmental umbrellas (or by the military). As Nairn also notes, there was ample evidence – both within and outside of ETS - that standardized testing of the sort ETS was flogging merely helped to reproduce the status-quo, albeit in a revolutionary and industrially efficient manner. According to Nairn, this was

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<sup>110</sup> In his 1940 article, "Wanted: American Radicals" Conant writes, "The reader will undoubtedly derive the impression that I am sympathetic in my own personal views with the hypothetical gentleman I have just portrayed. That is true. But I should like to make it clear that I am arguing for his introduction into the American scene not because I believe all his aims should be achieved, but because I believe his type of thinking would prove a most beneficial leaven. I urge the need of the American radical not because I wish to give a blanket endorsement to his views, but because I see the necessity for reinvigorating a neglected aspect of our historic pattern of development." (Conant 1943page)

precisely the point. Quoting Henry Chauncey, the first president of the ETS and former dean at Harvard, where he had previously studied psychology and philosophy (with a keen interest in testing) and become a close affiliate of Conant, Nairn makes clear that the purpose of the SAT was always well understood:

To many the prospect of measuring in quantitative terms what have previously been considered intangible qualities is frightening, if not downright objectionable. Yet, I venture to predict that we will become accustomed to it and will find ourselves better off for it. In no instance that I can think of has the advance of accurate knowledge been detrimental to society, unless it was misused. And with respect to knowledge of individuals, the possibilities of constructive use are far greater than those of misuse. Educational and vocational guidance, personal and social adjustment most certainly should be greatly benefited. Life may have less mystery, but it will also have less disillusionment and disappointment. Hope will not be a lost source of strength, but it will be kept within reasonable bounds.(Nairn 1980, 4)

In saying this, Chauncey was hardly speaking to the general public, but rather to the Board of Trustees of the ETS. What Chauncey and his immediate audience might have considered “constructive use” was likely rather different from how others outside the ETS might have, and might still, conceive of it. Regardless, Chauncey aggressively launched the ETS forward. In the year that it opened he established an ETS field office in California with the express intent of getting the University of California system on-board, an accomplishment that he then understood would make the ETS a national operation and also fundamental to higher education in both the private and public sectors. Almost immediately Chauncey cultivated a relationship with Clark Kerr, the veritable father of the

University of California system, and ETS board member, who championed the SAT in the face of significant opposition. In 1967, the SAT was made a mandatory requirement for all applicants to the University of California system. (Lehman 1999)

As Lehman has it, the decision of the Board of Regents of the University of California system to make participation on the test mandatory for all applicants was simply ground-breaking. The UC system was key because until ETS gained a foothold there, the ETS and the SAT were largely linked to small, elite, east-coast institutions. In other words, making the SAT mandatory in the UC system, which in the 1950s looked to be becoming the largest public system in the US, was fundamental to lending the ETS and the SAT a national identity and reputation. Such national scope and identity was furthered bolstered by the UC decision because it meant that the SAT had finally crossed the public-private divide. The speed with which the SAT subsequently became ubiquitous in the US after the UC decision in 1967 was terrific. Whereas in 1950, fewer than 80 000 high school seniors took the test, by 1975 nearly a million, or about 1/3 of all high school seniors, did. And by 2004, just under 50% of all high-school seniors took the SAT, which accounted for more than the number of high school graduates who went on to an accredited degree granting institution. (Lehman 1999)

The arch of testing's history in the US was not, of course, so linear. There was much more at play in the development of testing in the US than just the intent of corporate America to leverage testing as a means to reproduce its brand

of capitalism. Two other factors – both of which reinforced and extended the program of measurement first developed under the guidance of corporate America - were decisive: first was the need to manage the contradictions of massification in the immediate post-war era; second was the financial crisis in which both the sector and the state found themselves in the 1970s. There was both and simultaneously a crisis of legitimacy and one of “overloaded government”, the outgrowth of which was the contemporary program of and approach to management and measurement and the normalization thereof.

### **5.2.3 Massification, Overloaded Government, and the Extension of Measurement**

The massification of the university in the immediate post-war era was a process riddled with contradictions, most having to do with the degree to which women and visible minorities were permitted access. Just as the benefits of America’s welfare state were spread unevenly, so too were the spots in America’s universities and colleges (Thelin 2004; Rudolph 1990). Demands for access resulted in myriad new state and federal regulations with respect to affirmative action and gender equality, both in terms of admissions policy and the hiring of new faculty. As the SAT became ubiquitous, so too did the complaints associated with it. Because hispanics and black Americans tended to score poorly relative to their white counterparts such that the SAT was cast by some as a culturally loaded and thus discriminatory barrier (Nairn 1980). In response, the state’s regulation of university and college admissions policies hardly amounted to any

kind of a rejection of testing. On the contrary, by not restricting the use of the SAT as an admissions tool, federal and state affirmative action guidelines arguably increased the use of the SAT as a means by which to determine which applicants from designated backgrounds would be admitted. While the response from the white men of privilege then in charge of America's colleges and universities immediately hit an astonishingly revanchist tone, the extension of the state hardly stopped.<sup>111</sup> While opposition to affirmative action did eventually diminish, it has never gone away entirely and is likely to be challenged at the Supreme Court again soon. What did die down, however, was the sector's initial opposition to the bureaucratic measures that went along with the states expanded regulatory scope. Arguably, this is because the administrators of American higher education became wedded to the measurement of students and faculty in myriad ways, as did the subjects of those efforts.

The problems of access and equity that emerged in the 1970s were coupled with what Thelin (2004) describes as a pervasive sense of the sector being in crisis early on in that same decade. In part, this sense of crisis was itself the by-product of several Carnegie Foundation sponsored reports which questioned the financial stability/viability of institutions in the sector (CFAT 1972; CFAT 1973b).

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<sup>111</sup> Derek Bok, for example, the former president of Harvard, opined in 1980 that, "Rules condemning the dismissal of married pregnant women may frustrate the efforts of conservative colleges to impose strict standards of behaviour on their faculty." Such was a problem for Bok because it struck a fatal blow to the, "very essence of diversity," and to, "the freedom to experiment, to make mistakes, to cling to values not commonly shared with society" (Bok 1980, 93).

In fact, the universities had expanded terrifically since the GI Bill was first introduced and they had continued to expand alongside increasing enrollments, all without fundamentally changing the way in which classes were taught or the manner in which the universities were managed. As enrolments declined in the mid-1970s for the first time in 30 odd years, the financial position of the universities weakened considerably. Coupled with the oil shocks and moderate levels of inflation, the apparent “crisis of higher education” loomed large (Thelin 2004; Rudolph 1990). In response, the universities became “better” managers. Not only did the ranks of university bureaucracies swell, so too did the number of managerial tools and fads that were borrowed from the private sector and used to “prudent” ends (Weisbrod 2008; Birnbaum 2000a). In every case such managerial tools involved the quantitative measurement and monitoring of faculty and students. The SAT went from being an admissions test to an artifact of “excellence” used to attract applicants by ostensibly proving the quality of peers.

As was mentioned, alongside issues of finance and management, issues of equity also surfaced throughout the 1970s. In fact a series of governmental and non-governmental reports from the early 1970s raised both issues and, in seeking to resolve them, attempted to walk an awkward line between the need for “academic freedom” and “institutional autonomy” and the utility of some government regulation in rationalizing the system, particularly given almost uniform calls for additional public subsidy. Notable among such reports were the

“Newman Reports”, which sparked national interest and debate (Thelin 2004, 320). In response to the apparent crisis, and with funding from the Ford Foundation, the Department of Health, Welfare and Education, twice (in 1971 and 1974) commissioned a task-force headed by Frank Newman, a former engineer, corporation man, MBA, and two time Republican congressional candidate, to investigate the condition of America’s system of higher education. In the Reports, Newman’s chief complaints all pointed in the same direction: more government regulation of the higher education marketplace. Newman was particularly concerned with the degree to which the unregulated market had yielded little in the way of institutional differentiation. On the contrary, Newman saw evidence of institutional and curricular convergence, which he felt was going to lead to serious skills gaps in America’s labour markets. He argued that state regulation was needed in order to ensure that the market would become more varied. Newman’s other persistent concern had to do with diversity. As he saw it the colleges and universities simply did not reflect the diversity of America. As an antidote to these tendencies, Newman suggested that, among other things, the government needed to regulate the process of accreditation.(Newman et al. 1971; United States 1973)

The response from the universities was telling of how it was the crisis would ultimately be settled. While roundly critical of Newman’s recommendations concerning the regulation of things like accreditation, the sector leaned towards some form of state regulation related to things like equity

and admissions apparently in exchange for additional state and federal funding. Perhaps because the Newman Reports did accurately signal considerable frustration over the degree to which America's system of higher education had apparently departed from corporate America's long-held plan for a streamlined, rationalized, and national system of higher education, the universities, through the CFAT, argued that in addition to some regulatory incursions around admissions, both state and federal government needed to plough more money into the system through a system of portable grants and loans. It was argued that while additional subsidies would lower any financial barriers to access, particularly coupled with government regulation of such things, the avoidance of larger block grants to the institutions via a system of portable grants and loans would empower students/customers to effect greater institutional differentiation by choosing with their feet (CFAT 1973b). Thus, while the Newman Reports were perhaps indicative of the degree to which capital – and the government – was beginning to re-articulate a desire for a more Taylorized system of higher education, the sector's response was to deepen the self-regulatory and “market-based” logic that had long described the sector.

Critically, the CFAT's compromise position was struck first by casting issues of equity as issues of finance (i.e. black people were poor and therefore had been unable to go to university), and second by distinguishing between financial issues and non-financial issues, wherein the government had a role to play in the former but not the latter. Indeed, so long as the institutions could demonstrate



their on-going financial stability given more inclusive access/admissions policies, which the government could monitor, the rest was appropriately left up to the institutions themselves. Peer review and accreditation were thus repositioned as the mechanisms for assuring academic quality in a context where “proper” financial management was established as both a non-academic issue and the precondition to success in a marketplace described by portable grants and loans and conditional forms of research funding (which it was argued would affect institutional differentiation). (CFAT 1972; CFAT 1973b; CFAT 1970). Rather than address or resolve this contradiction, the Carnegie Foundation took up the cause of cataloguing and classifying the 2500 odd institutions within the American system in a manner that sparked intense competition for what was seen to be the best – and most lucrative – classificatory status: that of the research intensive university. While this may not have immediately eliminated the kind of duplication that Newman saw as so problematic, it did nonetheless prove rather effective and functional as a mechanism of rationalization, if not of reproduction. (CFAT 1973a)

In the end, if there had been a desire on the part of federal government to become more involved in the regulation of higher education than it did in the 1970s, that willingness dissipated after 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan.

Reagan’s approach to higher education, outside of research, was relatively “hands-off”. After initial cutbacks to student aid programs, funding levels were brought back up to levels comparable to those reached under Carter (Kosar 2011).

Reagan did however chart a new course for America's public elementary and secondary school system through a series of moves that embedded testing ever more deeply at that level of education. Under Reagan, the promotion of educational "excellence" as verified by scores on standardized test scores became the *sin qua non* of educational achievement (McNeil 2000; Kosar 2011). On the other hand, Reagan added new eligibility requirements to the federal government's student loan program, thereby trimming the number of students who qualified for access to government loans. But this merely forced more students to borrow from private-sector lenders, often at higher rates of interest (Mezzanotte et al. 1997).

Reagan's reforms were much more keenly felt on the research front. Beginning in 1980 with the Bayh-Dole Act, Reagan unleashed a legislative tsunami that transformed intellectual property and patent law, and the way in which public funds for university based research could and would be used. The knock-on effects were terrific. In what Slaughter and Leslie (1997) came to describe as "academic capitalism", the changes that Reagan made to research funding led universities to champion "commercializable" research. Such efforts were reflected in the very shape of the university. In response to the changed IP landscape, universities opened offices of technology transfer or of "research and innovation". Universities also added large numbers of in-house legal counsel to their payrolls, and created and new positions, ones often associated with QA practices and compliance. All of this happened following Reagan's election in

1980, when Carter's appointee to the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker hiked up interest rates, in turn providing the financial backdrop against which working class militancy was thoroughly defeated. Such defeats were hardly only the by-product of full-scale financialization, however. As much as the Volcker Shocks played a critical role in re-channeling inflation into financial asset prices, driving wave after wave of financial innovation, regulation, and "regulatory arbitrage", the various efforts undertaken by Reagan to more directly defeat, discipline, or domesticate organized labour were also critical to smashing labour and creating the conditions of labour market flexibility that have described the neoliberal program of accumulation.<sup>112</sup> Again, 1980 was also the year when the Bayh-Dole Act marked the legislative epicentre of the tsunami of national – and global – legislative changes that have since acted as the cornerstone of neoliberal IP and patent law, and therein the progressive privatization of the commons, not least in the shape of publicly funded university-based research. (Mirowski 2011a; Polster 2001). All of this was backstopped by huge jumps in demand, as applications to university and college rose markedly through the early 1980s, particularly during the deep recession that the Volcker Shocks triggered. At the very moment when the logic of austerity was finding root, university administrators and even the public at large all but agreed that there was a need to separate intellectual wheat from chaff (Thelin 2004; Rudolph 1990). Ralph Nader's valiant efforts to call

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<sup>112</sup> A longer discussion of this is provided below. The links between the Volcker Shocks, financialization, and the defeat of organized labour are discussed at length by Panitch and Gindin (2012)

into question the basis upon which much of this culling was happening did not just land on deaf ears – it landed amidst a cacophony of noise about “excellence” and “standards” that was quickly reaching a fever pitch. If the state did not pointedly require the use of the SAT, it did nonetheless advocate such, if only by supporting the then dominant memes around inflation, unionization, and the kind of boot-strap meritocracy Reagan was advancing.

Clinton, far more than his predecessors, lent tremendous support to the program of QA. Indeed, shortly into his first term, President Clinton tipped Vice President Gore to head the Administration’s “National Performance Review”, which led ultimately to the Government Performance and Results Act (1993). That Act set out requirements for performance review and measurement for every agency and department of the federal government. The intent of the Act was allegedly to “streamline” government by “cutting out red-tape”. But the effect of the Act was to link public expenditures to particular kinds of measurable outcomes and to thereby commodify public services. (Radin 1998; Kravchuk and Schack 1996)<sup>113</sup>

In 2005, and following passage of the Bush Administration’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation, the federal government commissioned a study of higher education, the so-called “Spellings Commission”, (after then Secretary of

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<sup>113</sup> In as much as Clinton’s efforts fell short of mandating specific performance requirements or measures for the sector, the legislation did require the DOE to provide an annually updated “strategic plan”, which did in turn rely on the use of many of the KPIs discussed in chapter 3 as well as the results from standardized tests (Kravchuk and Schack 1996; Radin 1998).

Education Margaret Spellings), on the “Future of Higher Education”. The Commission’s 19 member panel, which included six representatives from multinational corporations, published its final report in 2006 (US Dept. of Education 2006). All but one of the commissioners signed off on the report, signaling the controversy that quickly followed. In a widely publicized display, David Ward from the ACE opted to denounce large sections of the Report, saying that it created a “false sense of crisis”, that complex problems were blamed on single factors (such as the pay of the professoriate), and that the Report’s findings on accreditation seemed to herald a “one size fits all” approach to accreditation (Spiegel 2008). A follow-up report by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (2008) offered a similar assessment:

The higher education community seemed to reach a consensus that the Report offered too much of a “one-size-fits-all” approach to the challenges identified, and did not take into account or value the diversity of missions within the community. National associations, accrediting agencies, and institutional leaders were particularly concerned about this approach to the complexities of assessment. The Commission Report and Department statements suggested that outcomes should receive greater emphasis—that assessment should shift from a primary emphasis on reputation, input, and resource measures to a focus on measures of performance, impact, and outcomes. Higher education leaders expressed fear that if a single approach were put in place, standardized methods and measures would be applied across all types of higher education institutions without regard to their differences, especially differences associated with mission. Further, they feared that simplistic and potentially damaging comparisons would be broadly publicized, in the name of transparency. These reactions were immediate and intense, and served to galvanize resistance to the Commission, the Report, and the Department of Education.(Ruben 2008)(emphasis added)

As Ward himself made clear, the sector's objections were not to measurement per se, but to the "one size fits all" approach that the Commission seemed to support in the Spellings Report. Rather than have the government develop and impose a system of QA, the sector held strong to the idea that it could design something better. In a tale about a boat that had long since sailed, then president of the American Historical Association recounts a panel discussion about the Spelling Report:

The panelists at the AHA annual meeting and other knowledgeable people agree, and caution that if we don't craft the instruments of assessment, then the state or federal government surely will, and those instruments are likely to insist on standardized measurements of learning outcomes. Should that occur, the study of history might well be among the principal casualties, especially if the test is aimed at tracking "domain-specific knowledge" as well as more generalized analytical skills. In a broader sense, the long-term consequences for higher education in the United States from the mounting pressure to measure performance do not portend a happy prospect. As Adam Falk, dean of arts and sciences at Johns Hopkins University, remarked to the Baltimore Sun, "the more we rely on standardized testing as our bellwether for the quality of education, the more we will value in education only those things that can be measured on standardized tests."(Spiegel 2008)

#### **5.2.4 The Political Economy of University Based Research in America**

As was outlined earlier, the particular histories of testing and of university based research, while not the same, are linked in a multiplicity of ways: both begin with private sector/corporate efforts to reproduce capitalist accumulation in their own image; the suite of players, from the corporate engineers, to the university administrators, to the great American philanthropic associations, to the host of quasi-governmental organizations and self-regulatory bodies that are

implicated in the reproduction of American higher education throughout its history, have been and remain ever-present; both histories are deeply imbricated by the same discourses at the same time; and, both histories involve the development of so many mechanisms of measurement, that, since the 1980s, have coalesced into a dominant discourse around performance, competitiveness, and 'quality'. It is also important to bear in mind that the proliferation of standardized testing as a means of social reproduction has had an on-going impact on the nature of university research. Simply, standardized testing is, just as it was intended to be, mimetic of a particular world-view. And since promotion through the ranks necessarily involves high scores on standardized tests, the program works to reproduce a particular kind of academy, one disposed to the kind of quality assessment and commercially oriented research that are typical of the contemporary university.<sup>114</sup> Given the long-term reproduction of 'expertise' by the AAUP and the faculty (Silva and Slaughter 1984), and the more recent history of economics imperialism (Fine and Milonakis 2009), it is even reasonable to suggest that university-based research has tracked so closely the program of accumulation *because* of the extensive and expansive nature of America's regime of standardized testing. Of course, the commercialization

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<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, Mirowski's book, *Science-mart* (2011), is framed as a discussion with "Viridiana Jones", a fictitious "intrepid academic researcher," who is depressed by the state of the contemporary university, but not able to find any comprehensive outline of where things went wrong. In other words, Mirowski seeks to address the 'intrepid' academics whose lives and work have been remade with the turn to neoliberalism post-1980, but who lack any knowledge of the history of their own context and of the history of thought in the social sciences and public policy that have so shaped that context. The depth of disciplinary divisions which have created such ignorance is precisely exemplary of the larger arguments I make in this dissertation.

agenda has also transformed the professoriate, or at least segments of it. In making it possible for publicly funded research to be “spun-out” and commercialized, the Reagan administration opened the door to levels of remuneration that were previously unheard of for faculty and administrators alike. While the returns to investment in the commercialization agenda have flowed no more equally through the university than have the returns to the neoliberal enterprise overall, the commercialization program has created a hierarchy of vested faculty who have in turn become very active proponents of the neoliberal program.

For Noble, the development of engineering as a scientific discipline and of engineering education as a significant concern for corporate America during the first couple of decades of the 20th century was all but fundamental to the transposition/relocation of the corporate laboratory to the university campus.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, therefore, the corporate engineers undertook to organize and harness science to industry. Their work evolved in three overlapping phases. The first involved the establishment of organized research laboratories within the industrial corporations, as integral parts of the enterprise. The second concerned the active support of, and cooperation with, research agencies outside of the corporations: trade-association laboratories, research foundations, government bureaus, and, most important, the science and engineering departments of the universities. The third saw the national coordination of these myriad research activities, primarily through the National Research Council, in support of corporate industry. The first two developments began roughly around the turn of the century; the third surfaced during World War I. (Noble 1977, location 2480)



In his analysis, Noble also consistently clarifies the significant contributions of the federal government in bolstering the efforts of corporate America.<sup>115</sup> And he also points out that the state's authority was what key elements within the academy jealously courted after it was awarded to the engineers, and then carefully cultivated when it was in turn offered to them as well. As the above quotation indicates, all such efforts ultimately manifest in the National Research Council, which, from its earliest beginnings, pressed science into the service of industry. More than this, the NRC was hardly operated by federal government bureaucrats. On the contrary, the NRC's key agencies were filled with representatives from corporate America and by the academics who found their way in to the organization, having already established a track-record of strengthening ties between the academy and industry, not least through the aforementioned program of 'strategic philanthropy' they pursued assiduously from around 1910 on (Scott 1983, 36). The federal government was also not, at least initially, the primary sources of funds for NRC funded research. On the contrary, the bulk of NRC's money, right up until WWII, came from the private sector, and significantly from the various research foundations, namely the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations that also funded the various efforts associated with standardized testing. (Noble 1977, location 3361)

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<sup>115</sup> For example, the military provided critical support to the ambitions of corporate America in terms of the expansion of America's testing program, as it was in providing the legal framework necessary for corporate control of IP and Patent.

Thus, while during the Cold War, the organization of American science was massively impacted by the outgrowth of the American state, which quickly became by far the largest funder of US R&D, both in the university and the corporate sector, such expansion was predicated on the work already done by the NRC, which by the on-set of WWII had already centralized and coordinated the shape of university based science to a remarkably significant extent. For Mirowski, the emergence of the Department of Defence (DoD) as the primary patron of American science melded with the “M-form” or multi-divisional corporation, which had proven its mettle during the war, when mature corporations diversified in order to profit from the State’s demand for war-related manufacture. In this context, corporate laboratories once tasked with the development and testing of new products for the productive arms of their diversified firms, became, with the healthy support of the US military, stand-alone divisional profit-centres, whose largest customer was the DoD. Accordingly, the DoD used its research funding/buying power as a kind of “industrial policy by stealth”. Based on the conventions of research contracting that developed during WWII, the DoD, “did not mind funding what would be dubbed ‘basic research’...because its regulations concerning overhead would putatively allow it to control the mix of basic and applied as needed (Phillip Mirowski 2011, location 1487)”. At the same time, the military was “skeptical concerning the virtues of strong protection of IP in frontier science” (Mirowski 2011, location 1530). This view, which was also held by many mainstream

economists (at the time) and apparently by the Department of Justice as well<sup>116</sup>, led the military to flex both its funding and juridical muscle to keep industry from protecting and patenting whatever non-military and/or “basic” research was performed in the corporate labs with government funds. While the military was careful to protect whatever research it deemed to be of immediate military importance (an inestimably large amount of data) it was equally careful to press all other forms of IP into the commons. The military did this by imposing royalty-free licensing requirements on their corporate R&D partners. In this way, the DoD enabled American corporations to pick-up IP on the cheap, which is of course what the DoD wanted. In fact, the funding conditions stipulated by the DoD were intended to make corporate America, “better suited to withstand the chill wind of the Cold War” (Mirowski 2011a, 112). Thus, “under the banner of national security [and the military as science manager], was an oxymoronic regime of relatively open science hedged round by classification and secrecy” (Mirowski 2011: p.112).

For America’s universities, the Cold War was a kind of Golden Era. State and federal governments, with the DoD again playing the largest role, offered the universities unprecedented levels of funding and therein a wide berth for academic science, all as an “exercise in American nation building” (Mirowski 2011, 111). Accordingly, America’s network of colleges and universities was

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<sup>116</sup> The Department of Justice successfully argued for the extension of the military’s control over government funded IP that was not deemed a matter of national security.

massively expanded. While the Ivy League institutions benefited terrifically, as they had previously when corporate America was more in control of the levers of research funding, public subsidy was hardly focussed on such institutions. Instead, government funding was spread throughout the sector in a deliberate exercise in mass education and acculturation, as well as in ‘basic’ research. Another out-growth of this ‘oxymoronic regime’ was the widespread and rather dogmatic belief that scientists were best left to their own devices, free from the exigencies of markets and market forces. Indeed, the emergence of the state as the biggest benefactor of university-based research (and private-sector research as well) temporarily moderated, if not entirely severed, the then long-standing relationship between the university and industry, replacing it with the idea that scientists owed their loyalty to their discipline if they were to, in turn, demonstrate their loyalty to the state (Mirowski 2011b, location 1446). As such, the university lab was re-oriented and leveraged in the service of “basic” or “pure” research, which the state then pushed either into the commons or else to corporate America, where it channeled the vast majority of its research-funding (Mirowski 2011, location 1451–1530). This program of state sponsorship meant that the universities and the state could afford to tolerate and even accept some of the demands made by campus activists who, in the 1960s and 1970s, demanded that the military industrial complex be kicked-out of university labs.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Sears (2003) offers a slightly different perspective on the significance of campus activism through the 1960s and 1970s. For him, the expansion of higher education under the auspices of the Welfare State needs to be understood as a process that involved the domestication

But it hardly meant that “basic” or “pure” research was viewed in non-utilitarian terms. “Utility” was just defined differently, and with reference to the welfare of the American state then under pressure from Cold War competitors. “Basic” research was hardly severed from the dominant program of accumulation, even if the long-standing links between corporate America and university-based researchers were temporarily allowed to wither. And though the role of the philanthropic organizations became less important to the ability of universities to undertake research, it hardly stopped playing an important role (Scott 1983, 164). And the entire system continued to operate on the basis of conditional forms of finance delivered through systems of peer review, which was conducted under government umbrellas (ex. National Science Foundation). Block grants for either teaching or research were simply never part of the American system.

The Golden Era ended, in fits and starts, through the turbulence of the 1970s, but more obviously and consistently after 1980, when what Mirowski

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of the working class. In other words, the massification of higher education involved contradictory processes: on the one hand, individual’s rights were expanded as higher education was likewise expanded and made (temporarily) more accessible; on the other hand, schooling involved (as it still does) a process of acculturation and discipline. Without understating the significance, achievements, and potential of the oppositional movements that rocked American campuses through the 1960s, Sears argues that they were beset by contradictions, like that just mentioned, which effectively limited both their scope and the possibility of a more lasting form of success. Though he focuses on the development of higher education in Ontario, Sears’ comments are aptly applied to the situation in the US following WWII. He writes,

The broad welfare state captured social struggles, absorbing some of the impact of resistance and providing space to address (in some limited and displaced forms) the claims of people in motion. The university played an important part in this process, providing a space for dissent while teaching forms of self-discipline that contributed to the enhancement of self-regulating citizenship...The university thus served as a site for the deep internalization of discipline in a situation of minimal supervision (Sears 2003, 54)

describes as a “cascade” of legislative and other changes saw the principles and practices around R&D utterly transformed. The cascade of transformations after 1980 relates to the apparent waning of America’s dominance in the global economy, when both the American state and American corporations began to operate according to a fundamentally different set of dictates. Here Mirowski highlights the rapid transformation of the M-form Corporation. In response to apparently more agile Japanese and German competitors, American firms began to outsource production and, eventually, R&D as well. In outsourcing their R&D, American firms channeled their monies into either publicly subsidized, but corporately controlled, American research labs located both in- and out-side of the university sector, or, on a contract basis, to private research labs located in low-wage, low-regulation environments. This process of institutional reform saw American pharmaceutical, agribusiness, and other high-tech firms spearhead efforts to re-write first American and then international law so as to better protect their IP and patent rights. The same firms also worked collectively to take the teeth out of American anti-trust legislation, which until the 1980s, prevented firms from intensifying their operations within a single sector and from establishing the kind of monopoly rights that were necessary for them to do so. (Mirowski 2011, 114–128) All of this was underscored by the hegemony of neoliberal theory, which had made an end-run around classical liberal conceptions of competition (the theoretical back-bone of anti-trust legislation) such that monopoly came to be seen as anything but an obstacle to innovation

and economic growth (Mirowski 2009). In this way, the state was caught-up in a program of re-regulating the management of IP and patent so as to support the efforts of corporate America. Such transformations in effect amounted to the re-direction of state and federal research money away from protocols that would see new knowledge placed in the commons, and towards protocols that would generate new, and protectable, IP.<sup>118</sup>

Slaughter and Rhoades (1996a) tell a similar story. They see what they describe as a new “competitiveness agenda”, as having emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, as a response to: a widespread crisis of corporate profitability; post-Vietnam dips in government funding for R&D (both in and outside of universities); the subsequent ending of the Cold War, which entailed further cuts to defense related R&D; and, the large-scale transition in the US from not-for-profit, to for-profit healthcare. Accordingly, the military industrial complex, American pharmaceutical companies, and American agribusiness all looked to have state and federal governments channel funds into the commercialization of science and technology. The apparent aim in so pressing the state was “to increase US shares of global markets and to increase the numbers of high-technology, high-salaried jobs in the domestic economy” (Slaughter and Rhoades

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<sup>118</sup> The US Patent Office was transformed into a customer-friendly organization that came quickly to approve an increasingly large proportion of the ever-growing number of patent filings; in 1982, federal government created the special Court of Appeal in the Federal Circuit dedicated to hearing cases related to patent. And of course, the state actively promoted the privatization of state-subsidized research programs (in universities, in national laboratories, and in the host of “interstitial organizations”, like research parks, that hosted new quasi-public, quasi-private research initiatives.)

1996, 304). And like Mirowski, Slaughter and Rhoades also note the significance of changes to the corporate form, and therein to the development of more industry-focused, less diversified corporate operators.

There is also general agreement as to what have been the key legislative changes. Outside of the Bayh-Dole Act in 1980, which Mirowski notes was quietly extended to private corporations in 1983, there was the Stevenson-Wydler Act, also passed in 1980, which allowed research performed in federally funded national research labs to be protected and privatized. In 1986, the Technology Transfer Act allowed federally funded research once considered classified to be sold-off to private firms. The 1984 National Cooperative Research Act, allowed firms in the same sector to escape anti-trust prosecution when they undertook research jointly. All of this was reinforced by the decisions coming out of the Court of Appeals in the Federal Circuit, which Mirowski, following Jaffe and Lerner, notes, has, “due to its special composition...tilted the entire system [of IP] in favor of patent holders and against the defense in infringement suits.” (Mirowski 2011, 148) Such changes have hardly remained specific to the US. Where countries did not of their own accord follow-suit with similar such legislation, the changes made to international law with the passage of agreements such as the TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property) at the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations in 1993, had the effect of extending American IP and Patent legislation throughout the world (Polster 2001; May 2006; Coriat 2002).



The complete re-making of IP and Patent law has, in turn, created incentives to new patterns of behaviour and new forms of organization (Polster 2001; Polster 2007). Recall that in the post-war era, R&D was heavily funded by the state in ways that pressed huge amounts of new knowledge into the commons. In other words, on the basis of huge state subsidies, the nature of competition was fundamentally different than it would become through the 1980s. Instead of leveraging control over huge libraries of IP, as became the case after 1980, firms competed by taking knowledge from the commons and making use of it in new, novel, and protectable ways. Once defence spending was cut-back and made increasingly focused, however, firms both had less cash on-hand to fund research not directly related to the generation of profit, and less reason to place whatever knowledge they did generate into the commons. On the contrary, the progressive retraction and redirection of state R&D subsidies made it both possible and necessary for firms to commoditize every step in the knowledge production process. Simply, without either the state's prohibition of such behaviour or the states' subsidization of their R&D activities, firms sought to compete by focusing their research efforts and by protecting the results of those efforts. At the same time, firms also looked to outsource their R&D activities. Rather than assume the expensive overheads related to the maintenance of in-house R&D laboratories, firms began to outsource such activities via discrete, task-related contracts. Such behaviour, was part of the reason why American firms looked to have the juridical landscape remade. To ensure the security of

whatever IP was generated abroad in such contract research organizations, American, (and other multi-national) firms pressed the state to shore-up, re-write, and spread globally the kind of IP legislation that would provide them the security they required to outsource their R&D. (Mirowski 2011)

Increasingly, therefore, firms acted to protect and license both the downstream technologies that emerged out of research activities and the elemental pieces of knowledge necessary for research. As such, the costs associated with research increased substantially. At the same time, the potential returns from licensing IP also skyrocketed. As a result, all firms were forced into the IP protection game. In order to afford the costs of R&D, firms needed either to access the returns that could be generated by licensing IP, or else resource-poor firms needed to partner with resource-rich firms, generally on terms that further instantiated these patterns. This program of enclosure also opened up new fields for accumulation in that firms looked increasingly to leverage whatever IP they owned competitively, via patent infringement litigation, for which the aforementioned Federal Appeals Court was established. In this way, resource poor firms were either taken-over or taken to the wall. Also, and as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the potential returns available through litigation in fact led to the emergence of a new kind of firm, the so-called “patent troll” (Glass 2011; Mirowski 2011b; Polster 2001; Coriat 2002; Sheila Slaughter and Rhodes 2004).

In this context, universities rapidly found themselves in something of a bind. Cash-strapped from government cut-backs and declining enrolments (after 1975 when enrolments dipped temporarily), and with research costs quickly rising, they needed to play ball. Necessarily, this meant industry partnerships, the development of technology transfer offices, in-house legal capacity able to navigate the increasingly tricky waters of IP and patent, a whole new administrative/managerial agenda. All of this was bolstered in myriad ways by the long-standing relationship between industry and faculty working in the applied sciences, like engineering (see above). The pressure to conform to the new regime of science by enclosure came increasingly from within the university too, not least after Reagan opened the IP floodgates in 1980. Furthermore, as the lines between “basic” and “applied” science were blurred, as they were, for example, with the science around biotech, levels of support for the commercialization of university-based research coming from within the university grew stronger still (and all but merged with the advent of the “new” social sciences, itself a by-product of economics imperialism (see chapter 4). The everyday life of university based research thus changed deeply. Today, “Material Transfer Agreements” (MTAs) regulate the flow of knowledge between university based researchers at different institutions as well as between university-based researchers and private laboratories; in conducting research, scientists need to navigate a world of contracts that regulate access to both the materials and the bits of knowledge necessary to the conduct of any new research (Mirowski 2011,

Chap. 4). University-based scientists are also increasingly apt to keep new discoveries secret (so as to protect IP), and to take measures intended to provide evidence of the originality of their work and thereby some insurance against potential future litigation. And the availability of funds means that researchers will tend to either prefer – or be forced to prefer – those avenues of research that hold the promise of profit over those that do not (Polster 2007; Polster 2001).

In this light, the functionality of QA with respect to research is clearly available: QA functions as a relative measure of the returns available via investment in specific kinds of research as specific universities, with specific researchers. It is a price-type signaling system intended to reflect the exchange-value of commoditized knowledge. Of course, and as was made clear at the outset, the US does not have a “system” of QA as such. Rather, what constitutes the American “system” of QA is an array of private sector ranking exercises, built primarily around KPIs, and anchored in processes of accreditation. Collectively these seemingly disparate endeavors make-up a surprisingly seamless system capable of efficiently channeling government and private sector money to institutions that operate according to the dictates of neoliberal policy. The historical coincidence of the legislation just described (i.e. around IP and patent) and the emergence of mainly private-sector rankings exercises based on the crude and instrumental logic outlined in Chapter 3 is hardly coincidental. On the contrary, the timing suggests that the primary impetus behind the development of this ‘system’ had to do with the drive to make the universities attractive to

private sector “partners”, given that state’s endorsement in the late 1970s and early 1980s of the neoliberal program. Whereas the state had previously been more willing to fund “basic” research, it was now intent on funneling money to those institutions that linked to industry. Mechanisms of measurement and valuation, while they already existed and long been in use, could now (again) serve industrial interests more directly than they had in the early post-war era. And as such amounted to a form of industrial subsidy (where the state would carry the costs of industrially oriented and owned research), the corporate America clearly also had cause to revive, and popularize, ways of measuring the “quality” of university-based research, particularly given the sums involved and the massively expanded size of the higher education system (i.e. the publication KPI’s enabled capital to track value in a massively increased system of higher education)

### **5.3 Crisis, Resolution, and Intensification: Examining the Left in the making of American Higher Education**

Before leaving this case-study, it bears examining, if only in brief, the role played (or not played) by political and forces on the Left in terms of the histories just recounted; the “competitiveness agenda”, like the history of QA in the US, has been contested, and it is important to discuss how progressive social forces were defeated or overwhelmed, or rather naively supportive of the developments just recounted.

In as much as the emergence of New Social Movements did pose something of a challenge to these dominant modes of thought, there are several considerations. First, in 1973 the AAUP effectively re-affirmed the position on academic freedom that it had first laid out in 1911. Slaughter and Silva indicate that within the university progressive social forces no less than revanchist ones have been want to preserve the ‘expert’ status of academics (E. Silva and Slaughter 1984). Second, as was discussed above, the organization of science during the Cold War, entailed, “an oxymoronic regime of relatively open science hedged round by classification and secrecy (Mirowski 2011: p.112).” Not only did “basic” science receive considerably more funding than it would through the 1980s and 90s, but such facts preserved the edifice of academic freedom and “basic science”, which had the effect of moderating the fervour with which any sizeable segment of the academy pursued transformative change during the era when an opening for such emerged. Third, the nature of American radicalism was in and of itself somewhat problematic in that notions of “monopoly capitalism” alluded to a set of structural dynamics that subverted agency and arguably polluted much radical thinking during the era. More than this, the crude structuralisms of American Marxism in the 1950s and 1960s, which related in large part to the dynamics of the Cold War, entailed a sharp move away from careful consideration of working class capacities. Seen as having been caught in the structural dynamics of capitalist accumulation workers were too frequently ascribed a “false consciousness” that discounted the potential for change.

Ironically, this was the case almost immediately before the potential for mass mobilization rapidly re-emerged. Fourth, and relatedly, much of the discontent that surfaced within the ranks of the students organizing through the late 1960s under the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) banner(s), were ultimately crippled by a fervent belief in the need for a student-cum-vanguard led revolution that never bothered to build a viable labour movement. Elsewhere, students organized in ways that hindsight paints as deeply ironic. For example, the decision by students at both Harvard and Yale to, in the 1960s, mark their displeasure with the confined nature of analysis in the American social sciences, took-up the cause of Student Evaluation Questionnaires, a rather consumerist approach to dissent within a consumerist society. Also related was the fact that more than just radicalism took shape in America's universities:

To understand the 1960s properly, and the role of the "baby-boomers" in it, it must not be forgotten that matching the rise of the radical new Left in sociology and history departments of US universities was a new generation of MBA's, "bright and ambitious students...paying more attention to business strategy, product development, marketing, and costs, the stuff of business-school curricula." The members of the 1960s generation who were recruited into the expanding financial sector were also oriented to "changing the system," albeit in a very different way from their more radical counterparts – and as it turned out there were rather more successful at it. Some of them also went into the regulatory agencies, adding to the agencies' prestige and confidence...The new breed of regulators did not necessarily call for greater public control, since "the essential feature of the American regulatory system...its fusion of the public and private spheres" ensured that not only the financial institutions but also the regulatory agencies themselves became subject to the contradictory pressures that had emerged in the 1960s.(Gindin and Panitch 2012, 121–122)

But by far the most significant factor in the historic defeat of the Left in the late 1970s and 1980s however was the concerted attack that capital – aided and abetted by the American state – aggressively undertook in its effort to tilt the balance of class forces more durably in its favour. In this regard, the development of an increasingly conscious and aligned business lobby through the early part of the 1970s factored prominently. Propelled to act concertedly by declining corporate balance sheets, capital quickly found an ally in key agencies of the American state, which, by virtue of capital’s declining fortunes (and the “strike” of capital), were also in the midst of a deep crisis. For Panitch and Gindin, the most notable of the American state’s various anti-labour efforts were the Volcker Shocks, which they assert amounted to a program of structural adjustment. That said, Panitch and Gindin are also careful to point out that the Volker Shocks were hardly the first or only efforts on the part of the American state to revive corporate profitability through austerity and labour-market discipline rather than Keynesian-style efforts to manage aggregate demand. For instance, the efforts of the US Treasury under both Nixon and Carter to bolster corporate support for free-trade, given declining support for such in key industrial sectors, proved crucial to the on-going development of the “New International Division of Labour”, and therein the ability of corporate America to move huge swathes of America’s manufacturing base to low-wage, low-regulation jurisdictions, or else to negotiate for huge concessions from labour. Also significant were the efforts of the US Treasury and the New York Fed, when in



1975 they worked alongside Wall St. banks to make an example out of New York City through the imposition of structural adjustment and austerity measures as a “resolution” to the City’s financial crisis. Also of significance were the government’s more direct and equally successful efforts to break the “pattern of wage push” through direct intervention in labour negotiations, first when Chrysler teetered on the brink of bankruptcy in 1979, and then in 1981, when Reagan ended the strike by air traffic controllers by firing them, hiring scabs to do (some) of their jobs, and then by having a stacked Federal Labour Relations Authority decertify the union. All of this was also supported by a massive bulwark of cuts to social spending and taxes that Reagan used to simultaneously curry favour with and discipline the working classes. The longer history of police repression and incarceration were also fundamental to first undermining the potential of the Black Power movement, which emerged in the 1960s as a potent political force, and subsequently to the use of incarceration as a means of social control.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

As is made clear in the subsequent two chapters, the long history of QA in America is unique and indicates something equally unique about the nature of American liberal democratic capitalism. For Dorothy Ross, the distinctive and long history of QA in America would not come as much of a surprise. She describes the character and effect of American social science:

The distinctive character of American social science has necessarily had a profound effect on social practice and social thought in the United States. A historical world is a humanly created one. It is composed of people, institutions, practices, and languages that are created by the circumstance of human experience and sustained by structures of power. History can be used to achieve a critical understanding of historical experience and allows us to change the social structures that shape it. In contrast, the models of the social world that have dominated American social science in the twentieth century invite us to look through history to a presumably natural process beneath. Here the social world is composed of individual behaviors responding to natural stimuli, and the capitalist market and modern urban society are understood, in effect, as part of nature. We are led toward quantitative and technocratic manipulation of nature and an idealized liberal vision of American society. (Ross 1991, xiv)

Of course, where Ross goes on to argue that that the tendency ‘toward [the] quantitative and technocratic manipulation of nature’ is a by-product of the ideology of American exceptionalism, I have argued otherwise. Far from an ideology of exceptionalism, the distinctive nature of American social science is rooted in the particular history of American capitalism. This does not mean that the most influential social scientists did not completely and utterly believe that in America they had found the formula to a liberal democratic panacea, but rather that those apprehensions flourished and gave American social science its unique characteristic because of the particular nature and history of class relations in the US. What was relatively more important than the ideology of exceptionalism, in other words, was the way in which huge corporate agglomerations formed, the way in which those agglomerations were and remained linked to the state, and the particular form that the American state took as a result. America was – and remains – exceptional, no more so than any other state, but exceptional

nonetheless. But if the ideology of American exceptionalism informed a greater social scientific project, which it most certainly did, then it did so because of the dynamics of power that were set in motion with the advent of capitalism in America.

Of course, this dissertation is not so much about the exceptional nature of the American social sciences, as it is about the exceptional nature of America's system of QA. Long-standing and ubiquitous, the American system of QA seems almost organic, and as a true testament to the power and logic of the market. What today seems a normal, useful, and inevitable part of the America's system of higher education is the result of careful and coherent planning, aided and abetted by the state. What today appears as so many autonomous and non-governmental efforts at QA, is in fact, a dense web of operations at the pinnacles of which sit the six regional accrediting agencies whose independence is ultimately financed by the state and maintained (if not encouraged) because of an on-going confluence between the interests of the American state and of American capital and the on-going cooperation of the administrators and bureaucrats that operate America's institutions of higher education. As I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the champions of accreditation highlight the efficiency with which accreditation processes have helped to develop a highly "differentiated" system of higher education that is, in turn, able to put-out highly skilled labour able to meet every labour market demand as well as more world-leading and commercially oriented research than is any other system. As I have

outlined, such arguments are in some senses wholly accurate. America's system of higher education is more productive. Where I part with such conventional analyses however, is in my evaluation of the "quality" of that out-put. Contra the conventional line, I would argue that the American system of higher education has long been intensely (re)productive, not so much of high quality research and teaching outputs, but rather of a low and common level of literacy and monopolizable forms of knowledge. In fact, the level of (re)productivity has been so great that America's "system" of QA appears as a testament to the potential of QA and "the market" to integrate the knowledge necessary to efficiently allocate resources, as Hayek would presumably put it. One can well understand that in places like the UK and Ontario, the state and capital would both look to establish more coherent systems of QA with the express intent of both mimicking and improving upon not only the procedural aspects of QA in America, but more importantly, the outcomes it has helped to achieve. Indeed, where the confluence of the state's and of capital's interests did not manifest quite as early as they did in the US as either a concern for the operation of a national educational system or a program of measurement and conditional finance, the state and capital seem to have concluded that decisive state action is required if the kind of systematic coherence (i.e. stratification) and efficiency (i.e. reproductivity) achieved in the US is to be reproduced elsewhere and in any reasonable amount of time.

Of course, the state and capital have hardly been the only key players, either in the US or elsewhere. What was created “by design” when the American system of QA first emerged, again via programs of measurement and conditional finance that subjected the universities to the law of value almost from their inception, was a kind of market-based vortex that the universities have since further developed and cultivated, sometimes intentionally, and other times under the apprehension of “autonomy”. The re-emergence of global finance and the globalization of particular (American) forms of IP and Patent legislation, both under the aegis of an America empire, has widened that vortex and turned the universities and huge swathes of the academy and the student body outside the US, into boosters of the neoliberal university, reluctant supporters of the same, or else unwitting accomplices whose desire to research requires that they prove and improve “quality” in ways that are inescapably linked to capitalist value.

## **Chapter 6: Catch-up, Discipline, and Acculturation: QA in the United Kingdom**

The UK's system of QA is arguably the most codified and bureaucratic in the world. More than this, the UK's system of assessment and performance audit, where they have not been path-breaking, have certainly been trend-setting. Governments in jurisdiction after jurisdiction, including in Ontario, have looked to replicate and emulate the UK's model. In what follows I argue that the apparent popularity of the UK's model of QA has to do with its apparent success, not so much in qualitative terms (i.e. of research and graduates), which I have already suggested has diminished since 1980, but rather because the UK's system has appeared to provide an effective means via which to rationalize and transform higher education. More than this, the UK's system has developed rapidly. Thatcher and her government took-up the cause of rationalizing research funding with a ferocity that simply belies any kind of structural analysis. Subsequently, her disciples, in both the Conservative and Labour Parties, have picked up and extended the program of QA with similar vigour and enthusiasm. The British system of higher education now allegedly operates both more efficiently and more in-keeping with the operational norms of the American system, which as I have already argued, have been judged to be more efficient and effective. In developing the UK's system of QA, successive governments have faced-down and overcome what can at best be described as piecemeal opposition from both the academy and students. Where the American system of QA

emerged and developed over the better part of a century, and apparently without the kind of state direction and support seen elsewhere, the British one is seen as having been created to great and virtuous effect almost overnight and without having to overcome, until perhaps quite recently, over much opposition. For governments and policy-makers wishing to rapidly reproduce the kind of differentiated and market-based environment that mainstream thinkers identify with the US (and with economic prowess) then, the British system of QA is like a veritable “how-to”.

Perhaps this is why the UK’s system of QA and audit has been more studied than have other jurisdictions’ systems. Even highly developed systems such as Australia’s and New Zealand’s have simply not been subject to the same amount of critical analysis as has the UK’s. In fact, the UK’s system is, on the one hand, relatively new, and, on the other hand, an obviously useful tool in the effective reproduction of neoliberal capitalism. Even despite the obvious and on-going dislocations and inefficiencies it has caused, the UK’s system of QA has proven to be remarkably durable. I argue that such durability relates to the fact that “the logic of the market, left to itself, necessarily tends to be cumulative rather than corrective (Anderson 1987, 72 emphasis in original)”. In other words, QA in the UK has become so deeply embedded that its cumulative impacts, however negative, are also reproductive, even despite the fact that outside of

mainstream circles, the system has been subject to often vicious critique.<sup>119</sup> What most critiques miss, however, is the history of QA understood in broader political economic terms. Indeed, I argue that it is vital to situate the development of QA in the context of: Britain's long-term industrial decline; the relatively early arrival of neoliberalism in the mid-1970s; the sizeable failure of the Country's parliamentary Left over that same period; and the subsequent ascendancy and hegemony of finance capital within the British political economy (and the manifestations of such in terms of "everyday life").

### **6.1 The UK's System of Quality Assessment**

The QA infrastructure in the UK operates in two parts: one part is focused on research and revolves mainly around the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), which has recently been renamed the Research Excellence Framework (REF); and, the second part focuses around "service provision" (teaching) and operates through the Quality Audit Agency (QAA). The QAA operates at the pinnacles of the UK's teaching assessment program via a series of indirect institutional meta-assessments. These meta-assessments are in turn built, and thus dependent upon, the myriad particular forms of QA employed by each and every university. Thus, while the assessment of research is undertaken nationally, in a heavily prescribed and detailed manner, the assessment of teaching is said to be more "open", at least in so far as universities are permitted to develop their

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<sup>119</sup> As I highlight below, some of the most cogent critiques have been provided by Willmott (2003; 1995) as well as by DeAngelis and Harvie (2009), among others (noted below).



own QA processes, which are then subject to assessment. This approach, described by proponents as “steering not rowing” (Barlow and Röber 1996) or, “lighter touch” (Wright 2003, 1) type regulation, means that systematic study of QA processes is daunting. Each university tracks and evaluates its teachers in a slightly different manner and according to a slightly different set of criteria. Of course, this belies the point: the “quality” of each institution’s QA regime is itself subject to assessment according to a voluminous set of criteria that are made clear by the QAA (QAA 2013a). As a result, the seemingly endless list of procedural particularities that may exist at the institutional level should not be taken to mean that QA has not become a significant pre-occupation in most institutions, or that the broader meta-assessments of the QAA have not encouraged a high degree of procedural convergence, at least in terms of the degree to which academics’ teaching practices are subject to an extensive and broadly similar array of assessment mechanisms. This is precisely the point made by De Angelis and Harvie (2009), in their invaluable discussion of value and measurement in UK higher education. As they see it, the drive towards both the quantification of higher education and thereby its standardization is indelible and ubiquitous.

It is also worth highlighting at the outset that the “war over measure” (De Angelis and Harvie 2009, 5) that De Angelis and Harvie describe has been, and continues to, be very fluid. Both the RAE/REF and the methods of QA employed by the QAA have changed considerably since they were first introduced.

Generally speaking, and as I outline below, such changes have come in response to changes in government, to pressure from within the sector to change-up the manner in which it is regulated, and/or to the latest fad in the on-going evolution of QA.

### **6.1.1 The Assessment of Quality in Teaching**

Since its inception, the QAA, has evaluated and assured quality via two related mechanisms: 1) an extensive literature identifying the requisite standards that institutions must meet in terms of their own internal QA measures and mechanisms, as well as in terms of the learning outcomes/standards that graduates must verifiably meet in order to obtain credits/diplomas/degrees; and, 2) the periodic audit of institutions' internal QA mechanisms by a panel of "experts" external to an institution or program. Both mechanisms operate in respect of an over-arching code of conduct currently referred to as the "Quality Code". The QAA describes the code like this:

The Quality Code gives all higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. Providers use it to design their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and quality. (QAA 2013a)

The Code itself is made up of three parts: "Part A", which describes the academic standards that students, at each level of study, must meet; "Part B", which outlines the kinds of processes via which institutions are supposed to set and measure standards; and, "Part C", which involves the communication of the information gleaned through QA to the general public. Considered as a whole,

the Code is an obvious effort to ensure consistency in terms of the overall standard that a graduate at each level should be able to obtain and/or demonstrate, without being too prescriptive in terms of content. For example, in outlining the academic standards that students are expected to meet (Part A), the QAA offers “descriptors” of key competencies at the program level (as in what a baccalaureate degree in Geography must mean in terms of a student’s particular, subject-specific competencies), at the degree/diploma level (i.e. in terms of the competencies expected of baccalaureates in general), and at the institutional, national, and international levels (i.e. so that a student at any given university can be assured, in getting a baccalaureate degree, that their degree is, in some basic way, comparable to a baccalaureate degree at other institutions both in and out-side of the UK). The Code is thus a massive set of self-referential documents intended to make-up a comprehensive and logically consistent approach to QA. (QAA 2012a)

The development of the Code was an intensive operation, as was the development of the “Academic Infrastructure”, which the Code replaced in 2013. For example, the development of “subject benchmark statements” (i.e. the discipline specific standards that students are expected to reach upon graduating at the Baccalaureate or Masters level) is today undertaken in accordance with the QAA’s, “Recognition Scheme for Subject Benchmark Statements” (QAA 2012b). Accordingly, subject benchmark statements are revised when the QAA’s Quality Code Steering Group receives a submission from a particular academic subject

association, or a “professional, statutory, or regulatory body (PSRB)”, indicating the need for either an entirely new subject benchmark statement, or the revision of an existing one, in accordance with the principles set out in the Recognition Scheme (which sets-out when a new or a revised statement would be considered). If the QAA’s Steering Committee decides to support a request, the QAA then works in conjunction with the relevant subject group or PSRB to convene an appropriate and “balanced” team of experts who develop a draft statement. The QAA then shops the draft subject benchmark statement around to relevant stakeholders, in a process that is not outlined in the Recognition Scheme, and collects relevant comments from such stakeholders before finally leaving the expert working group to the task of finalizing the Statement (QAA 2012b, 6–9). In addition to this process, the QAA conducts regular (initially after five years, and then every seven years) reviews of the Statements, a process similar to that just outlined (QAA 2012b, 9).

The Statements themselves are inoffensive. Typically, over around ten pages, the particular domain of a subject is defined, the nature of an undergraduate or graduate program in that subject is described, and certain “threshold” (QAA 2007, 1) standards are identified. For example, the benchmark statement for Politics and International Relations clarifies that, upon being granted an honours undergraduate degree,

4.14 Graduates in politics should be able to:

- understand the nature and significance of politics as a human activity

- apply concepts, theories and methods used in the study of politics to the analysis of political ideas, institutions and practices
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different political systems, the nature and distribution of power in them; the social, economic, historical and cultural contexts within which they operate, and the relationships between them
- evaluate different interpretations of political issues and events.(QAA 2007, 4–5)

The clear and express intent in outlining subject benchmark statements is to inform the various QA processes that the QAA ultimately oversees. In other words, individual academics, the departments of which they are a part, the over-arching faculty to which they belong, the entire institution, and the teams of external reviewers are all intended to use the Statements as a kind of a guide. The QAA puts it this way:

Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area. (QAA 2013b)

The same is true for all of the other “descriptors” provided by the QAA – they are intended to inform QA processes up and down the proverbial “line” and to thereby ensure consistency throughout the sector. Of course, the QAA does also provide an outline of how and when the full suite of their descriptors are to be used, as well as what a vigorous program of QA looks like at the institutional level. Here, the QAA makes no outright mention of any kind of standardized test, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement. Rather, institutions are

provided a relatively wide berth when it comes to the processes each follows in order to ensure the maintenance of standards. The QAA requires only that each and every aspect of the QA process be somehow codified, made publicly available, and meet the broad criteria that the QAA has outlined in terms of things such as, for example, “student engagement”. Indeed, the QAA’s Quality Code though procedurally burdensome, is also at pains to ensure that it is not too prescriptive (QAA 2013a). As I have already suggested, the result is a great swathe of generalities, such as this one: “Institutions ensure that their responsibilities for standards and quality are discharged effectively through their procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes” (QAA 2011, 1). Taken from Chapter B8 of the Code, the above is offered as the first of eight “indicators of sound practice” with respect to monitoring and program review (1). Similar such indicators are offered with respect to ten other areas of practice, including, external examining, admissions, learning and teaching, enabling student learning and development, etc. This, ‘light touch’ (Wright 2003) approach is thus linked to still another set of guidelines and rules. Summarizing the myriad measures to which the British academy is today subject (in terms of teaching), Harvie and DeAngelis offer this point form outline, which is usefully reproduced at length:

- For each module, the ‘module leader’ (ML, i.e., lecturer) must complete various paperwork, in particular a ‘module specification’ (at the module’s start) which lists the module’s ‘aims and objectives’, ILOs, ‘modes and methods of assessment’, amongst other information; and a ‘module review’ document (at the end of the module), in which the ML reports their own assessment of the module’s strengths and weaknesses and their

suggested changes for the following year; a summary of student feedback; and average marks and their dispersion.

- Across a degree programme as a whole (say BA (Hons) Economics) this information is collated into two important documents with similar structures. First, a 'programme specification', which will include the module specs for all of a programme's constituent modules, plus rationale for the degree as a whole, its overall 'aims and objectives' and learning outcomes, and an inventory of the resources (academic staff, library and other facilities, etc.) available to 'deliver' the programme, Second, annual programme reports, which collate module reviews and summarise overall performance of a cohort of students, in terms of 'progression rates', 'withdrawal rates', location and spread of marks, etc.
- To ensure 'fairness,' students' assessed work – particularly for longer pieces such as a dissertation – should be graded against a 'matrix', with the various degree 'classes' (First, Upper Second, etc.) along one axis and a list of categories (e.g., structure, grasp of 'key concepts', ability to critically analyse, referencing) along the other. Within each cell is a description of the standard that must be achieved in that category in order to warrant that class of degree. Markers must complete the matrix for each individual assignment.
- This documentation may be scrutinized in a number of ways, both internal and external to the institution.
- Before any degree programme can be offered, it must be 'validated'. The validation process involves scrutiny of the 'programme specification' and/or a 'validation document' by both committees internal to the university and, at a final validation meeting, a panel which will include two or three external validators. These scrutineers will judge the proposed degree on the basis on its internal consistency, the extent to which its learning outcomes correspond to the subject benchmark and so on. All degree programmes must be periodically (approx every four years) revalidated.
- Annually, module and programme documentation is examined by various 'quality' committees, overseen by institution-level bodies with such names as Centre of Academic Standards and Quality.

- Marks and degree classifications awarded by universities are monitored by ‘external examiners’, whose role it is to ensure consistency across the sector.
- Departments are subject to periodic visits – lasting three or four days – by the QAA, which sends in a team of inspectors. Such inspectors spend most of their time in a ‘base room’, examining and comparing programme documentation: module and programme specifications and reports, external examiners’ reports, examples of student work, examples of academics’ feedback on student work, documentary evidence of ‘excellence’ in various areas. Of course, preparing, collating and cataloguing this documentation involves an immense amount of work, which must start up to 18 months before the visit.
- Transparency review: an attempt by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to discover the amount of time that academics spend on various activities – teaching funded by HEFCE (EU undergraduate students); teaching funded by other sources; HEFCE-funded research; etc. English universities were required to supply this information: some required their academic employees to complete diaries for sample weeks.
- Teaching observation: lecturers observed by one of their peers. Before observation, observed required to complete form stating information regarding group of students and ILOs for the session. Observer required to complete feedback form following the observation. (De Angelis and Harvie 2009, 11–14)

### **6.1.2 The Assessment of Quality in Research**

Having already outlined in Chapter 3, (section 3.4.3) the operation of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (formerly known as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)), I will only provide a brief review here. Like its predecessor, the RAE, the REF is a program of peer review that requires individual researchers deemed “active” by their departments (“research units”) to submit four published papers (1 for each of the previous four years) for



evaluation by an expert panel according to a set of criteria established and outlined by the UK's Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The scores awarded to an individual researcher's research are assembled into a composite score for each 'research unit', each of which operates in one of 36 research areas designated as such by the HEFCE (Willmott 2003). In terms of the review process itself, the REF operates through a series of four main panels (A-D) and 36 sub-panels. Both main and sub-panels vary in terms of their overall size. Panel membership is determined via a nomination process to which both the universities and other "end-users" of university research have access. Generally, the majority of members on each panel are active and university-based researchers. It is also the norm, however, for private sector (industry) partners to occupy at least a couple of seats on any one assessment sub- or main panel. (HEFCE 2013)

Each sub-panel assesses each of the four submissions of each individual researcher on a weighted 4-point scale. The weightings reflect the government's (via HEFCE) definition of quality. Accordingly, quality is defined in respect of three "sub-profiles": the overall quality of a research "output" (accounting for 65% of the overall score); the impact that a given research output can be demonstrated to have had over the preceding four-year period (accounting for 20% of the overall score); and, the degree to which a research output impacts positively on the "research environment" within/around a particular discipline (accounting for 15% of the overall score). Once assessed, 100% of each

institution's research budget is allocated based on the score of each research unit and the number of active researchers therein. (HEFCE 2013)

The key difference between the RAE and the REF is the inclusion of the second, "impact" category. After some debate and study (by a HEFCE working group and subsequent to a pilot study), the HEFCE has determined that impact scores will be based on "case-study" submissions provided by each research unit for each active researcher. Ostensibly, this means that the definition of "impact" has been left for each individual institution or research unit to define, particularly given that the HEFCE has only gone so far as to outline that judgments around impact must relate to the, "reach and significance on the economy, society and/or culture"(HEFCE 2012, 48) of particular research outputs. On the other hand, and as others have noted, this does not mean that the universities have been given *carte blanche* either. Lacking a more vigorous set of standards or direction, institutions have indicated a willingness to rely heavily on bibliometric indices, informed by various weightings of "key" journals, as a basis for their case studies (Martin 2011; Yates 2005).

## **6.2 Political Economy of Quality Assessment in the United Kingdom**

Relative to the decentred and almost anarchic nature of the American system of higher education and QA, the UK's system is highly centralized and coordinated. In fact, since the end of the Second World War, the federal government has been the primary source of funding for the universities, which

only began charging tuition-fees to domestic students in 1998, when the Blair government first introduced them (Walford 1988, 48–49). And although the bureaucratic apparatus in and around the management of the sector has massively expanded since the 1980s, and particularly since the sector's main buffer/administrative body, the University Grants Committee (UGC), was formally wound-up and replaced by funding councils that were made directly accountable to parliament, where the UGC had not been, the sector's administration has remained relatively centralized (Shattock and Berdahl 1984; Walford 1988, 56–58). The British system is decidedly different from the US's in other ways too: though Britain is home to some of the oldest universities in the West, the story of massification is of a relatively recent vintage (Trow 1979). Furthermore, industrial capital in Britain never coalesced into a cohesive social force the way that it did in the US, let alone a cohesive social force that avidly supported a developmental program that aimed to leverage the universities to particular ends. Not until the 1980s, some 70 years after corporate America became fundamental to the development of American higher education, did finance and industrial capital in Britain cohere around a program that made the UK's universities an obvious part of an economic development model (see below and Chapter 5). It was also not until the 1980s that the administrative arrangements between the universities and the state changed dramatically in the UK. Until that time, state authorities permitted the universities a terrific degree of independence from both the scrutiny of the state and the machinations of

capital, not least through the provision of a block grant for both teaching and research (Shattock and Berdahl 1984). In other words, where American capital and then the American state had long rationed research and operational funding (through, among other things, 'strategic philanthropy' and the portability of the GI Bill) the British state paid for the massification of Britain's universities more equitably.

Thus, while the groundwork for neoliberalism had long-been set in the US, the kind of reproductive machinery necessary to support a services-based neoliberal political economy was, in the UK, something that needed - and got - substantially more attention and stewardship when in the 1980s, the Government set-about attempting to construct just that.<sup>120</sup> As a result, the evolution of QA in the UK is a short tale about a highly concerted and concentrated effort to transform the British political economy (and within it the universities) that begins with the election of Thatcher in 1979.

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, however, there is a longer "tail" to the UK's neoliberal turn under Thatcher. That 'tail' relates to four things: 1) the long-run decline and neglect of British manufacturing (Anderson

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<sup>120</sup> As I immediately mention, Thatcher did not come from thin air. After the lengthy post-war tenure of the Conservatives, (starting with Churchill's return in 1951), the labour party did little to effect the kind of change that might have extended Labour's stay in power. Indeed, during Labour's brief stints in power prior to Thatcher's victory in 1979, Wilson only set the ground for Labour's wholesale turn to the right and to Blair's more consistently neoliberal program.(Panitch and Leys 2001) When Thatcher later offered her, "there is no alternative" fait accompli, she was largely correct – in the face of economic crisis in the 1970's, Wilson's Labour government had accomplished little that might have enabled the working class to marshal the forces and resources necessary to both weather the turbulence of the 1970s, and mount a meaningful challenge to the neoliberal onslaught that later came with Thatcher.

1987; Leys 1985); 2) a period of intense economic dislocation and adjustment through the 1970s, which was capped off by the imposition of structural adjustment programs at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (Hickson 2005); 3) the inability of Britain's social democratic Left to offer an alternative (Panitch and Leys 2001); and, 4) the relative position of finance capital, and of global finance, within the British political economy such that the ability of left-forces to marshal an alternative was hamstrung (Leys 1990; Anderson 1987).

### **6.2.1 Towards Thatcherism: From Empire to Financial Centre**

By the end of the 1970s, British industry had been languishing for the better part of the previous hundred years. For Leys (1985; 1990), the slow decline of British industry through the twentieth century, and right up until its virtual elimination through the 1980s and 1990s, is partly linked to the political weakness of industrial capital in the British political economy. Accordingly, the early emergence of capitalism in the UK and thereby the construction of Britain's industrial advantage never involved the coalescence of industrial capital into a cohesive social force with a clear developmental program, simply because such was not necessary, at least not until other states had had caught up, by which time other social forces had assembled at the centre of the capitalist power bloc. In other words, British leadership was such that there was not a pressing need to establish consonance between, for example, large and small industrial firms, or those more oriented to the domestic market relative to those more involved in international trade. So long as Britain remained the predominant imperial power,

and the institution of private property was sufficiently protected, there was no need for industrial capital to take on the task of managing the affairs of state or of organizing politically for a developmental program that might have provided sufficient protection and support when competitors did emerge.<sup>121</sup> Even through the hey-day of corporatism, British industry never emerged as a cohesive fraction of capital or a hegemonic political force within either the ruling power bloc or the UK political economy. (Leys 1985, 14–16)

The story of finance capital in the UK is quite different. Not only did the operation of the Empire lead to the creation of a strong – and unified – group of merchant bankers and financiers, that faction of capital also took on a powerful institutional form, the Bank of England, which was hardly reformed when it was nationalized in 1946 (Anderson 1987; Leys 1986, 15; Baker 1999). Indeed, the relationship between Whitehall and the City was and remained strong throughout the post-war era, even when the establishment of capital controls and fixed exchange rates temporarily left finance capital with less room for manoeuvre (Leys 1990; Anderson 1987).<sup>122</sup> And to the extent that Thatcher’s program of liberalization and privatization did ultimately require the substantial

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<sup>121</sup> By “developmental agenda” I mean a nationalist developmental program traditionally associated with strategies around import substitution (tariff protection), capital controls, state subsidy and direction, and the like.

<sup>122</sup> Even through the post-war era, finance capital stood impatiently in-line behind labour – not productive or industrial capital – for primacy within the British state. Indeed, in as much as finance capital was temporarily brought to heel by Keynes in the post-war reconstruction, corporatism did not, in the UK, denote the hegemony of a productive program, as it did elsewhere. Again, corporatism in the UK was more about peak-level bargaining and the amelioration and management of class conflict, than it was about peak-level planning.

reform of the sector, that reform did little to weaken the relative power of finance capital, even if it did spell the end of British finance defined in terms of bank ownership. On the contrary, Thatcher's move to liberalize financial markets, which was capped off in 1986 with the abolition of fixed charges on the sale of stocks and bonds, (known as the "Big Bang" because of its massive effect on sales' volume) was arguably the *fin de siècle* in terms of the ascension of global finance within the British political economy. Simply, the Big Bang meant that the interests of British finance were identical to those of global finance.<sup>123</sup> Of course, the relative position of finance capital within the British political economy was arguably on display in the early 1980s too, when finance capital was able to corral the support of British industry for a policy program that was destined to lead to the full-scale deindustrialization of the UK (Baker 1999; Anderson 1987, 68–70).<sup>124</sup>

In the run-up to and following the emergence of QA in the UK then, finance capital was arguably the single-most powerful faction within the capitalist power-bloc, and moreover, was also clearly represented both in- and out-side of the

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<sup>123</sup> The 'Big Bang' prompted the sale of Britain's banking sector to so many increasingly "global banks", coming out of the US, Germany, and Japan.

<sup>124</sup> The Confederation of Business Industry (CBI) (the main business lobby in the UK) emerged as a cohesive force in the early 1980s when industrial capital fell in line behind finance capital and supported Thatcher's economic reforms, the great bulk of which involved forms of de- and re-regulation that thoroughly liberalized Britain's political economy, making British industry more, not less, susceptible to competition from abroad. In other words, the CBI established – and then proved – its mettle in support of a program (Thatcherism) that promised what it ultimately delivered: de-industrialization. Sparked by fears of an insurgency by organized labour itself operating under the auspices of a Labour government that was hardly capable of such, industrial capital proved willing to cut off its nose to spite its face. Based on interviews with several industrial captains, Leys notes that what motivated industrialists to so act, was not a sense of sectoral self-interest, but rather the fear that the alternative to Thatcher was Stalin!

British state. In fact, Alex Jarratt, who chaired the committee that produced the infamous “Jarratt Report” (discussed below), which is widely regarded as the first stage in the development of QA in the UK, came to the civil service after heading up the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), a long-standing, relatively inclusive, but traditionally ineffective, business lobby that became decidedly more effective at the very moment when finance capital asserted itself within the organization, then under Jarratt’s stewardship, and came out strongly in support of Thatcher (Leys 1985, 17). In its ascent within the political economy, and in its efforts in support of Thatcher, finance capital received a great deal of help by way of Britain’s Labour party. Indeed, for Panitch and Leys (Panitch and Leys 2001), as well as for Anderson (Anderson 1987), Thatcher’s utterly transformative program was presaged by an anemic and all-too conventional program on the part of Britain’s Labour Party under both Wilson and then Callaghan. Unwilling to take-on the task of mobilizing a working class movement in the manner advocated for by people such as Tony Benn, Labour found itself beholden to global financial interests during the 1976 Sterling Crisis as well as during the subsequent “Winter of Discontent”. Labour’s massive electoral defeat in 1979 did little to trigger the kind of re-evaluation that might have led Labour to endorse a more traditionally social-democratic program or to reign-in the emergent power of the British cum global banks. On the contrary, in the wake of Labour’s 1979 defeat, the Party elite organized to transform Labour into an electoral machine increasingly distanced from the trade-unions and closer to business. By the time



John Major's bid for re-election finally ended the nearly two decades long run of consecutive Conservative administrations, New Labour's anti-inflationary, anti-union, privatization program was entrenched. Rather than repudiate Thatcherism, Tony Blair, in part under the guidance of Gordon Brown's penchant for "post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory", embraced neoliberalism in precisely the same manner as had the Keynesian economists in the early 1980s (see Chapter 2). To the extent that there were any notable differences between Labour's brand of neoliberal policy and that of the Conservatives, such marked the relatively small gap between "roll-out" and "roll-back" neoliberalism. And as Leys points out, having adopted the mantle of low-inflation, independent central banking, and market-led growth, New Labour found that "it could not reverse itself on privatisation however abysmal the consequences (Leys 2001, 78)". In 1998, but a year after being elected to office for the first time, Tony Blair's government introduced tuition-fees for university students. (Panitch and Leys 2001; Leys 2001)

The inability of New Labour to distance itself from the Conservative program of privatization was more than just a result of ideological commitments to the market. During the Conservative's tenure in power, government had been completely restructured:

The Conservatives set in hand a radical reform of the civil service, driving through a separation between policy-making, to be done by a small central elite, and implementation, to be carried out by independent executive agencies organised on business lines, with chief executives on short-term contracts and performance-related pay, 'profit centres' charging other

branches of the state for their services, and annual budget cuts to encourage productivity 'savings'. They also imposed a quasi-market system of organisation on the National Health Services and the organisation of personal social services, and ensured that the nominally independent BBC followed suit...The Conservatives also expanded dramatically the number and scope of unelected 'quangos' until those organisations were responsible for a third of all public spending, almost as much as elected local government. (Leys 2001, 69–70)

In so transforming the state, the Thatcherites were thus able to affect the complete restructuring of the British political economy such that to contemplate a turn away from neoliberalism, should Labour have seriously considered it, would have been a monumental task. The labour movement had been neutered, the British political economy tightly linked to the machinations of global capital, and popular sentiment carefully manipulated and managed in the creation of an "enterprise culture". On this last point, it is worth highlighting that the ideological transformation Thatcherism was able to affect in the UK was such that it became the subject of fevered debate amongst radical academics in the 1990s. The concern of many left leaning scholars was to explain the apparent rootedness of neoliberalism, even despite its obvious failings in a variety of regards (growing inequality; the growth of state expenditures; the diminution of public services).

For Perry Anderson (Anderson 1987, 67–68), the 'rootedness' of neoliberalism in the UK has had to do with both the factors identified above, and just as crucially, the expansion of Britain's military and the government's willingness and capacity to crush dissent. In respect of the former, Anderson

highlights Thatcher's exploits in Argentina in 1982, while in respect of the latter he highlights Thatcher's sanctioning of police brutality in breaking the long-winded coal-miners' strike in 1984/85. Anderson also notes that Thatcher's program of privatization created,

...a popular clientele for the regime from a mass impropriation of public assets—a calculation [that] lent a certain persuasive force by the social tone of Thatcherite ideology itself. Petty-bourgeois, like the Premier herself, the new Conservative rhetoric could now appeal more readily than the patrician style of traditional Toryism to upper layers of the working class not always that distant now in residence and outlook from the lower-middle class itself. (Anderson 1987, 68)

Leys makes a similar point, albeit with reference to the Labour Party and its turn to Third Way Neoliberalism. For him, the ambitions of Labour's leadership in the run-up to the 1997 election meant that Labour built a business-friendly fundraising machine that promised to cater to the needs of the very clientele whose loyalty Thatcher has similarly been able to purchase (Leys 2001, 67). For Larner, the durability of neoliberalism has less to do with global market forces and policies of patronage than it does with policies that are transformative of the ideological milieu:

Neo-liberal strategies of rule, found in diverse realms including workplaces, educational institutions and health and welfare agencies, encourage people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well-being. This conception of the "active society" can also be linked to a particular politics of self in which we are all encouraged to "work on ourselves" in a range of domains, including the "counter cultural movements" outside the purview of traditional conceptions of the political...Welfare agencies are now to be governed, not directly from above, but through technologies such as

budget disciplines, accountancy and audit. In association with this "degovernmentalization" of the welfare state, competition and consumer demand have supplanted the norms of "public service." Correspondingly, the citizen is re-specified as an active agent both able and obliged to exercise autonomous choices. (Larner 2000, 12)

Of course, one need hardly abandon the present focus on the machinations of global capital and the more material bases of British neoliberalism in order to obtain a sense of the popular appeal of neoliberalism in Britain (and elsewhere). Indeed, as Leys points out immediately after outlining the nature of institutional reform of the British state under Thatcher (i.e. the advent of quango government)<sup>125</sup>, he too turns to the issue of audit:

The counterpart to the quasi-commercialisation of central and local government was the proliferation of auditing, i.e. the use of business derived concepts of independent supervision to measure and evaluate performance by public agencies and public employees, from civil servants and school teachers to university lecturers and doctors: 'environmental audit, value for money audit, management audit, forensic audit, data audit, intellectual property audit, medical audit, teaching audit, and technology audit emerged and, to varying degrees, acquired a degree of institutional stability and acceptance...very few people have been left untouched by these developments...' In place of a society of citizens with the democratic power to ensure the effective and proper use of collective resources, and relying on a large measure of trust in the public sector, there emerged a society of 'auditees', anxiously preparing for audits and inspections. A punitive culture of 'league tables' developed (purporting to show the relative efficiency and inefficiency of universities or schools or hospitals). Inspection agencies were charged with 'naming and shaming' 'failing' individual teachers, schools, social work departments, and so on:

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<sup>125</sup> Thatcher, and subsequently Blair, pursued a program of privatization which saw myriad government services transferred to private organizations that had some kind of arms-length tie to the government. As such, Thatcher's government was described as a kind of, "quasi autonomous non-governmental organization", or "QUANGO" Government.

private firms were invited to take over and run ‘failing’ institutions. (Leys 2001, 70)

It is no doubt also relevant that aside from the transformation of the British state and the dominance of finance capital within the British political economy (which again involved the parallel annihilation of British manufacturing) the nature of most people’s work also changed. As data from the OECD makes clear, finance capital came through the 1980s to account for a remarkable amount of domestic wealth in the UK. More than this, the proportion of workers in the services sectors soared from the 1970s on, and today accounts for some 80% of employment.<sup>126</sup> As was discussed in Chapter 2, the production of services presented capital with a problem in terms of the measurement of productivity (the productivity paradox), which was and remains vital to the reproduction of the capital relationship. Though there was something of a lag, albeit a relatively short one in the case of the UK, the emergence of QA in and around the British state and the British universities paralleled the advent of not just Thatcherism and the re-emergence of global finance, but the adaptation of managerial technologies from the shop floor to the new corporate, services based environments that came to dominate the British political economy. To put it in terms an institutionalist might appreciate, there was a significant degree of “overdetermination” in the emergence and evolution of QA in the UK’s system of higher education.

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<sup>126</sup> OECD Stan Structural Analysis Database v.2011. I have used here the OECD’s proxy for finance capital: “FIRE”, finance (i.e. banking and related services), insurance, and real estate.

### **6.2.2 The Development of QA in the UK after 1980**

Before we can begin to consider the specific nature of QA in UK it is worth pointing out that there are in fact two separate literatures that tell the story of QA in the UK, one which deals with the development of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (i.e. the assessment of research), and one which deals with the development of QA and audit processes around teaching. This division likely reflects the fact that the assessment of research and that of teaching are managed by different institutions and via entirely different processes. In a number of ways, however, the division within the literature must itself be made part of any political economy of QA in British higher education. At a high level of analysis, it is important to recognize that the bureaucratic apparatus of the capitalist state tends to impose and institutionalize what are often artificial divisions between different “sectors” or policy areas. By obscuring from view the common logic underlying the overall program and system of QA such divisions, make it difficult to stitch together a coherent picture of public policy around higher education or of neoliberalism. As a result, the narrative split between the story of QA in terms of both research and teaching functions to maintain the status-quo.<sup>127</sup>

Nonetheless, it bears keeping in mind that the institutional and narrative separation of the two QA tracks has been functional in terms of the degree to

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<sup>127</sup> I do not mean to suggest that such artifices as the division between portfolios within the capitalist state were designed to be functional (i.e. I am not arguing for a crudely functionalist history of the development of the capitalist state). I am however, arguing that it is possible to both understand the particular nature of any capitalist state and to examine the consequent functionality that any state-form might take-on.

which opposition to the broad sweep of changes was divided, muted, and contained.

The separation between two QA tracks is also significant in that it speaks clearly to another artifact of massified and neoliberalized higher education: the apparent separation of teaching and research. In fact, it has become common to find scholars who argue, contra the allegedly “traditional” view, that teaching and research are not usefully related (Qamar uz Zaman 2004). Of course, that literature and the neoliberal mythology upon which it is based, it itself a by-product of diminished quality, wherein undergraduate teaching has become so debased and rudimentary that the argument becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy. Undergraduate students, in other words, have become ill-equipped to read, understand, and usefully comment on the work of their teachers.

Perhaps most important to note is the fact that the process of commodification has arguably been greatly enhanced via the division between separate assessment tracks, as it arguably has been in the US. Both processes can be broken down more effectively into their constituent parts, measured, and ultimately managed. This is why, for instance, the use in the 2008 RAE, of a “continuous grading-scale”, wherein each department (unit of analysis/cost centre) was given a score based on the accumulated scores of each individual research-active participant, whose work was individually graded on a three-point scale is so significant: it is evidence of efforts to improve the accuracy of measurement and the unity of the overall system. Such forms of division and measurement have parallels in the

UK's teaching assessment processes, which track and measure things like: contact hours, the use of visual and audio communications technologies etc. Simply, such measures are essentially identical to Taylor's time and motion studies.

All this said, there are striking similarities between the narrative accounts of how QA developed in each track: both literatures tend to discuss, though only passingly, Thatcherism and/or neoliberalism; both literatures tend to highlight successive governments' concern to promote closer links between the universities and industry; both narratives suggest that the nature and operation of the QA institutions are causatively linked to tensions between the universities, which wanted autonomy, and the government, which looked to promote efficiency and economic utility. In other words, the universities are generally cast as either victims or as proactive but reluctant "partners" that were constantly responding to intense and ever-intensifying governmental pressure.<sup>128</sup>

### **6.2.3 Cutting Research out of Base Funding: Thatcher and the Establishment of the RAE**

Though there were some programmatic antecedents to the system of QA that developed in the 1980s and 90s, they were nowhere near as comprehensive, as bureaucratically involved and complex, as what began to take shape after the election of Thatcher's Conservatives in 1979. According to Desmond Ryan (1998), almost immediately upon its election, the Conservative Government

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<sup>128</sup> For the reasons outlined above, I have attempted to stitch together a single narrative account of the UK's overall system of QA.



constantly and effectively beat a populist drum with the aim of building popular support for cuts to higher education. Ryan notes,

...There came with the cuts in resources a demoralizing and politically disabling message which was to become a Tory refrain: 'higher education had only itself to blame for the cuts.' Expenditure on higher education had all along been investment in industry—'where were the dividends? (Ryan 1998, 15)

When combined with the rhetoric of privatization and efficiency, the case for targeting funds for the purposes of research and otherwise cutting transfers for higher education seemed imminently reasonable. Of course, this populist rhetoric was not just rhetoric. Thatcher's brand of neoliberalism was rooted in a belief in the virtue of the market as the best mechanism for the allocation of funding. Not only did the Thatcherites conflate quality with utility, they also understood the market as the most efficient means by which to evaluate that utility.<sup>129</sup> In the absence of a market-type allocation mechanism (i.e. when funding was allocated equitably, as had been the case prior to 1981), knowledge, at least of any meaningful/useful form, would according to Thatcher and her acolytes, wither and die.

Neither Thatcher's rhetoric nor her Government's decision in 1981 to cut higher education expenditures by 10% ignited much in the way of opposition. For Willmott (2003), the muted nature of the opposition to the 1981 cuts related

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<sup>129</sup> As I outlined in Chapter 2, the neoliberal conception of utility involves the conflation of "market utility" (i.e. what is profitable), with use-value (i.e. real utility). In Hayek's world, the market operates as a kind of super-computer, rationally coordinating investment and purchasing such that the best, most useful technologies/knowledge are/is produced. He saw this coordinative power as utterly eclipsing that of humans (Mirowski 2011).

to the way in which the overall reduction was selectively and unevenly imposed. While the size of the overall funding envelope was set-down by the Government, each institutions' individual allocation was decided by the sector's "buffer" institution, the University Grants Committee (UGC), which was anxious to revive its relevance within the sector, it having suffered seriously through the 1970s.<sup>130</sup> Though the presumption by some was that the UGC was careful in its selection process such that more capital intensive programs were spared while others bore the brunt of the cuts, this was never made clear – the decision-making process was completely opaque (Butler 1982, 266–267). That said, the UGC had previously outlined some interest in a research selectivity exercise and was by all accounts careful to cultivate a relationship with the Conservatives, particularly given fears of government incursions into the sector (Butler 1982; Shattock and Berdahl 1984). Whatever its intent, the UGC's system of selective allocation had the effect of dividing the universities. The universities that survived the Conservative axe were loath to question why they had survived. Where the cuts were significant but not disastrously so, opposition was present, but muted. And where the cuts were massive, opposition was still more muted, though only because administrators were pressed into damage control (Butler 1982; Jones

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<sup>130</sup>Butler (1982) is also careful to note that the UGC had, by the late 70's become increasingly irrelevant. The UGC's refrain, which involved annual demands for ever-more money, had become both predictable and frustrating for Whitehall, which wanted the UGC to deliver ways to lower unit-costs and create efficiencies. In as much as the UGC finally stepped up to the proverbial plate in selectively administering the 1981 cuts, the Government and Whitehall had already begun looking for an alternative and presumably more cooperative organization through which to transform the universities into "efficient" operations. That the UGC had so bungled the administration of the 1981 cuts, likely only served to hasten its demise.

1991; Willmott 2003). Opposition also focused (and was arguably misdirected) not just on the opacity of the UGC's selectivity exercise, but on the UGC's obvious mismanagement. According to Butler (1982), who nonetheless expressed admiration for the UGC:

First, they imposed cuts of widely varying degrees of severity (from 30 or 40% at places like Bradford, Aston and Salford to actual increases in budget at places like York and Bath); they did this without publishing the criteria on which they had based their judgments, or the procedures by which the criteria had been applied, or the objectives which they were designed to serve. And in announcing their results they got some of their figures wrong, they issued advice which was contradictory, or impossible to reconcile with advice issued in other directions, they asked universities to preserve some subjects they did not have and, shortly after it was all over, they discovered they had made an £8m mistake, which required some of the universities which had been hardest hit the first time round to lose further sums of several hundreds of thousands of pounds. (Butler 1982: p.266-267)

In the wake of the 1981 cuts and the opposition it engendered, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), in close cooperation with the Government and less-so the UGC, created two subcommittee's within the CVCP. The first committee, the "Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities", was tasked with examining,

whether management structures and systems [within the universities] were effective in ensuring that decisions are fully informed, that optimum value is obtained from the use of resources, that policy objectives are clear, and that accountabilities are clear and monitored. (CVCP and Jarratt 1985, sec. 1.2)

The second committee, the "Academic Standards Group", when it reported in 1986, discussed,

three formal codes of practice (on external examiners, postgraduate training and research, and research degree examination appeals), as well as two papers on the maintenance and monitoring of standards, which offered universities 'points of reference' for self-comparison. (Brown 2004, 36)

According to Jones (1991), the CVCP in forming these committees was motivated by a desire to keep the Government at bay and the UGC in check following the 1981 cuts. In other words, "it was a means of averting further intervention by the Government, whether directly or through the UGC, by demonstrating that the universities took seriously the pursuit of internal efficiency" (Jones 1991, 148). To put this still another way, the Committees were the CVCP's attempt to resurrect some autonomy! Neither of the committees challenged however, the basic idea underlying the 1981 cuts, which had been made according to a set of criteria that were undoubtedly related to the issue of research, given the different "overhead" costs of which the UGC was mindful in making decisions about how the overall funding envelope was to be apportioned. Furthermore, the CVCP, in setting up separate Committees arguably pressed the issue somewhat further than had the UGC in establishing separate research-assessment and teaching assessment tracks. Either way, the points that need to be highlighted with respect to the 1981 cuts are: 1) that cuts were made selectively on the basis of research, thereby separating funding for research and teaching; 2) the fact that this program of selective funding was not challenged by the universities; and, 3) the fact that whatever consternation the universities did voice related exclusively to the opaque process via which funds were rationed.

The first committee, which was chaired by none other than the former chair of the Confederation of British Industry, Alex Jarratt, delivered its report in 1985, to the resounding approval of the Conservative Government (Jones 1991, 149). For Jones, the Committee's purview suggested that it was to be concerned with what he calls, "accounting and control structures (ACS)" (Jones 1991, 143), which were already an on-going concern for Thatcher's government. In fact, the Government had used similar such efficiency studies to affect change in the National Health Service. For Jones therefore, the idea that Jarratt would not extend "to issues of academic judgment nor be concerned with the academic and educational policies, practices or methods of universities" (CVCP and Jarratt 1985, sec. 1.1), is preposterous (Jones 1991, 146). But this does not mean that the Committee's work or the Report itself intentionally obscured the nonsensical divide between matters that were putatively financial and those that were putatively just academic. Again, Hayek's belief in the efficiency of a marketplace of ideas was similarly trusted by the Thatcherites, of which Jarratt was most certainly one. There was no need to adjudicate on 'the academic and educational policies, practices or methods of universities', so as to ensure that, 'optimum value is obtained from the use of resources,' if and when decisions around the allocation of resources were, 'fully informed' as to the competitive (i.e. market) potential of particular undertakings.

Overall, the Jarratt Report was a bold argument and blueprint for the transformation of the sector into a kind of industrial enterprise both in form and

content. University Vice Chancellors were to become CEO's, department heads were to administer funds strategically, and the whole enterprise was to operate on the basis of metrics and measures that were to flow to the centre (i.e. to the Government) rapidly and constantly. So as to make the university more responsive to the needs of industry, Jarratt also recommended the restructuring of governing boards. Here the Report stressed the importance of involving "lay" people from outside of the academy (but from inside the upper-echelons of business), into the decision-making process (Jones 1991). In essence, Jarratt proposed a formula that would protect the autonomy of the universities by having the universities both adopt the kind of private-sector managerial practices that the Government so admired and by inviting inside the university, the key private-sector interests that the Government appeared so intent on forcing the universities to address. Notably, at more or less the same time, in 1986, the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), a lobby group made-up of the largest and most powerful corporations in the UK, was formed and began pressing a policy program that drew very generously from the spirit and content of the Jarratt Report. In other words, Jarratt was followed by the emergence of a powerful and cohesive lobby made-up of the leadership from within the capitalist power-bloc and which focussed on the issue of higher education exclusively.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> As I outline in the next chapter, the development of the CIHE in Britain had a notable parallel in Canada, where capital organized under the Business University Forum in 1979 and the Corporate University Forum in 1983.

Also in 1986, the CVCP's second committee delivered the "Reynolds Report", which, as was mentioned, had looked to establish a basis upon which to assess "teaching quality". Despite these efforts on the part of the universities, the Government remained skeptical, particularly with respect to the idea in focusing on the assessment of "teaching quality" the universities would be able to operate efficiently with respect to the best practices set-out by both Reynolds *and* Jarratt. In terms of the assessment of teaching quality, follow-up on the part of the Government was not immediate however, apparently because the issue of research selectivity was then of primary importance (Kogan and Hanney 2000: p. 104-105). In 1988, fully two years after the CVCP re-established its Academic Standards Group and following the Group's second report, the CVCP formed the Academic Audit Unit as a permanent group within the CVCP responsible for auditing institutions' internal QA processes and communicating best practices in this regard.

Meanwhile, research selectivity remained front and centre following the Jarratt Report, particularly given that both the Report and the CIHE had supported the idea of a research selectivity exercise on the basis of clearly established (i.e. transparent) criteria. Neither the Jarratt Report nor the CIHE were, however, much more detailed in their recommendations. As such, the selectivity process was left for the UGC to set-out, which it rushed to do. Indeed, in response to the Jarratt Report, continued pressure from Government and the CIHE, as well as the criticisms that had been levied against it in the wake of the

first selectivity exercise, the UGC administered, in 1986, a selectivity exercise differently than it had the 1981 cuts. The now formally named, “Research Assessment Exercise” was not much better managed than the 1981 cuts had been, however:

Relevant information was hastily assembled and assessed by committees of three experts sitting in judgment over university ‘cost centres’ that were evaluated as outstanding, above average, average or below average. The information comprised a two page description of the achievements of the ‘cost centre’ plus a list of its five best publications during the past five years; the number of research grants, studentships and ‘new blood’ posts; income from industry and other sources, and fellowships, etc. awarded (Willmott 2003, 135)

The response from the universities to the 1986 exercise was much the same as it was to the 1981 exercise. Accordingly, the loudest voices from within the universities’ administrative ranks complained that the UGC had failed to make the process transparent or the consequences clear. According to Willmott (2003), the recommended corrective was a program of peer-review. In saying this, it is important not to overlook the fact that both the 1981 and 1986 exercises had in fact operated on the basis of peer review, albeit via a process that was largely informal, ad hoc, opaque, and thereby unsatisfactory to the universities. For Tapper (2007) this point is crucial: the reliance on peer review as the basis of assessment reflected the degree to which the process enjoyed then, as it does now, terrific legitimacy within the academy, from which the upper ranks within the UGC were drawn (Tapper 2007, 193). The UGC’s use of peer review in ’81



and '86 therefore reflected a kind of consensus that only deepened in subsequent rounds of the RAE, especially as the process and evaluative criteria were clarified.

#### **6.2.4 Deepening QA: The Further Normalization of Research Selectivity and Teaching Quality Assessment**

Well ahead of the third RAE in 1989, the Government, in 1987, released its White Paper, “Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge”, in which it clarified that the aims and purposes of higher education were: “to serve the economy more efficiently,” and “to have close links with industry and commerce, and to promote enterprise” (DFES 1987). “Meeting the Challenge” also laid the groundwork for the government’s Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988) that followed the next year. The ERA made several significant changes to the governance of higher education in the UK. First, the ERA abolished both the UGC and the colleges’ and polytechnics’ own “buffer” institution, the National Advisory Board (NAB). Both buffers were replaced with funding councils, the Universities Funding Council (UFC) and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC).<sup>132,133</sup> Unlike their predecessors, the Funding Councils were statutory bodies and thus formally part of government. Whereas the UGC was staffed by sector insiders that often operated on the basis of custom and tradition, the Funding Councils would be staffed by career bureaucrats and administrators and were to operate

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<sup>132</sup> The NAB and the PCFC were responsible for the UK’s numerous colleges and polytechnics.

<sup>133</sup> In 1996, the Government of Ontario, which was then controlled by the Progressive Conservative Party, eliminated the Province’s “buffer” body, the Ontario Council on University Affairs. The move was wholly reminiscent of what Thatcher’s government did in 1988.

according to codified rules and regulations. Tapper (Tapper 2007, 31–34) sees this kind of formalism as intentional – the Thatcherites wanted to engineer a cultural brake with, and even a rebuke of, the academy and its customary *modus operandi*. The formation of the Funding Councils also meant that policy development and administration was centralized. This centralization meant that the Government would have a direct line to affect the structure of the system (34). For the Thatcherites, this centralization was seen as useful in terms of the creation of a quasi-market in higher education and university based research (34–38).

While QA can operate through myriad different and competing organizations, as it does in the US, the absence of long-standing traditions around this kind of regulation in the UK meant that there was no system external to the state which could usefully be relied upon to facilitate the kind of transformation that had already taken place in the US. As such, there was no private-sector means by which to make both the comparison and rationalization of taught-programs and research possible. It was vital therefore that the British state establish a system of QA in order to administer the progressive privatization of higher education. In this regard, the Funding Councils operated as do central banks, to establish and maintain the “value” not of a currency, but of university research and educated labour.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Given that the ERA did not outline the specifics of how future RAE’s should be conducted it remains an open question whether or not the Government was then concerned to have the process operate more publicly than it had under the stewardship of the UGC. Of course,

Notably, the ERA did not actually enshrine the RAE, or any such selectivity exercise. The UFC and the PCFC were however, empowered to perform whatever exercise they deemed necessary in order to allocate funding optimally. Of course, the UGC had already performed two selectivity exercises and started planning for the next. Moreover, as the first chair of the UFC was also the last chair of the UGC, it came as no surprise that the UFC stuck with the research assessment program started by the UGC in administering the 1989 RAE. Indeed, while it used a slightly more transparent methodology, the 1989 RAE was strikingly similar to the 1981 and 1986 exercises.(Willmott 2003)<sup>135</sup>

The government's 1991 White Paper, "Higher Education: A New Framework", went decidedly further than had the 1988 Education Reform Act in establishing the framework for the assessment of teaching, thereby bringing this side of the QA program more or less up to speed with developments on the research side. As Brown has described, the 1991 White Paper set-out the Government's plan to increase participation rates and thereby increase the size of the higher education sector (Brown 2004, 37). The Government was

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the Government was concerned to establish quasi-markets as well the centralization and formalization of the process. It bears keeping in mind as well that the opacity of the 1981 and 1986 exercises was therefore anathema to the task at hand.

<sup>135</sup> The Councils were also able to do this because the enabling legislation required that the universities surrender to the Councils whatever information the Councils requested. More than this, the power of academics to direct the Councils was circumscribed. The ERA required that only six and no more than nine of the Council's fifteen member board be drawn from the sector. The remaining members (between nine and six) were to be appointed by the Secretary of State who, the ERA directed, "shall have regard to the desirability of including persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, industrial, commercial or financial matters or the practice of any profession" (ERA 1988: sec131(3)b).

simultaneously concerned to keep costs down, ensure that the universities were more responsive to the needs of business and industry, and generally more efficient in their operation. The White Paper clarified that the path to such efficiency was to be found through competition, which the Government further held could only happen within a unitary sector (market), of higher education. In other words, the Government planned to abolish the so-called “binary divide” between the universities on the one hand, and the polytechnics and colleges on the other. The two separate funding councils that had been legislated into existence in the 1988 ERA were therefore to be folded into a single body, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (there was one such body for each of Scotland and Wales as well), which would in turn oversee funding throughout the unified system, both in terms of the RAE, which was to continue, and now in terms of teaching quality assessment. (Brown 2004, 37–40)

The assessment and assurance of teaching quality was to be performed via two bodies: an assessment unit within the new HEFCE, and a separate body, collectively owned by the universities (i.e. through their administrations), which would be concerned not with actually assessing outcomes, but with auditing institutions’ internal QA programs and policies. This obviously confusing arrangement emerged out of negotiations both within the sector (between the universities and the colleges and polytechnics), as well as between the sector and government; while there was total accord in terms of the need for a unified/unitary system of assessment and audit, there was decidedly less

agreement over what kind of a process was to be employed and to what extent the Government would be able to intervene in and/or direct that process. For Brown the key point of contention between the Government and the universities had to do with the difference between assessment and audit. As audit reports contain “what is at most a threshold judgement, and have no financial consequences for the institution involved” while, assessment reports “contain a ranking or grading, or a series of grading and do have financial consequences for the institution” (Brown 2004, 40).

As was mentioned, the Government’s plan created division within and between the institutions too. Where the colleges and polytechnics were eager to see a vigorous system of assessment and ranking, the universities were somewhat more reticent. Brown relates this to the fact that the colleges and polytechnics had long been subject to various forms of assessment and were confident of their ability to score relatively better than were the universities when it came to the assessment of teaching (they ultimately scored much worse). This division was apparently somewhat less animated than it might have been, however, because all parties were concerned to press back against the Government’s suggestion in the White Paper that legislation would enable the government to side-step any QA arrangements and intervene directly whenever it felt such was necessary. Again, the universities, as well as the colleges and polytechnics, wanted full and complete “ownership” of what they agreed would be a unitary body concerned

with quality assurance. The particular methodologies were, at that point, less examined. (Brown 2004, 41–43)

Discussions between and within the sector following the 1991 White Paper led ultimately to a settlement formalized in the Government's 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. Accordingly, the Government abolished the binary divide and offered university status to any college or polytechnic that wished to take it up, which most immediately did. The system of teaching quality assessment outlined in the legislation was bifurcated: the CVCP's Academic Audit Unit was to become the Higher Education Quality Council, a sector owned "arm" of the CVCP, which would audit institutions' internal QA programs, advise the Funding Council accordingly, and publish its findings annually. At the same time, the HEFCE would oversee the "assessment" of universities via its own internal "assessment unit", which was to conduct subject level assessments that would ultimately feed into allocation decisions by the HEFCE. Thus, the institutions were allowed to maintain some control over the quality audit process, albeit less than they would have liked, and the Funding Council had direct access to assessments which could in turn be used as the basis of funding decisions. But, as Brown notes, the bifurcated model was never very satisfactory to anyone. The universities, both "new" and "old", HEFCE, and the Government began

discussions concerning a more unified system almost immediately upon the passage of the 1992 legislation (Brown 2004, 44–48).<sup>136</sup>

In terms of the RAE, the end of the binary divide meant that the 1992 exercise was the first time that both the colleges and polytechnics and the universities were forced to compete against one another for access to the same level of funding as had been previously given to the UFC (Willmott 2003, 134). The 1992 exercise also introduced the distinction between “research-active” and “research in-active” workers, wherein departments (units of assessment) were forced to submit four publications from “research-active” employees and to list the number of “research in-active” people that were on the payroll. According to Willmott, this had at least a few significant consequences (134). First, the active/inactive distinction invoked “a model of personal ownership of publications” (134) which thoroughly undermined the process in which intellectual work was (and is) actually developed. In fact, ‘research in-active’ academics can and do contribute significantly to the development of ideas and new knowledge. In the natural sciences, where the number of multi-authored works, sometimes with over 50 authors, is increasingly the norm, the RAE’s focus on an author’s ability to demonstrate ownership, is simply a call to unethical behaviour (Mirowski 2011, location 3884). The active/inactive distinction was also easily read as a distinction between relatively valuable academics and those

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<sup>136</sup> By “new” universities, I am referring to the colleges and polytechnics, which were turned into degree granting universities by the 1992 Act.

of less apparent value and importance. As such, the division between active and in-active researchers “directly violated the ethic of collegiality” (Willmott 2003, 134). The HEFCE did not, however, stop there. In 1996 the HEFCE outlined further changes to the RAE and again indicated its intent to direct the research activities of the universities. Willmott highlights three changes to the 1996 exercise that are significant in this regard:

1. Units of assessment were forced to describe how internal research plans were responsive to the Government’s two commercialization initiatives, the Technology Foresight Program, and the Forward Look program.
2. The HEFCE directed assessment panels to conduct their assessment on the basis of a revised definition of research, which expressly sought to recognize the work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors.
3. The HEFCE announced new ratings categories, thereby expanding the 5 level system into a seven level system. Accordingly, the third tier was broken up into 3a and 3b and to the highest level was added a 5\*.  
(Willmott 2003, 135–137)

Following the 1996 Review and in spite of concerns being expressed by a growing number within the academy, the HEFCE subsequently announced that units that scored 3b or lower in the 2001 exercise would not receive any funding. The disciplinary line was being reinforced. Willmott, following McNay (1998), suggests that by de-funding certain programs, neither the HEFCE nor the Treasury were looking to close those departments that didn’t receive any funding. On the contrary, the hope was that un-funded programs would become entrepreneurial and thereby find alternative sources of finance by way of industry partners (136). Willmott also argues that this hope was subsequently clarified in



the Government's 1998 White Paper, "Our Competitive Future: building the knowledge driven economy" (Department of Trade and Industry 1998), as well as the by CVCP's 1999 report on the issue (CVCP 1999).

#### **6.2.4 Establishing Unitary Control for Quality Assessment of Teaching**

Five years after the Government introduced its bifurcated model of teaching quality assessment, in 1997, plans were announced for the creation of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), as a unified and sector-owned body that was responsible for both "assessment" and "audit" and as such, for supplying the HEFCE with information regarding its findings (Brown 2004, 122). As Brown has outlined, the lengthy discussions that presaged the creation of the QAA related mainly to the reluctance on the part of various parties (the "old" universities, HEQC) to consent to assessment processes at all similar to the ones with which the "new" universities were long familiar, the colleges and polytechnics having been subject to such forms of assessment under the pre-1988 regime. To internal divisions within the sector (between "new" and "old") was added the initial reluctance on the part of the HEFCE to either or both allow the universities to collectively control whatever institution would in turn control a unified quality assurance system and to relent on the issue of assessment, which the 'old' universities were reluctant to embrace to any significant degree (Brown 2004, 105–115).

Again, and more substantively, the various disagreements which Brown (2004), Watson (2006), and others have documented relate to the

aforementioned distinction between “audit” and “assessment”: whereas audit was seen as a means by which to review internal – and thereby more autonomous – quality assurance and improvement practices, assessment was conceived of as a heavy-handed and pecuniary approach “from above”. Rather than respect the autonomy of academics, assessment entailed definitive judgments in respect of academic outcomes and the evaluation of such outcomes upon a single – and imposed – set of criteria, which was understood as a serious threat to academic freedom, particularly given the links between assessments and funding. Concern, in other words, was not just with the way in which the results of assessment could be used to rationalize space, but also the nature of what was taught and how. Wrapped up in this were some additional concerns over not just standardization, but the way in which standards provided incentive to meet, not exceed, low and minimum levels of achievement. For critics like Brown, there were concerns about how “fitness-for-purpose” type standards would limit the drive for “enhancement” (Brown 2004, 74–99).

Though agreement was ultimately reached by way of the QAA, the balance between assessment and audit was not finally reached until just before the QAA actually began operating, when the so-called “Dearing Report”(1997) was released following over a year of consultation (Brown 2004, 116). The Report maintained that teaching quality assessment was to operate in part on the basis of a “framework of qualifications” (Dearing 1997, para. 42) and alongside “benchmark statements about standards” (para. 50). Of course, in as much as

Dearing was directive, it remained for the QAA to work-out with the universities, the HEFCE, and the Government, how and what such evaluations were to be performed. Brown does a reasonably useful job of documenting the problems that were encountered: the timing of “academic review”, as the audit/assessment process was to be called, had to be negotiated; the nature of summative reports, and whether or not they were to include summative grades was at issue; and the precise nature of both the national qualifications framework and subject benchmark statements needed to be developed. Of the nature and extent of the wrangling that went on between the various parties it is only necessary for present purposes to note that the HEFCE’s trenchant demand that evaluations end with the award of a summative grade won-out (Brown 2004, 99).

The contests and deliberations that went into the making of Academic Review, and indeed its predecessors, illustrate quite clearly, one of the primary arguments advanced in this thesis concerning the nature of QA, namely, that it is essentially about the renegotiation of capital, understood as a social relationship. Brown’s (2004) account of the development of quality assurance in the UK, and indeed the intensely personal critiques it engendered,<sup>137</sup> offer but a mild indication of the degree to which the most concerned critics within the mainstream were not fearful of audit per se, so much as they were concerned to develop a system of audit that could help to improve higher education, provide for institutional autonomy, *and* satisfy the Government’s demands for

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<sup>137</sup> See for instance (Watson 2006)

“accountability” and “transparency”. In other words, those that championed the cause of audit over assessment saw in such the potential to save higher education in the UK from its wholesale commercialization. Audit, however, was ultimately hardly different from assessment, at least in so far as it too was always to be evaluated relative to the kinds of criteria set-out by Thatcher in the early 1980’s. In other words, the sharp edge of “practicality” and “value” were not dulled merely by conducting audits of institution level QA processes, which were themselves to be evaluated against primarily these (practicality related) criteria.<sup>138</sup> If the hopes, dreams, and (mis)apprehensions of QA’s mainstream critics/developers were not in and of themselves naive, it is hard to imagine what they were exactly. Brown, for instance, begins his account of the development of QA in the UK with a discussion of neoliberalism and the faith that neoliberals (mis)place in the market (Brown 2004). At any rate, audit did not triumph over assessment.<sup>139</sup> The QAA’s reports have been (i.e. since 1997/1998), and still are, “crystallized” into summative grades on a three point scale.

In terms of timing, then, the entire oeuvre of QA’s two “tracks” also seemed more settled by around 1998. The earlier emergence and development of the RAE suggests that it operated as a kind of lever via which the rationalization

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<sup>138</sup> Tapper (2007, 163) highlights and critiques Brown’s arguments for self-regulation in precisely this way.

<sup>139</sup> In fact, it is reasonable to suggest that individuals like Brown were much more than just ‘naïve’. I would argue that their naiveté speaks both to the kind of theoretical deficiencies found in their analyses (discussed in Chapter 2), and to a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between use-value and exchange-value under capitalism.

of funding according to neoliberal logic was normalized. More than this, the RAE also provided an example of how the development of QA was progressively deepened and used to affect the kind of cultural shift that Thatcher had intended. The development of teaching assessment procedures followed the RAE model closely. Each progressive stage in the development of QA on this track led, as had been the case with the RAE, to a program that, by linking funding to ever-more detailed kinds of “product specifications”, pressed the process of commodification forward, not seamlessly, but forward nonetheless.

#### **6.2.5 “Unexpected Outcomes” and the Cumulative, not Corrective Impacts of the Quasi-Market**

Between 1996 and the 2001 Exercise, the RAE process remained relatively unchanged. However, the results of the 2001 Exercise produced what Tapper (2007) refers to as a “crisis”. Without re-producing Tapper’s account, the upshot is that a higher than anticipated number of programs received a 5 or a 5\* rating, thereby producing concern on the part of both the Government and the HEFCE that the institutions were either gaming the system, or that the system had become subject to significant grade inflation (42). What followed was a series of reviews that ultimately led to the further deepening of the trajectory established in 1981, when the UGC first imposed selective cuts. According to Tapper, the HEFCE ultimately found cause to revise the RAE more mildly than was suggested in their internal, but public, review. On the other hand, the Government was stalwart in its calls for a more substantial revision. In 2003, the Government

made clear its frustration with the results of the 2001 RAE. In its 2003 White Paper, “The Future of Higher Education”, the Government clarified that HEFCE needed to “distinguish between the strong and the strongest” (Department for Education and Skills 2003, 23). The White Paper also outlined the Government’s intention to provide additional monies to the best research intensive institutions before the 2008 RAE, when the next exercise was scheduled to take place. Accordingly, particular 5\* institutions were singled out for a 6\* rating, and provided additional money (30). Additionally, the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology published two reports, one in 2002 and one in 2003, following the HEFCE’s release of its Report on the 2001 RAE. In those reports, the Select Committee voiced its desire to see several of the suggestions that had been made in the HEFCE report but not taken up by HEFCE, actually implemented. Most notably, these included the use of “metrics” (such as bibliometric indices) in the selective process and the development of a multi-track evaluative process that would force under-performing institutions to forgo participation in the RAE, in favour of other, less vigorous evaluative mechanisms, which would in turn be linked with smaller and sequestered pots of funding. (Tapper 2007, 231–232)

Again, as Tapper notes, the HEFCE resisted and carried out the 2008 RAE in more or less the same way that it had the 2001 Exercise (232). For Tapper, the HEFCE’s intransigence reflects the degree to which it is beholden to interests within the Academy, which uniformly rejected the proposed use of metrics and a

multi-track funding solution. At the same time, Tapper does draw attention to the one key change that was made in the 2008 Exercise: departments were graded on a “continuous grading scale derived from individual ratings rather than a more sharply defined hierarchy derived from fitting (shoehorning) departments into a predetermined scale” (Tapper 2007, 200). In other words, the work of each individual researcher was graded on a three point scale and departmental scores were based on the accumulated scores of all of their research-active participants. Unfortunately, Tapper never focuses much attention on peer-review, the way in which it has been implemented in the RAE since 1992, and the fact that the 2008 Exercise, in reducing the evaluator’s analysis of work to a grade, was in fact only shades different from the use of metrics in making decisions about funding.

Of course, the fact that the research selectivity process has been an on-going power struggle between successive neoliberal governments and an academy intent on protecting some greater level of autonomy and pluralism than the Government would choose to do, is hardly the whole story. The Government, often with a great deal of support from both university administrators and faculty, have operated in concert in several other ways so as to press the university closer to industry. In this regard, the Government has long provided support for commercially oriented research outside of the normal RAE/REF channel, and without much opposition from the universities. In fact, from the late-1990s to the present day, successive governments in the UK have spent tens

of billions expanding the breadth and depth of the various programs and supports available to those involved in so-called “third-stream”<sup>140</sup> or “collaborative research”<sup>141</sup> (HEFCE 2010). Such programs, which include the Higher Education Innovation Fund (£1 billion over 10 years)(HEFCE 2010, 20), the Technology Strategy Board (£19.9 billion over 10 years), and the Regional Development Agencies (£711 million over 10 years), have entailed everything from the expansion of the physical infrastructure devoted to collaborative research to extra and competitively based grant funding for university-business research. More than this, the Government is overhauling Britain’s IP and patent legislation, thereby signaling that it will provide additional protection to IP and patent generated through publicly funded university-based “collaborative” research. And the Government is also acting to change the revenue structure for such IP by lowering the effective tax-rate on university research that is subsequently turned into profitable enterprise.<sup>142</sup> The Government has also

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<sup>140</sup> ‘Third-stream’ funding refers to: a, “trend among many universities toward a third function, which has been described using a range of terms such as knowledge transfer, community service, community engagement and the third stream” (HEFCE 2010)

<sup>141</sup> By ‘collaborative research’, the HEFCE means that universities will collaborate with private sector partners. (HEFCE 2010)

<sup>142</sup> Since 1985 universities have been allowed to claim ownership over IP generated on-campus with public money. And faculty have long been able to do the same thing. As such, the UK’s copyright and patent law has, since the mid-1980’s, been made to more closely resemble the US’s (i.e. in terms of the Bayh-Dole suite of legislative changes, among them the ability to privatize the results of publicly funded research protocols). Since 2001 the Government has also offered monetary support for so-called “third-stream” research (which brings the universities together with business) through the “Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). Through the first ten years of its operation, the HEIF has funneled over £1 billion (in 2003 £’s), to support commercialization activities at individual universities. In 2004 the Government established the Technology Strategy Board (TSB), which, in 2007subsumed all of the powers of the Department of Innovation, which was in turn folded-up. With a three-year budget of £711 million (between



looked to address some of the hiccups involved in the process, namely by starting a working group whose aim is to address the sky-rocketing costs associated with the charges universities are imposing on each other for access to patented technologies fundamental to the development of other new technologies.<sup>143</sup> The RAE, in other words, is perhaps the most direct, but only one of a number of ways in which the government and the HEFCE have separately and together pressed the commercialization agenda forward. Of course, the RAE has helped to send clear signals throughout the academy and British society as well. The prized position of “practical” research and researchers has ripple effects that work to

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2008-2011), the TSB has operated a competitive grant program for collaborative university-business research, as well as a series of Technology Transfer Networks in 24 specific subject areas. The UK Research Councils (there are seven such Councils), have also looked to channel funding to collaborative research by making available specific and competitively awarded grants for such endeavors. As well, with spending of approximately £19.9 billion between 1999 and 2009, the Government’s “Regional Development Agencies”, have also provided significant financial support for university-industry partnerships. As Currie notes, it is not possible to know precisely how much of the £19.9B was channeled directly to university-business partnerships (the RDA’s funded various things, including physical infrastructure), there is good reason to believe that a sizeable portion of the RDA’s funding went directly to collaborative programs, if not to collaborative research as such; not only can infrastructure spending also operate as an indirect subsidy of collaborative research, but as Currie points out, a review by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2009 highlighted that the physical infrastructure undertaken by the RDA’s often related to things like research parks, which have traditionally been a breeding ground for university-business research links. The Government has also offered “innovation vouchers” to SME’s interested in contracting with university researchers for short periods. Public monies have also been channeled to commercialization through the University Challenge Seed Fund (since 1999), which has since been renamed the University Enterprise Capital Fund. This Fund has, offered support directly to researchers who look to take their innovations directly to market. The Government has also supported the commercialization of research by lowering the effective tax rate on certain areas of IP, such as pharmaceutical patents. And in 2010, the coalition government began signaling that further revision of IP and Patent protection laws were in process, again with an eye to enhancing the ability of both researchers and businesses to monopolize the results of research, even that which is publicly funded.

<sup>143</sup> This phenomenon, which revolves around the use of so-called, “Material Transfer Agreements”, is discussed at length by Mirowski (2011). Accordingly, Mirowski sees the advents of “MTA’s” as evidence of the way in which the regulation of university research a la neoliberalism is creating new opportunities for accumulation and profit, none of which bear any relationship to the putative “quality” of research.

undermine the desire of incoming students to pursue interests in basic or curiosity driven areas, particularly when the practitioners of such sub-disciplines eke out a relatively impoverished existence relative to their more practically and profit minded colleagues.

The announcement by the HEFCE in the run-up to the 2008 RAE concerning the Government's plans to revise the exercise are also necessarily understood as little more than the extension and consolidation of that which Thatcher put in place nearly thirty years earlier. Coming on the heels of a series of reports outlining the need for more collaboration between universities and business, the HEFCE's announcement included plans for the inclusion of "impact" as one of the variables to be considered by peer-review panels in assessing the "quality" of work under review. Following the Government's announcement, the HEFCE conducted an "impact pilot study", so as to gauge the viability of including 'impact' as part of the REF. In March of 2011, the HEFCE announced that 'impact' would in fact be included as an evaluative variable in the 2014 round of the new REF. Accordingly, in 2014, panels will score the degree of impact OF a researcher's work on a 4-point scale. This impact score will constitute 20% of the overall score awarded to individual work. The HEFCE has also indicated that this 20% weighting will be raised in subsequent REF's. In order to measure the impact of research, institutions will be required to submit case study outlines and other forms of documentary evidence detailing how particular pieces of research have had a clear impact on activities outside of the

academy and the higher education sector. While the HEFCE has sought to make room for such case studies to include things such as social activism, it has also clearly prohibited the inclusion of the transformative impact research might have on students' ideology and actions as a measure of impact. On the other hand, certain – but not all – disciplines have been allowed to use bibliometric and other citation related data as evidence of impact.

### **6.3 Whither the Left? NUS and the UCU**

Perhaps the clearest testament of how embedded audit and QA have become in the UK is that neither have been opposed with any coherence or consistency by the University and College Union (UCU), the faculty's main representative body, or by the National Union of Students (NUS). In terms of faculty, support for QA has likely been garnered in the same manner that it has been in the other jurisdictions under investigation, via mechanisms that reward some faculty and discipline others. Also, and alongside the process of economics imperialism, QA has left the academy divided as to its overall benefit and effect. Thus, to the extent that leadership within the UCU may have wanted to voice more strident opposition than they have, their ability to do so is compromised. The UCU has therefore taken up the cause of equality, wherein QA is conceived of as acceptable so long as everyone gets a piece of the funding pie. As a result, the UCU has opposed the use of things like bibliometric measures in the doling out of government funds, as well as to any measure that would privilege certain disciplines and academics over others. As such, the UCU has championed a kind

of “fitness-for-purpose” model which would look to ensure that research and teaching meet minimum standards. Whether or not such a program could, in the context of neoliberalism, allow the university to escape privatization, which the UCU more doggedly opposes, is not so much an open question as it is a symbol of the UCU’s obviously compromised position. (University and College Union 2011; University and College Union 2010; University and College Union 2009)

The crest of student union activism in the mid-1970s was followed by a long period of decline right-up until the 2010 election, when the re-emergence of student radicalism blew open huge gaps between the students’ national leadership in the form of the National Union of Students (NUS), and certain of their local affiliates. What became clear was that the NUS had been transformed into a business-oriented and politically impotent bull-pen for New Labour, while an increasing proportion of students, beset by three decades of neoliberal restructuring, looked to change-up tactics and again take to the streets. The process of the NUS’s decline related, on the one hand, to the secret of its earlier success and, on the other hand, to the stiff opposition provided by both the Conservatives and Labour. Student radicalism in the 1970s, which as Callinicos and Turner (1977) note fomented into a “Broad Left” coalition with serious political capacity, faced-off against both major cut-backs both by taking to the street and by developing the capacity of the NUS to provide services. The subsequent massification of the university thereby entailed a parallel process whereby the services offered by both the NUS and some of their local affiliates

grew into massive on-going concerns. Over time, and in the context of neoliberal restructuring, such services morphed into customer-focused concerns of central importance to the financing and thus survival of the unions. The ideological consequences of this transformation were such that the NUS lost touch with democratic organizational principles. In the place of concern about internal democracy, emerged an ever-greater concern for prudent management and “good governance”. At the same time, the Conservatives, under both Thatcher and then Major, waged wave after wave of legislative attack against the student unions’ ability to organize around “political issues”, or around their ability to maintain mandatory, “closed-shop”, membership policies. In 1994 and then in 2006, the Government passed legislation that heavily circumscribed the operating parameters of the NUS and its affiliates. (Swain 2011)<sup>144</sup>

On QA, the NUS’s *raison d’être* has been inclusion. The NUS lobbied aggressively, though not via mass tactics, for the inclusion of both students and measures of student engagement in QA processes. But in this the NUS never really faced much in the way of stiff opposition. The QAA quickly relented to the NUS’ demands. Since the first review of its audit process, QAA guidelines for institutional reviews/audits have mandated that one student sit on any audit committee and, furthermore, that the review/audit include examination of those

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<sup>144</sup> Swain (2011) highlights the manner in which successive rounds of legislation have hemmed in unions’ activities by designating them as “charities”, whose activities must relate to the needs of students. Similarly, the legislation also prescribes limits to the kinds of campaigning that can be done during elections.

efforts that a university has undertaken to engage students in QA. Similarly, the NUS has come-out in support of the RAE, championing the Exercise as evidence of the degree to which high-quality research is being done at UK universities. The NUS, it would seem, has been anxious to do good by improving the relative value of its member's degrees and diplomas. (NUS 2006)

To the extent that the NUS cannot be used to gauge the state of the students' movement more broadly, it is worth noting that QA has not received any kind of lasting attention outside of the NUS and within emerging and radical student-based organizations such as Globalise Resistance, the Student Broad Left, and the Education Activists Network. On the other hand, opposition to austerity is rooted in a critique of neoliberalism and in arguments that look to press back against neoliberal conceptions of higher education as a form of investment. Opposition to austerity is also widespread and emerging as the basis upon which some of the UK's largest unions in and around the higher education sector are working together (UNISON 2013). Whether or not students' resistance to austerity will ultimately morph into a more broad-sided attack against both austerity and neoliberal "governmentality" is an open question. To date, however, it is clear that the links between QA and austerity have not been so well made.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

Notwithstanding the efforts of a select few academics and policy-makers who have tried to draw attention to the core issues involved in and around the UK's system of QA, there is an obvious disconnect between the frustrations and

concerns of many academics and their understanding of the purpose and intent of the UK's system. Yet perhaps more obviously than in any other jurisdiction QA was introduced as a political project aimed at thoroughly transforming the intellectual climate of, and purposes served by, the UK's system of higher education. The subsequent development of a byzantine bureaucracy that some have likened to the operation of COCOM in Soviet era Russia (Amann 2003; Radice 2008), has done little if anything to either undermine or mitigate the purposes to which QA was created to serve. On the contrary, attempts to reform the UK's system of QA, and to thereby institute processes more focused in "enhancement" than on simply "audit", have arguably just embedded the logic of value ever more deeply into the UK's system of higher education.

To a degree, insiders like Lee Harvey and Roger Brown, are aware of this. Lee Harvey, another former QAA insider, has for his part, taken to writing scathing critiques of the UK's system (for example see, Harvey 1999). Arguably it is here that one finds evidence of the degree to which the logic of QA and the logic of value have become both fundamental and somehow obscure, even to those most intimately familiar with the operation of the UK's system. Harvey is wont to distinguish between "quality" and the processes that are created to assure it:

Quality and quality assurance are not homogeneous and, for example, a fitness-for-purpose approach is not adequate, nor even appropriate, for evaluating many quality issues. What an epistemological analysis does, as hinted at by the examples, is to draw attention to the way that we construct quality as knowledge. It differentiates reductionist causal explanations from interpretation of meanings of actors from socio-historically specific deconstructed and reconstructed alternative

understandings. In this drive to create a “quality culture”, which we can take to mean a reflective, gracious, and considerate academy within which critique (including self-critique) are appropriately prized and used to facilitate constant improvement, Harvey argues that it is possible, within a system of QA, to create the conditions necessary to, in turn, create a quality culture. The obstacle to quality, is, in other words, not the systematization and bureaucratization of QA, but its rendering by political forces into something else. (Harvey 2009, 8)

Arguably, Harvey is correct. In theory, as in fact, there is an important distinction to be made between “quality” and QA. For Harvey the conflation of the two is an obstacle to the achievement of the kind of quality that he envisions as being potentially achievable. But in so far as QA *has* been construed as quality within the context of particular social and power dynamics, what this dissertation suggests is that little change or reform is possible unless those power dynamics are first transformed. In practice, QA is synonymous with quality, and the discursive reconstruction of ‘quality’ so as to affect the creation and operation of a “quality culture” is only possible if we address the power-relations at root in the initial conflation. If anything, this is precisely what the preceding has demonstrated: the UK’s system of QA has developed and deepened as oppositional currents have focused on the apparent fairness or transparency of assessment and audit procedures instead of on the issue of value (and commodification). Of course, one can hardly be surprised that the managers and administrators of Britain’s universities and colleges did not take-up the kind of critique that might have tempered if not turned back the kind of instrumental rationality that informs neoliberal policy. If nothing else, the UGC’s efforts in



1981 and 1986 were indicative of how bureaucrats in that organization were just as dedicated to the rationalization of higher education in the UK as were Thatcher's Conservatives. Where the UGC and the Conservative Government parted company, to the extent that they did at all, had only to do with which, and to what extent, programs were to be cut. This kind of issue remained at the very core of debates within and between the universities and successive governments. In other words, none of the players involved in the negotiation and extension of QA in the UK have ever appeared to reject neoliberal assertions as to the relative efficiency of markets and therein of price-signaling. On the contrary, they have spent most of their time simply bartering over price. To be fair, players-cum-critics like Roger Brown and Lee Harvey would likely bristle at this description. What this dissertation suggests is that their failing is more epistemological and methodological than it was ideological, to the extent that such things can be usefully parsed.<sup>145</sup>

This chapter also argues that the kind of bartering that took place within the higher education sector, primarily between institutional managers and government agents/agencies, took place in a context where neoliberal restructuring happened rapidly and under the auspices of a newly cohered ruling class based in The City, whose interests Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown, and indeed Cameron have all looked to serve. The so-called "death of parliamentary

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<sup>145</sup> Harvey and Brown both construct the higher education sector as somehow separate and apart from neoliberal globalization. Thus, they believe that by designing the appropriate kind of procedures, the problems with what they might describe as "neoliberal QA", can be avoided.

socialism”, which, as I pointed out, involved the wholesale abandonment of social democratic and Universalist principles by the UK’s Labour Party, meant that the Left was without a political/organizational anchor, particularly given the degree to which Thatcher savaged the unions, not least during the long Miners’ Strike in 1984/1985. That such savagery was presaged by the earlier arrival of structural adjustment in 1976, the failures and contradictions of Labourism in the post-war era and the complete restructuring of the British political economy, only further served to incapacitate the Left. Oppositional movements within the universities were also effectively turned back. In this regard, QA functioned not only to split the academy, but also to affect the development of a punishing work-regime that makes oppositional organizing difficult and increasingly risky. Students’ opposition was also muted, not least as a result of the massification of the university in the context of austerity. Pressed into the provision of a wider array of services and out of ‘political’ organizing via legal redefinitions of their purview, the main student organizations have failed to find a firm oppositional footing.

Relative to the other two jurisdictions under analysis, what stands out about the UK’s system of QA is not just its byzantine complexity, but the speed with which it developed. As I have argued, measurement was, in the US, a longer-term program that was reasserted after a very temporary interregnum in the late 1960s and 1970s, during which time instrumentalism hardly died. As we shall now see, Ontario’s system of QA developed somewhat later than did the UK’s. Indeed, in Ontario, QA emerged and evolved somewhat more slowly and

has yet to develop into the kind of extensive bureaucratic morass that now describes the UK's system. Nonetheless, there are clear similarities too, not the least of which is the imposition of "value" as the central organizing principle.

## **Chapter 7: Privileged Dependence, Policy Borrowing, and the Political Economy of QA in Ontario**

Where the development of UK's system of QA is a story of so many stalwart attempts on the part of successive governments to transform the universities a la neoliberalism, the development of QA in Ontario is more a story of both policy borrowing and of privileged dependence. In essence, because of its position as a privileged dependent of the US, the arrival of both the neoliberal research program as well as the development of QA in Ontario was forestalled right up until the 1990s. This should not be taken to mean that Ontario's universities did not face stern pressure to reform along what could be described as neoliberal lines starting in the 1970s, when budgets were slashed amidst falling enrolment and the fiscal crisis of the state. Rather, what I mean to argue is that Ontario's system of QA was, at best, a piecemeal compendium of policies and programs that were not galvanized into a vigorous system of QA until long after such systems were in place in both the UK and the US. What this suggests is that QA is not so deeply rooted in Ontario as it is in the other jurisdictions under investigation. Although the "rootedness" of QA in Ontario in turn suggests the possibility that oppositional forces in the Province might be better positioned to articulate – and mobilize around - an alternative to QA than they are in other parts of the world, the foregoing warns against too much optimism.

Though of a relatively recent vintage, Ontario's system of QA has been advanced with the enthusiasm of the newly converted and in a context where the back of organized labour has been broken, the students' movement neutered, and faculty, and faculty unions have likewise been divided and dissembled. While there are certainly glimmers of hope, albeit more outside of Ontario than in it, it is also necessary to recognize that Ontario has long been tied into international and global circuits of capital and finance that have remade 'everyday life' in a manner strikingly similar to the kind of "financialized" existence lived in other advanced industrial/post-industrial jurisdictions. Thus, where I would argue that QA was instrumental in establishing the hegemonic position of global finance and an American led neo-liberal capitalism in places like the UK and the US, I would suggest that QA in Ontario is better understood as a residual effect of that hegemony, and thus testimony to it.

### **7.1 Ontario's System of QA**

Currently, the quality of education provided in Ontario's universities is regulated by the Council on Quality Assurance (COQA), which is an institutional subsidiary of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). The COQA is a recent outgrowth of, and replacement for, the COU's longer-standing Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) review process, which started in 1982, and of the more recently minted, Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC), which began operating in 1999 (it was first announced in 1996). The COQA administers four main processes: a protocol for the approval of new courses; an

expedited protocol for the approval of new courses; a protocol for the cyclical review of existing courses; and an audit process, which examines an institution's own QA framework, standards, and processes (Council of Ontario Universities 2010).

Each of the four processes that the COQA administers operate around statements outlining what is expected of students in terms of their understanding and competence at each degree level. At the undergraduate level, such statements are referred to as, "University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLES)" (Council of Ontario Universities 2012, 1). At the graduate level, the COQA does not specify a specific acronym, though it is reasonable to assume that the COQA would identify them using the no less awkward moniker, "UGDLES". In addition, each institution is required to prepare its own statements with respect to whatever undergraduate and graduate programs it offers, irrespective of whether or not such programs receive public funding (Council of Ontario Universities 2010, 3).

As is the case in the UK, the primary mode of QA for the COQA is its audit process, which is what the COQA describes as a "desk audit"(Council of Ontario Universities 2010, 11). Herein a panel of auditors examines the various artifacts (documentation, scores etc.) that each institution assembles for the purposes of the audit and which testify to the institution having followed both its own Institution Quality Assurance Plan (IQAP) (as ratified by the COQA), and the

COQA's requirements for IQAPs in general 26).<sup>146</sup> As such, the COQA's 'desk audit' is a capstone to the other audit processes that the COQA requires institutions to perform. In this regard, the COQA requires that an institution's IQAP involve: a self-study process; the periodic audit of each program by external experts; the combination of both the self-study and external audit into a final review; and the preparation of a manual outlining both the schedule for and processes involved in the full audit/review process. The COQA also specifies specific evaluative criteria to be used in institutional self-study assessments and those performed by external auditors:

#### **4.3.6 Quality indicators**

While there are several widely used quality indicators or proxies for reflecting program quality, institutions are encouraged to include available measures of their own which they see as best achieving that goal. Outcome measures of student performance and achievement are of particular interest, but there are also important input and process measures which are known to have a strong association with quality outcomes. It is expected that many of the following listed examples will be widely used. The Guide makes reference to further sources and measures that might be considered.

a) **Faculty:** qualifications, research and scholarly record; class sizes; percentage of classes taught by permanent or non-permanent

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<sup>146</sup> Accordingly, and as the QC's "Framework" document describes, an institution's IQAP must be ratified by the QC before it can be implemented by the institution. As part of the ratification process, the QC evaluates the degree to which an institution's IQAP is consistent with the "substance and principles set out in the respective Quality Council Protocols." What the QC means by such 'consistently', could perhaps be made a bit clearer. In outlining this process the QC writes,

Before implementing its IQAP for New Program Approvals, Expedited Approvals, and Cyclical Program Reviews, each university must first submit it to the Quality Council for ratification. The Council will test their consistency (sic) with the substance and principles set out in the respective Quality Council Protocols.

(contractual) faculty; numbers, assignments and qualifications of parttime or temporary faculty;

b) **Students:** applications and registrations; attrition rates; time-to-completion; final-year academic achievement; graduation rates; academic awards; student in-course reports on teaching; and

c) **Graduates:** rates of graduation, employment six months and two years after graduation, postgraduate study, "skills match" and alumni reports on program quality when available and when permitted by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). Auditors will be instructed that these items may not be available and applicable to all programs. (Council of Ontario Universities 2012, 23–24)

In terms of reporting, the COQA also requires that institutions publish certain components of their QA processes on-line (any part of the audit/reporting process that does not contain, “confidential information” (Council of Ontario Universities 2010, 22), which is not further defined). At the time of writing, the COU has not completed or published any ‘desk audits’. However, it would appear that such audits will not involve the awarding of a letter or numerical grade.<sup>147</sup> Instead, the COQA desk audit reports will merely highlight whether or not the QA processes performed by each institution are sufficiently up to snuff. As such, the universities themselves are productive of the measures discussed throughout this dissertation. For example, in meeting the reporting requirements of the COQA, the University of Toronto publishes its “comprehensive inventory,” of performance measures, a list of some 109 different measures that begins with the

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<sup>147</sup> The COQA provides a template for external reviewers reports here: <http://www.cou.on.ca/links/other-links/the-ontario-universities-council-on-quality-assura/resources/templates>



University's ranking on both national and international rankings exercises (University of Toronto 2012).

## **7.2 The Political Economy of QA in Ontario**

Whereas in the US, QA is usefully seen as the long-term outgrowth of the myriad triangulations and calculations of corporate America intent on constructing a national system of higher education to better serve a program of capitalist accumulation, such is certainly not the case in Ontario. And whereas in the UK, QA is usefully seen as fundamental to the initial waves of neoliberal restructuring aimed at reproducing the putative benefits of the American system, such is also not the case in Ontario. Rather, the political economy of QA in Ontario is more a story about the consolidation of neoliberalism and the need for institutions to demonstrate the relative value of their manufacture so as to both maintain a foundation for on-going state support and also to access increasingly global circuits of capital (money for research and development and tuition-fees).

### **7.2.1 System Expansion and the Post-war Compromise**

As a branch-plant and resources based political economy, Ontario's universities were not heavily involved in research until after WWII. And until the 1970s the value of that research was modest, particularly compared to the level of expenditure in the US. In 1967-8 total federal outlays for university based research reached \$71 million, a sum then equivalent to about 13% of provincial grants and tuition-fees (Trick 2005a, 320). To put this in perspective, the US

Department of Defence was pouring billions of dollars into research and development from the 1950s on (Mirowski 2011, location 1452). While the universities only saw a fraction of those amounts, it is important to also remember that the US's National Science Foundation was then also directing fully \$84 million just to universities, which were also getting hundreds of millions more in research money from the private philanthropic organizations through their coordinated program of "strategic philanthropy" (Scott 1983, 36; Mirowski 2011, location 1452). While it is true that America's system was, in the 1950s and 1960s, populated by many more universities and colleges than was Ontario's system (as it does today), it is also true that the great bulk of research funding was then being channeled to a select few institutions, which utterly dominated the research landscape in the US, (and which continue to so dominate the American higher education landscape today) (Scott 1983; C. W. Barrow 1990, 89).

The upshot is that Ontario's system of higher education was not nearly as research-intensive as it would, through the 1980s and 1990s become.<sup>148</sup> Again,

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<sup>148</sup> According to their websites, the University of Toronto today boasts a \$1.2 billion dollar research budget, from all sources of funding. While in absolute terms this places the UofT in league with the cream of the American research-intensive crop (i.e. like Harvard), when evaluated relative to the size of the faculty complement, the picture changes. In 2010-2011 Harvard's faculty complement, on an FTE basis was 2275. The UofT has a complement of over 11000 faculty. In 2010-2011 Harvard received over \$600 000.00 in federal research dollars alone. That means faculty at Harvard brought in more than double the \$104 000.00 in total research revenue brought in by the faculty at the UofT. I do not mean to suggest that research income was spread evenly across any university. OECD data, which only starts in 1981, tells a similar story. In that year, all Canadian universities spent approximately \$1.6B on research and development, where the US spent just under \$12B and the UK well over \$3B. By 2004 the US was spending some \$39B on university based R&D, where Canada was spending just under \$7B. In other words, the total value of university R&D in the US was about five and a half times greater than in Canada.

this was compounded by the fact that branch-planting involved neither high levels of corporate R&D nor any sense of urgency on the part of largely American corporations operating in Ontario to leverage the Canadian universities as was done in the US. And as Carroll and Beaton (2000), following Axelrod (1982) argue, the early involvement of corporate Canada on university boards of directors, simply did not involve the kind of programmatic design, either in terms of research or teaching, that it did much earlier in the US. Coupled with the largess of the Provincial government right up until the late 1960s, which paid universities a generous per-student subsidy intended to cover all operating costs, including research, there was, on the research front, simply not any kind of a drive to measure and assess. While at least a couple of Ontario's universities may have by that time already developed *some* 'research-intensity', the absolute size and significance of such research in terms of Ontario's political economy was small and there was little urgency to rationalize research funding.

As a system largely dedicated to teaching under-graduates, Ontario's system was also not immediately subject to the kind of rationalization evident much earlier in the US. The massive expansion of Ontario's system of higher education, which, as in the UK, happened through the late 1950s and 1960s, was based firmly in the logic of the post-war compromise. While state investment in

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Assuming a distributional pattern similar to the one established through the 1920s and 1930s, which was still very present in the 1970s and 80s, that means that approx. 25 institutions split a R&D kitty that is worth more than five times that split between Canada's self-described "research-intensive" universities.

higher education was seen as a functional means to deal with returning war veterans and therein with unemployment, and as means by which to produce the human capital necessary for economic growth, this was counter-balanced by very different, more humanist notions. In fact, higher education was seen as vital to the defence of the Canadian state and the West, and to the full experience and development of human being (Sears 2003). The much referenced Massey Report of Arts and Letters captured this very well in warning against the idea of higher education as a purely practical endeavour:

Under contemporary demands the modern university is urged to provide expanding facilities for technical training. The urge "to speed up production" and to emphasize technology in the university's curricula has led to a growing stress on purely utilitarian subjects in academic courses. The practical result has been what one witness called "conspiracies to prevent people from being educated". It is certainly neither our right nor our wish to tell the universities how to do their work, but, if financial stringency prevents these great institutions from being, as they have said, "nurseries of a truly Canadian civilization and culture", we are convinced that this is a matter of national concern. (Massey et al. 1951)

In policy and programmatic terms, what this meant was that university accountability was judged relative to the willingness and ability of the university to accommodate additional students and to operate in service of the kind of national vision that the Massey Commission had imagined. Again, this did not mean that the university was to be divorced either partially or entirely from "practical" and "technical" forms of education, or from pressure to perform more plainly "economic" type roles (Axelrod 2008). What it did mean however, was that the drive for such forms of education was embedded within and conjoined to

post-war visions of liberal-capitalist-humanism (Sears 2003; Newson 1998).

Indeed, in as much as the Massey Report reads like a document concerned about the cultural life of the universities, it also devotes clearly demarcated sections to discussion of the economic and technical contributions of the universities (Massey et al. 1951). It is in this light, then, that we must view William Davis' remarks to Ontario's university community offered at York University in 1966, right in the midst of the massive expansion of the province's university system:

In so far as I can ascertain, the degree of autonomy enjoyed by the provincially assisted universities of Ontario is equivalent to, if not greater than, that known by publicly supported universities anywhere – including the United Kingdom. There is, moreover, much evidence to indicate that provided the universities can meet the responsibilities of our times we should undoubtedly be better off if they were allowed to continue to operate with such autonomy. On the other hand, if they cannot or will not accept those responsibilities, and if, for example, large numbers of able students must be turned away because the university is not prepared to accept them, or if, as another example, some of the less glamorous disciplines are ignored, despite pressing demands for graduates in those areas, or if costly duplication of effort is evident, I cannot imagine that any society, especially one bearing large expense for higher education, will want to stand idly by. For there will inevitably be a demand – there have been indications of this in other jurisdiction – that government move in and take over. In saying this I am not attempting to act as an alarmist or to use alarmist tactics, but it is important that we realize what the possibilities are. I have already stressed that I am in favour of free and independent universities, but this belief will not take away the question as to whether our institutions of higher learning can meet the challenge. Only our universities will be able to answer that. (Davis 1966 as quoted in Royce 1998, 101)

However much the university was, at times, viewed instrumentally during the initial wave of massification through the 1950s and 1960s, the calibration of value via a system of QA was nowhere on the agenda.

### **7.2.2 Muddling Through Crisis: From the Welfare State to the Seeds of Managerial Reform**

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the crisis of the post-war order saw the government cut-back on levels of per-student subsidy, which the universities quickly began to understand posed a threat to their ability to operate, especially given enrollment declines, which were, rather incorrectly, expected to continue. Having added capacity, both in terms of the faculty complement and their physical infrastructure, the universities, like the government, wanted things to change, albeit in a decidedly different manner (i.e. the universities wanted an expansion of the per student subsidy, while the government wanted to cut and/or rationalize the subsidy, in part by severing funding for research and teaching). (Royce 1998, 100–105)

The crisis of Keynesianism thus ushered in a period of intense uncertainty, relative upheaval, and debate. Indeed, the larger crisis of capitalism was mirrored in efforts to understand and manage the massified university, and therein to find some rationale within an entirely unsettled political economy to prompt public and governmental support for the universities. Notably, such discussions began, early on in this era, to look to the US, and therein to specific state systems, as paragons of virtue to be emulated in Ontario (Royce 1998, 116).

It is in this context that we can place all of the major governmental and sector-led/sponsored reports of the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>149</sup> In this regard, what seemed to emerge through the 1970s was a pattern of negotiation between the state and the universities over the extent to which the government would continue to respect the apparent autonomy of the universities in exchange for some greater effort at self-regulation and coordination rather than directly intervene in the sector (as the reports of Government commissions recommended). For mainstream scholars, the fact that Ontario's government did not undertake to direct the rationalization of the system, is seen as evidence of the degree to which Ontario's universities were and remain autonomous (Trick 2005a; Gesink-Walsh 2007; G. Jones 1991; Royce 1998).

For example, in reading the significance of the Report of the Wright Commission (1972) Trick (2005a), Royce (1998) and Jones (1991) all conclude along similar lines. As they have it, Wright's call for the creation of a "buffer" body to administer the system with full executive control was perceived by the universities as a serious threat to their autonomy. Although the 'buffer' was pitched as a kind of third party able to navigate between the universities' need for autonomy and academic freedom and the government's more instrumental logic, the universities thought otherwise. Through the Council of Ontario Universities

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<sup>149</sup> The various reports to which I am referring are the Government of Ontario's Spinks Commission (1966), the AUCC's, Duff Berdahl Commission, the Government of Ontario's, Wright Commission (1972), the OCUA's "System on the Brink Report" (1979). For a full list of government and sector reports see (Royce 1998, 353)

(COU) the universities both pushed-back against the “buffer” idea (initially with a proposal for a “double buffer”) and also undertook to improve their ability to self-regulate. In so far as the government took the proverbial teeth out of Wright’s recommendations and made the Ontario Council on University Affairs (OCUA) a purely advisory body, the episode is seen as the institution and extension of the pattern described above. Indeed, because the Government regularly accepted the universities promises of self-regulation and coordination, Trick (2005a) concludes that, in Ontario, higher education policy has not departed very much from founding principles. On the contrary, he argues that decision-making has remained within the dominant “paradigm”, and Ontario’s universities exercise considerably more autonomy than they do in places like the UK (Trick 2005a). In a similar fashion, Gesink-Welsh (2007) concludes that although the government did signal, through the 1970s (and indeed the 1980s and early 1990s) a desire for more direct forms of control over Ontario’s system of higher education, it was not until the, “strong political leadership” of the Progressive Conservatives (for whom she worked) was brought to bear in 1995, that the rhythms of negotiation within the dominant “policy network” really changed (Gesink-Walsh 2007, 229).

In fact, though sector relations did settle into a routine through the 1970s, where governmental concern over economy and efficiency triggered successive, if mild, rounds of self-regulation (or the attempt thereof), they did not settle in that manner *just* because of institutional rigidities that left the dominant paradigm or



policy network intact. In fact, the OCUA and the COU were, as Royce (1998, 148–152) points out, largely in agreement about the need for some form of rationalization, particularly in terms of graduate education, where the on-going decline of government transfers were felt would most threaten program quality. But neither the government nor the institutions themselves would commit to any kind of a plan. Not only did the per-student funding formula create incentive for institutions to grow, but the Government appeared unwilling to back away from its promise to pay for universal access. On both counts, (i.e. the unwillingness of the universities to strike a deal amongst themselves around rationalization and the government's unwillingness to give-up on its promise of universal access) positions were likely taken more as a political calculation than as a result of firm ideological commitments. According to Newson (2013), negotiations between the OCUA and the COU around the adjustment to the per-student funding formula (the "basic income unit"(BIU)), were roundly criticized by faculty, who were, through the 70's, actively organizing (Horn 1994; Savage 1994). The possibility of dramatically shifting the nature of taught programs, or of severing the relationship between teaching and research was limited, in other words, because the massification of the university at the end of the 1960s had meant the hiring of large numbers of young academics trained in that heady and radical moment. The fact that the wave of faculty unionization was manifest as an attempt by young faculty to protect themselves against the ravages of both government cutbacks and the established hierarchies within their institutions (i.e. the COU),

only served to hem-in the universities' ability to rationalize without some external intervention (Horn 1994). More than this, because the rationalization of graduate programs were to see some institutions downsized and turned into teaching-only universities, internal divisions began to ferment within the COU.

The government was also in something of a bind, and not just because of faculty opposition. Ontario did not see the level of university-based protest that rolled through the US in the 1960s and 1970s, where the ruling classes were prompted to think according to the logic of the Trilateral Commission (as outlined in Chapter 2). Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the Government, given both the proximity to the US and examples such as Rochdale College, was hoping to find an approach to the fiscal crisis which would neither ignite nor fuel further opposition. In this regard, it is vital to note that the 1970s were an era of terrific labour unrest *outside* of the universities. This was particularly the case in Ontario, where the autoworkers, which Panitch and Swartz (2003) describe as the “weathervane” of labour politics in the Province, were able to mount a stalwart opposition to the Trudeau government’s introduction in 1975 of wage and price controls (Panitch and Swartz 2003; Gindin 1995). The rationalization of Ontario’s universities simply did not and arguably could not rank highly-enough on the government’s agenda so as to disturb the conventions of the “policy network” that developed through the 1970s. Thus were the 1970s described by little more than heated debate over the Province’s funding formula and the universities more earnest efforts to realize internal economies and to

coordinate through the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) some more “rationally” organized system. Herein the significance of the Government’s various reports appears most clearly: the universities needed to manage themselves in a manner both more befitting the times and more reflective of the best American institutions. In this limited way were the first seeds of neoliberalism and QA sewn.

### **7.2.3 Elite Cohesion, the Emergence of the Neoliberal Agenda, and Managerial Reform of the Universities**

The 1980s, and particularly the recession in 1981-1982, which was preceded by the Bank of Canada’s turn towards monetarism, marks a significant turning point, though as with the 1970s, not because the provincial government appeared able to mount anything approaching a comprehensive political economic program (Drainville 1995; Newstadt 2008). Though, as Newson and Buchbinder (1988) note, fiscal cutbacks became, by the 1980s, increasingly accepted as part of the political economic landscape, the full-scale attack on organized labour had only just begun to take shape. In other words, the neo-liberal orthodoxy was then just establishing a foothold in Ontario and the financialization of the Canadian economy, and of everyday life, was also just beginning (LeBaron 2010). Thus, Ontarians, like all Canadians were inundated by anti-inflationary rhetoric from both the state and capital. Federally, the government – and such measures were mimicked in Ontario - developed so-

called “temporary” coercive measures to control labour and thus inflation.

Panitch and Swartz put it this way:

...the federal government’s 1982, “6 and 5” program was not a “bolt out of the blue” – an isolated blemish on an otherwise impeccable record of liberal reformism. Its significance lay in the fact that it served as the opening shot in a broad-based assault on trade union freedoms by federal and provincial governments in the 1980’s. It made explicit the ad hoc, selective, “temporary” use of coercion, not merely directed at the particular groups of workers affected or at the particular issue of “emergency” at hand, but rather designed to set an example for what was considered to be appropriate behaviour throughout the industrial relations system. The suspension, in 1982, of public sector workers’ rights was not proclaimed or defended in terms of what it would directly accomplish to stem inflation and re-invigorate Canadian capitalism; rather, it was an example of what other workers had to voluntarily do if these objectives were to be attained. (Panitch and Swartz 2003, 26)

In saying this Panitch and Swartz highlight that the wage freezes put in place both federally and provincially in 1982 were at least as much, if not more, about bringing private sector unions to heel as they were about reigning in public sector workers and state expenditures. Nonetheless, organized labour in Ontario remained buoyant, particularly in the wake of the 1981/82 recession when the auto-sector benefitted from favourable exchange-rate differentials and finance capital enjoyed dividends earned via links to US markets (Gindin 1995, 205–227). Not only did governmental and private-sector efforts to squash and/or transform organized labour temporarily abate, but key unions found and leveraged space to maneuver where their American counterparts could not

(207).<sup>150</sup> Ontario's branch-plant economy, in other words, showed significant signs of life in the period immediate following the 1980-82/3 recession. What this meant is that the wage freeze levelled against public-sector workers did not have the desired effect in the private sector. Furthermore, the public-sector mobilized in opposition, arguably stalling the Government's efforts, if only temporarily. To the extent that the neoliberal program was based upon reviving corporate balance sheets and rates of investment (by quashing labour and making labour markets more flexible), the government has simply not yet succeeded. Again, the program of neoliberal restructuring was just beginning to take shape.

In is in this light that we need to consider developments in and around Ontario's universities after 1980. As Trick (2005a, 322) points out, one of the notable and early manifestations of an emergent new orthodoxy (what he calls a new "paradigm"), was the COU's first articulation in 1980 of support for conditional forms of research funding that would reward universities for linking with private sector partners. In this, the COU actually anticipated some of what was contained in the 1981 report of the Government's commission into the structure of Ontario's system of higher education. In fact, the Government's "Fisher Report" (1981) also suggested that the universities be encouraged to create links with private-sector partners. But the Report went much further and

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<sup>150</sup> The most obvious manifestation of this was the formal split between the UAW and the CAW in 1985, which enabled the CAW to negotiate a better Agreement with the Big Three American auto-makers, than had the UAW.

struck a far more revanchist note than had the COU's earlier call for the government to increase funding for commercially oriented research. Indeed, the Report arguably went beyond either the universities' or the government's pale in recommending as it did that either the government significantly increase base-level funding to all of the universities or else more directly administer a University of Ontario system with the aim of thoroughly rationalizing it (i.e. by tasking different institutions with different and discrete functions). In forcing a choice between more money or more intervention (less autonomy), the Fisher Report pleased no one and was effectively, "dead in the water" (Royce 1998, 372). In so failing to satisfy anyone, the Fisher Report also failed to deliver on its primary mandate, which was to settle the still on-going debate over the province's funding formula. In the wake of the Fisher Report, the government was merely able to revise the BIU formula so as to make it slightly less sensitive than it had been to fluctuations in enrollment, which temporarily declined. In doing so the government provided the universities with some of what they were seeking, namely a promise that declining enrolments would not rapidly undermine their ability to operate, given a massively expanded faculty complement. Of course, this hardly settled the issue, particularly given the expectation that enrolments would continue to decline, thereby intensifying the fiscal bind that the universities were facing. As such, negotiations between the COU and the OCUA again picked-up, as did the controversy such negotiations triggered from within the universities. The government, therefore, looked for another out, and, in 1983

appointed another commission (the Bovey Commission) to navigate the troubled waters of university finance. (Royce 1998, 160–164)

Before considering that Report, however, it is necessary to give the Fisher Report slightly more consideration. The Fisher Report actually spoke meaningfully to the issues of the day and thereby foreshadowed subsequent changes. In wanting the universities to take-on more differentiated roles so as to avoid unnecessary and wasteful duplication, Fisher hardly sounded so different from either previous commissions, or the Government of the day. And again, Fisher’s suggestion that the universities expand their connections with industry was hardly different from what the COU was itself calling for, albeit not through an adjustment to the BIU as Fisher recommended. Furthermore, in recommending that the government set clear objectives for the universities, including more vigorous accounting standards, Fisher was also not so far from previous articulations of the government’s desire for “better” and more visible forms of accountability. The Report also provided some direction to both OCUA and the COU: the OCUA would appropriately develop system-level monitoring capacities, while the COU should begin conducting periodic reviews of graduate programs and thereby make the quality of such programs an over-arching objective (Royce 1998, 161). The Report even suggested that information be made available to the public concerning the vital economic role that the universities played in helping to meet important labour market requirements (Ministry of Colleges and Universities 1981). But for the mechanism via which

such changes were to be implemented, the Fisher Report reads as more prophecy than heresy. Indeed, in calling for the COU to begin the periodic review of graduate programs outside of any calls for the rationalization of the BIU, Fisher suggested, if only unintentionally, how it was the universities might prove their utility without having the evidence of such tied to a program that rationalized funding and tiered institutions. This is precisely how the universities then understood the utility of program review. In other words, from the universities' perspective Fisher signaled that QA could be undertaken as a means via which to both argue against cuts to the BIU and to pre-empt the Government from directly intervening in the rationalization of the system. More than this, and given the lack of any serious opposition to the earlier introduction of program review at the graduate level, the universities presumably saw in QA an effective means via which to engender some support for system rationalization from the academy.<sup>151</sup>

Where Fisher had failed, the Bovey Commission, which was officially labeled the, Commission on the Future Development of the Universities of Ontario (Trick 2005, 200), succeeded, though not in a manner that was

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<sup>151</sup> Writing in 1981, Grant Clarke, then the Deputy to the Executive Director of the COU, noted what he saw as the critical difference between summative and formative evaluations: the former were tied to decisions about resource allocation and the latter to on-going efforts at improvement. Clarke goes on to argue for a system of programme review that has as its, ...first consideration that the quality of academic offerings should be at the heart of the process. This orientation is indispensable to real accountability, ensuring the preservation and enhancement of the central value of the university. Focusing on quality will help us avoid the danger of confusing efficiency with educational effectiveness. From the practical point of view, it will also help with the acceptance of the process by the academic community. (G. Clarke 1981, 108)



immediately clear.<sup>152</sup> Where the Fisher Committee had seen a need for either a large amount of new government funding or a complete overhaul of Ontario's university system, Bovey maintained that government funding needed to increase only mildly and that the university system could be effectively transformed via conditional funding programs intended to encourage greater "differentiation" between "resource-intensive research universities" and those that could usefully be classified as "instruction intensive" schools (Bovey 1984, 5). Conditional financing arrangements were preferred by the Commission apparently as a nod to university autonomy, which the Report noted, "had been a major factor in their [the universities] vitality and achievement (13)"; instead of bar universities from participating in certain areas/functions, the Report sought to create a market-like competitive environment where ambitious universities and those already in the "resource-intensive research" category could be more generously funded.

The Commission holds that such differentiation ought to be recognized in funding principles and in planning and coordinating structures, and that it's appropriate further evolution should be encouraged. However, we reject the notion that universities should be formally designated by a central body as to their type, or placed in rigid categories. Emphasis should rather be placed upon a competitive system within which institutions are rewarded for the distinctive functions they perform and the quality of their activities and in addition are provided with the capacity to be flexible and innovative. (Bovey 1984, 14)

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<sup>152</sup> The official title of the Bovey Commission is strikingly familiar to that of the Fisher Committee, which was called the Commission on the Future Role of the Universities of Ontario.

The Commission did recognize that this kind of ‘competitive system’ would undoubtedly generate “winners” and “losers” and pose a challenge to wider accessibility. However, for Bovey and the other commissioners, globalization meant that broad accessibility was necessarily sacrificed at the altar of economic growth and global competitiveness:

The third element in the proposed strategy is a greater emphasis in the period ahead upon excellence and adaptability. The urgency of reaching an internationally competitive level of excellence in higher education and research, together with adaptability to facilitate responsiveness to the needs of a rapidly changing society, set against the relatively broad access already achieved, requires a strategy which in the immediate future gives priority to quality and adaptability over the further enhancement of accessibility. When priorities are related to the availability of resources this emphasis is especially important. (Bovey 1984, 5)

In this regard, and as Trick (2005a, 323–324) describes, the Bovey Report triggered some considerable consternation and discord, not least within the COU. In recommending that the government adjust the BIU formula so as to distinguish between research- and teaching-intensive institutions, Bovey threatened the ambitions of several universities which saw that they would quickly become ghettoized at the bottom of Ontario’s more “differentiated” system. At the same time, those institutions that had already achieved some level of research-intensity, apparently favoured the Report (Newson 2013). But whether or not the universities were divided over Bovey’s recommendation for the development of research-related adjustments to the BIU, they found the Report’s call for higher tuition-fees and more money for operating and research-

related expenditures generally agreeable (Royce 1998, 172). Given the COU's aforementioned announcement of support for the development of conditional forms of finance outside the BIU formula, it stands to reason that the government saw a way to finally move beyond the BIU related debates, particularly given the opposition mounted by both faculty and students' associations, which simply rejected Bovey's call to sacrifice access for quality (Royce 1998, 173).<sup>153</sup>

Ultimately, the Bovey Report amounted to little in the way of immediate changes. Because the release of the Bovey Report was preceded by the retirement of then Premier Bill Davis, a cabinet shuffle that saw the long-serving Bette Stephenson relocated, and the very temporary designation of a Premier believed to be less interested in the universities than Davis had been, few of the changes Bovey recommended were immediately taken-up. The significance of the Report cannot be under-estimated, however. First, in recommending the institution of market-like adjustment processes, the Report helped to pave a path between direct intervention and total self-regulation. Second, the Report constructed university autonomy not so much in a new way, but in a manner that further laid

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<sup>153</sup> While Royce examines only the opposition to Bovey mounted by the OCUFA, an email exchange with Newson (2013) has clarified that in fact faculty unions and associations which had previously been able to maintain some level of solidarity on the BIU issue, became split after Bovey in precisely the way the Report appeared to split the universities. Accordingly, faculty at research-intensive universities who stood to reap the rewards of a research-linked BIU, supported Bovey, while the rest were roundly critical. As Newson has also clarified, more than split the faculty, this also put something of a brake on the on-going process of faculty unionization, which stopped when faculty at research intensive universities split from other faculty unions over the BIU issue. Of course, this just highlights my larger point, that the opposition and splits created by Bovey were ameliorated by the Government's subsequent decision to maintain BIU funding and grow the envelope of research funding available on a conditional basis outside of the BIU formula.

the groundwork for a program of systematic valuation (i.e. QA). Accordingly, universities were to draft detailed mission statements, a beefed-up and revived OCUA was to monitor and assess the universities, to advise the government on all issues related to post-secondary education, and the government was to act, wherever necessary, to steer universities in specific directions if they refused to do so of their own accord. Finally, the Report, in so far as it was roundly rejected by both students and faculty, not least because it recommended higher-tuition fees and an income-indexed loan repayment program, reflected what were at the time the popular limits of the neoliberal program.

With the election of a Liberal-led coalition government in 1985, the Bovey Report, a product of the preceding Progressive Conservative government, was more formally sidelined.<sup>154</sup> However, this should not lead one to conclude, as Trick (Trick 2005a, 272) has, that the Liberal tenure marked a period of “relative calm,” even if one assumes that is was relative to, “to the years of retrenchment” that were to follow. On the contrary, though the sector was not marked by the kind of disagreements typical of the era immediately preceding and following the Liberal’s five-year stint in office, it was nonetheless a period of fundamental restructuring within the sector. In fact, while levels of per-student funding via government transfers and tuition-fees rose at a rate generally in-line with

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<sup>154</sup> The historical defeat of the Progressive Conservatives, initially by a Liberal led minority which subsequently cemented into a Liberal majority, also tempered the speed of the transformative program – in a period of five years, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities saw the appointment of three different ministers, none of which was able to amass the experience and expertise necessary to undertake much in the way of significant policy departures.

inflation, the government's introduction of the Ontario Centre's of Excellence, which were subsequently copied by the federal government, and of other forms of conditional finance intended to encourage university-corporate links, were significant, not least because such programs did not upset the 'relative calm' Trick describes.<sup>155</sup>

It is also necessary to remember that the 1980s were a period of significant change in the universities themselves. The tide of economics imperialism began to crash throughout economics departments all over North America (Milonakis and Fine 2009). By the mid-to-late 1980s governments had firmly refocused on economic growth over-full employment, reflecting to a significant degree the perceived theoretical superiority of Hayek and Freidman (Gindin and Panitch 2012; Harvey 2005). Also, in 1985 the OCGS committed to conduct periodic reviews of all graduate programs, thereby expanding their longer-standing practice of reviewing only new graduate programs. In other words, the extension of QA was well underway. The fact that the extension of OCGS review hardly kicked-up any opposition, speaks, on the one hand, to the degree to which managerialism was already embedded within Ontario's universities, and, on the other hand, to the ease with which QA was allowed to develop when not

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<sup>155</sup> In fact, Trick hints at this. He notes that the emergence of conditional forms of research funding, by way of the Ontario Centre's of Excellence, did mark an important turning point in what he conceives of as a wholly separate area of government-university relations. Of course, as I suggest above, this conception of research as a separate area because it did not immediately impact the BIU formula is precisely why it is so terrifically important, not least because the imposition of conditional forms of finance based on peer review had the effect of normalizing both university-corporate links.

connected to issues of funding. In subsequently making periodic reviews a condition of eligibility for provincial funding, the government subsequently made the formal link between audit and value. But this was hardly threatening, if only because the OCGS reviews operated through the accepted doctrine of peer review and were not linked to graduated outcomes and rationalized funding. The 1980s were also the decade of four major “management fads” in higher education: zero-based budgeting, strategic planning, benchmarking, and, towards the end of the 1980s, Total Quality Management (Birnbaum 2000). The administrative/bureaucratic apparatus was being completely transformed, even if formalized systems of measurement and ranking were not yet in place.

Also critical to the development of what would emerge as the foundations of QA through the 1980s, was the increasing interest of corporate Canada in the country’s (and Ontario’s) system of higher education. For example, the formation in 1983 of the Corporate Higher Education Forum, which followed but seven years after the formation of the Business Council on National Issues in 1976, is indicative of the degree to which the capitalist class was beginning to constitute itself as a cohesive social, political, and economic force with an interest in higher education. In this regard, Carroll and Beaton (2000) note several trends of significance. Between 1976 and 1996: 1) the number of corporate-industry links widened to include firms operating in hi-tech and “knowledge intensive” sectors; 2) a greater number of links between senior university bureaucrats and corporate Canada took shape; and, 3) more university administrators came to play roles in

the affairs of corporate Canada (Carroll and Beaton 2000, 89–92). Carroll and Beaton read this precisely as do Newson and Buchbinder (1988), and therein as evidence of the degree to which neoliberalism was, through the 1980s, *becoming* embedded within higher education.

#### **7.2.4 Roll-back Neoliberalism and the Death of Parliamentary Socialism in Ontario: From the NDP to Mike Harris**

In so far as the development of ideological and programmatic cohesion and extension (to the universities) within Canada's capitalist class, had delivered something of a revolution in the management of Ontario's universities, it was not yet clear just how far that program could progress. Indeed, the degree to which Canada's working classes had not yet accepted the neoliberal orthodoxy was evident in the 1988 election, largely fought over the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and was on display again in 1990, when Ontario's New Democratic Party (NDP) was able to capitalize on widespread discontent with the dictates of neoliberalism. Indeed, elected on the promise of breaking sharply with the neoliberal trajectory that the Liberals and Conservatives were both advocating, the election of the NDP was clearly an indication of both real dissatisfaction (not yet completely turned to disaffection) and potential. Notably, organized labour factored centrally in the election of the NDP. The CAW's separation from the UAW in 1985, had provided room for the union to organize and mobilize in a manner that undoubtedly aided the NDP in their electoral bid. The strength of the CAW through the early 1990s is also significant in so far as it both suggests

the continued importance of Ontario's manufacturing sector and the urgency with which capital – and the Government – then wanted to defeat the unions. The changes that the NDP government made to higher education and QA, suggests that higher education policy was at least one of the levers through which labour was to be disciplined. In expanding the suite of programs designed to promote university-industry links at the very moment when they cut direct transfers to the universities and colleges via the BIU and hiked tuition-fees, the NDP government looked to fuel the Province's transition to a "knowledge-based" and "global" economy, a transition that would weaken the manufacturing sector by making it a relatively smaller piece of the Province's economic pie. In hiking tuition-fees and founding an alternative to the Ontario arm of the Canadian Federation of Students, the NDP also advanced arguments about the "value" of higher education. More than this, in simultaneously calling for University boards to be made more representative and inclusive (not least of students and faculty), and for those boards to be directed in their efforts by the use of KPI's, the NDP looked to further instantiate neoliberal concepts of value.

Without question, the policy constraints which the NDP encountered immediately upon their election in 1990 were significant. At the time, Ontario was in the midst of a remarkably deep and painful recession, one that saw the unemployment rate top that of any other advanced industrial country. And the immediate reaction of financial markets to the election of the NDP, clearly posed a significant barrier to the imposition, if not the development, of a truly



progressive program. Of course, however binding were the constraints that it then faced, the NDP government did little other than accommodate, and rather rapidly. In remarkably short order, the NDP came to accept and promote a very conventional line:

Rather than treating the deficit as a symptom of the economic crisis, they asserted, with increasing insistence, that it was *the* problem, and adopted the conventional business view-point that advances towards lowering unemployment and reducing socio-economic inequality were dependent upon its solution. Before long the Ontario NDP government began to look like every other federal and provincial government. (Panitch and Swartz 2003, 162)

What this meant was that reforms of the Province's labour laws, long promised by the NDP while in opposition, were limited not so much because of the constraints faced by the Government early on during its tenure, but because of the ideological disposition to which the NDP leadership was arguably attached for a long time. Of course, both Panitch and Swartz (2003), and Rachlis and Wolfe (1997) note that the Government's departure from a more radical line was taken in the face of a highly coordinated and almost continuous attack on the NDP government by business. But what Rachlis and Wolfe never broach is the degree to which such attacks intensified only *after* the Government capitulated to business demands in respect of the NDP's amendments for the aforementioned reform of the Ontario Labour Relations Act (ORLA). And they simply never discuss the NDP's rapid uptake and advocacy of competitiveness through restructuring (i.e. the human capital/knowledge based economy thesis) as a kind of ideological transformation (perhaps because it wasn't?). Moreover, events in

the higher education sector suggest that the ideological turn so clearly reflected in the “Social Contract” was foreshadowed in legislative moves that pre-dated that legislation. Indeed, before offering up the Social Contract, with the Government under pressure from the COU to raise tuition-fees and to consider the introduction of an income indexed loan repayment program (ICLRP), the NDP not only helped found and fund the Ontario University Student Alliance (OUSA), a breeding ground for young Liberals that was intended as a counterweight to the Ontario Federation of Students, but it also announced a 10% increase in tuition-fees, the abolition of up-front grants, and a pilot ICLRP program run jointly with the federal government. These steps mirrored moves by the then Liberal-led government at the federal level, which, frustrated by the opposition mounted by the Canadian Federation of Students (the national organization of which the Ontario Federation is an affiliate), had helped found and fund the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, an organization which shared the political disposition of the OUSA.

The NDP tenure was also coloured with the rhetoric of university accountability, though not clearly as a result of a desire to direct universities to specific ends, which would become more evident with subsequent administrations. The delivery of the auditor general’s report in 1987 in respect of the Trent, Waterloo, and the University of Toronto, more or less forced the NDP to, once in power, undertake some kind of review of university spending and accountability. In what Trick describes as a deal with the universities, the

government, rather than amend the Audit Act in a manner that might impinge on university autonomy, struck the Task Force on University Accountability, subsequently dubbed the Broadhurst Commission for its chair, William Broadhurst (Trick 2005, 241). During its deliberations a report delivered by Stephen Lewis on race relations in Ontario led then Minister of Education Richard Allen to broaden the mandate of the Task Force to include consideration of the make-up of universities' governing boards (242). This issue became a principal thrust of the Report, which recommended that faculty and student involvement in university governance be expanded (Broadhurst 1993). However, the Report also made recommendations regarding the use of indices and measures to help transformed boards effectively monitor university performance. – “indices whose prime purpose would be to establish norms to be applied uniformly to all universities and used to rank them,” were also recommended (Broadhurst 1993 as quoted in; Trick 2005, 242). Allen also asked OCUA to make recommendations about a quality and accountability framework for the university system. The OCUA's recommendations reflected perfectly neoliberal rhetoric fundamental to the neoliberal program discussed in Chapter 2. Accordingly, QA was to be undertaken through a program of “monitored self-regulation” (“steering not rowing”), ultimately answerable to an Academic Audit Committee made up of government-appointed members (Trick 2005, 243). The NDP also introduced the Education Quality and Accountability Office (the EQAO), which was resisted successfully by the universities, but which became a

key part of the secondary school program and of the Progressive Conservative's approach to elementary education after 1995. As well, the government's activities triggered discussion within the COU that ultimately led in 1996, when additional pressure was being applied by the new Progressive Conservative government, to form the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (244), thereby making period audits and reviews a part of all taught programs in the Province's universities.

What is fascinating here is the degree to which accountability and quality had become, and very rapidly, synonymous with measurement. Again, such developments cannot be viewed in abstraction. The discussion in Ontario regarding quality and accountability happened not long after moves in the UK, first under Thatcher and Major and then Blair, to use measurement as a mechanism of control and direction. Of course, such moves were excused and explained by appeal to the "realities of governing" (Rachlis and Wolfe 1997), as two NDP insiders would have it. As much as the NDP tenure also involved certain progressive changes to labour laws and the like, the NDP stint in power, brief as it was, saw cutbacks increasingly described as more than just a competitive necessity in the new global economic landscape, but as absolutely inevitable. Bob Rae's "pragmatism" meant that progressive social policy was a moral obligation only in respect of the poorest of the poor and the most disenfranchised. Otherwise, social policy became a potential source of competitive advantage, a means of supporting markets that, as the neoliberal

economists might have put it, were only inefficient periodically and/or under exceptional circumstances. In what Rachlis and Wolfe describe as the search for policy coherence during the NDP tenure the government's 1991 budget paper, "Ontario in the 1990's",

...recognized that competitiveness was important to attaining this objective [sustainable stability and prosperity], but argued that it could best be realized through the creation of high-value-added, high-wage jobs and strategic partnerships. The most important adjustment challenge in the 1990's was to increase the overall productivity of Ontario's economy. The key to increased productivity did not lie in minimizing cost levels for the existing mix of product and processes, but in fostering productive systems that promote continuous improvement in products and processes across the networks of firms and sectors in the provincial economy. The budget paper also argued that any successful high-wage, high-value-added economic strategy must be based on a defence, and extension, of social equity to generate the required degree of social cohesion. (Rachlis and Wolfe 1997, 349)<sup>156</sup>

The Social Contract then was merely an extension of that which was started in earnest in specific sectors and grew out of the panicked recognition on the part of the government that early projections concerning the depth of the economic crisis then underway had been grossly under-estimated, to the point of

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<sup>156</sup> In a recent critique of the CAW's 2008 deal with Chrysler, Sam Gindin had this to say about the logic of "competitiveness": "The problem, it seems, is that once the union accepts the argument that competitiveness is a goal workers must conform to - rather than as a constraint that must be stretched through broader policies and challenges to corporate power - the union ends up dependent on the corporations. Mobilizing the workers to fight the corporations is then largely irrelevant (in fact, it might even be seen as a potential problem)." Gindin, Sam, *The CAW and Panic Bargaining: Early Opening at the Big Three*, Socialist Project Bullet, May 1, 2008

negligence.<sup>157</sup> Having promised business that the Province's deficit would not exceed a \$10 billion dollar ceiling, the Government used dire projections concerning the imminent erosion of its revenue base to leverage support for legislation that did away with the right of public sector workers to strike and which cut public sector wages most famously through the imposition of 12 days of unpaid leave that came to be called "Rae Days". In terms of funding for the universities, the NDP government largely froze levels of spending there too, alongside aforementioned increases to tuition-fees, the abolition of up-front grants, and the expansion of student debt programs. How the universities worked through the Social Contract was, however, left entirely up to the universities. Rather than impose agreements on the system,

...each university was left to negotiate with its own employees on how to manage the funding reductions (which as we saw in Table 5.1, averaged about 5 per cent per student in 1993-1994 once inflation and higher tuition-fees were taken into account)...All universities introduced a salary freeze for at least part of the three years (with one agreement silent). The second most common way of finding the necessary savings was to reduce contributions to university pension plans.(Trick 2005, 146)

In the end, the NDP government successfully imposed a level of fiscal discipline and austerity of which any conservatively minded economist could be

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<sup>157</sup> Rachlis and Wolfe attempt to applaud Rae for helping Ontario to weather a global economic crisis, without imposing drastic cuts to public sector payrolls. In so applauding Rae, and their own efforts of course, they fail to recognize that: 1) the fact that the bulk of adjustment was borne by workers, via tax reforms and wage cuts, and other directly coercive measures (like the temporary suspension of collective bargaining rights); 2) the degree to which the logic of NDP policy was exemplary of the logic fundamental to the exercise of neo-liberalism; 3) a fundamental redefinition of the public good; and, 4) premised in part on the very obfuscation that this dissertation has outlined: the idea that measurement can be an objective means by which to assess success and quality.

proud. Critically, this did not mean across the board cuts, but rather a program of cut-backs alongside funding increases to programs that were intended to press the university closer to industry. When the austerity program encountered political blocks, the NDP turned both to the rhetoric of “value”, “efficiency” and “accountability” as well as to the development of QA as a mechanism through which to justify either or both on-going support for government expenditures or the imposition of austerity (the EQAO being an important case in point). In this the NDP had managed to engender relative disgust on the part of both labour and capital. For its part, organized labour watched as a social democratic government “temporarily” suspended collective bargaining rights. Meanwhile, capital, having taken-up a public relations attack almost as a kind of pre-emptory challenge to the possibility that the allegedly progressive NDP might advance a social-democratic politic, proved unwilling to relent when the NDP supported the neoliberal program, perhaps because capital recognized that more support was available elsewhere. Nonetheless, from the perspective of capital, the NDP government was something of a success. As was mentioned, the manufacturing sector took-off, if only briefly, after the recession of the early 1990s, and the NDP had provided a basis upon which more obviously neoliberal programs of accumulation could be implemented, not least through the expansion of programs designed to support commercialization and the province’s transition to a knowledge based economy. In other words, the intellectual transformation that the Social Contract allegedly reflected, signaled the on-set of what Peck and

Tickell usefully describe as “roll-back neo-liberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002)” that is the wholesale de- or re-regulation of the political economy, the dismantling, generally through privatization, of state institutions, and a stalwart attack on the institutions and capacities of organized labour. The massive defeat of the NDP in the 1995 election then did not happen because the NDP failed to provide, as Rachlis and Wolfe argue, a “positive vision of good times to come, (Rachlis and Wolfe 1997, 357)” but rather because in trying to please two masters (one to a far greater extent than the other), the NDP lacked not just direction, but any kind of identity whatsoever, particularly in a political economic climate within which neoliberal globalization had taken on a flavour of inevitability.

By contrast, the PC manifesto, the “Common Sense Revolution (CSR)” was direct, comprehensive, and understandable. In promising a program of “revolution” based on the near simultaneous reduction of personal income taxes and the province’s deficit, the PC’s program spoke the *lingua franca* of the moment: less taxation and regulation, the inexorable efficiency of the market, and the virtues of individual freedom. Thus, the Tories did not just commit to what the NDP described as the realities of governing, they embraced it wholeheartedly.

### **7.2.5 The Harris Eves Government – Organized Labour in the Crosshairs**

The ellipsis of the PC government is exemplary of how ‘roll-back neo-liberalism’ has tended to become exhausted and is suggestive of why QA has



become such an attractive regulative technology – their legislative agenda triggered high levels of social unrest in turn triggered by increasingly obvious forms of social inequity and eventually generated a series of outcomes that sacrificed public safety thereby ending (temporarily) the government’s ability to conflate notions of the public interest with market de- and/or re-regulation. Indeed, the limits of roll-back neo-liberalism in Ontario were such that the Tories were forced to experiment with different forms of “roll-out neo-liberalism,” in some sectors, including higher education.<sup>158</sup> As such, the Tories did construct and expand certain state institutions or quasi-state institutions<sup>159</sup> so as to further normalize and cement market-based regulation and neoliberal forms of hyper-individualism (what Peck and Tickell (2002) call, “new social subjectivities” (390)). But the Tories proved totally unable to consciously marry the contradictory impulses fundamental to neoliberal forms of statecraft. So brazenly ideological was the leadership of the PC Party that they appeared unable to understand well-enough the degree to which public investment in “social” programs was necessary to support and perfect the neoliberal enterprise. The consequence, in terms of higher education, was that the Government under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves was not able to establish the political capital necessary to

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<sup>158</sup> I am thinking here of both the University Ontario Institute of Technology, which the Conservative Government founded, as well as the Superbuild program. “Ontario Works” also entailed significant expenditures, not least through the hiring of Anderson Consulting, which helped the Government develop this program and associated cutbacks. See (Herd 2002)

<sup>159</sup> Among other things, the Conservatives built the University of Ontario Institute of Technology,

consolidate a system of QA, at least not as much as their successors would prove able to do.

As was mentioned, the Conservative program centred around fiscal cut-backs and tax reform that were in turn leveraged to support an aggressive legislative agenda intended to deconstruct and destroy what neo-classical economists refer to as “negative externalities”, so called “barriers” to competition and free-enterprise, that were blamed for the Province’s lacklustre performance in the new global, and allegedly knowledge-based, economy. Consistently justified in terms of competitiveness and cost-effectiveness, the Tories sought to thoroughly restructure the Ontario Public Service, and the larger political economy (Kozolanka 2007). To that end, the Province’s major municipalities were each amalgamated into a series of “mega-cities”, by far the largest of which was and remains Toronto (Keil 2002). The elementary school system was similarly amalgamated and subject to a series of legislative moves that massively decreased the number of elected officials, curtailed municipalities’ ability to impose property taxes to support education while simultaneously adding to their slate of responsibilities, regulated teachers’ work, imposed new managerial relationships within public schools, attacked unionized labour in the sector, and subjected the system to intensified forms of QA and community “participation” (Keil 2002; Bedard and Lawion 2000a) . As well, the Tories scrapped the NDP’s labour legislation (which included equal opportunity and anti-scab provisions); welfare transfers were cut and tied to work requirements; infrastructure

development and renewal work was progressively farmed out to private industrial “partners”; various state-run forms of regulatory supervision were similarly privatized and/or outsourced. Where governments maintained “ownership” over policy development they did so subject to the imposition of new rules (drawn from the New Public Management) which sought to have the government operate like a private corporation (Cohen 2001).

The response of organized labour, which crystallized in the “Days of Action” was, for a time, fevered. But after organizing the ‘Days of Action’ in 1995, the leadership of the OFL and its affiliated unions became increasingly unwilling to offer either organizational or financial support to the broader social movements then pressing back in unprecedentedly large numbers against the onslaught of neoliberal restructuring being pursued by the government (Munro 1997). There are at least a few explanations for this lack of support. First, Ontario’s economy had, initially via the FTA and subsequently via the NAFTA, been made more dependent on the rhythms of accumulation in the US. This was complicated by the fact that the same agreements also made the 1965 Auto Pact largely irrelevant. While the ability of the automakers to divest from the Canadian market was limited, the massive de-industrialization of significant chunks of the US, and the fact that production guarantees outlined in the Auto Pact were made irrelevant under NAFTA, meant that the CAW and indeed the OFL was increasingly beholden to the logic of ‘competitiveness’, if only on the basis of a series of fallacious assumptions. Paramount among such assumptions

was that capital mobility and free trade enabled massive and almost instantaneous divestment from jurisdictions fraught with labour unrest. The second key issue was the about-face of the NDP. That party's "pragmatism" under Bob Rae meant that the labour movement at large had no natural parliamentary allies. As a consequence, direct action was progressively replaced by a firm belief in the utility of meetings with parliamentary committees and lobbying through formal networks. Though the rhetoric of the CAW would remain focused on mobilizing the rank and file, little such activity was actually undertaken, unless it was impossible to avoid. And finally, one can also not underestimate the force with which the logic of globalization and financialization had taken hold in the province and in the country. Household finances had been fundamentally reshaped through the 1980s and 1990s in a manner which not only prompted critical scholars to begin focusing on global finance as fundamental to understanding the emerging order, but which also had the effect of reshaping capital and its everyday manifestation. The CAW's embracing of the apparent inevitability of global finance, though by no means also inevitable, was nonetheless indicative of the transformed political economy and the defeat of organized labour under neoliberalism.

Whatever the explanation, the transformation of the unions became publicly visible most poignantly during the 1999 provincial election, when the CAW made the decision to back NDP candidates in only those ridings where they had a chance of winning. Elsewhere, the logic of "strategic voting", saw the CAW

support liberal candidates against Progressive Conservative ones. Though the tactic didn't work in 1999, it did generate significant media attention and arguably triggered not only the formal divorce of the NDP from the CAW, but also the on-rush of suitors at the Federal level, namely Paul Martin and Belinda Stronach, the former being the first sitting Prime Minister to be invited to speak at a CAW general meeting and the latter being the daughter of auto-parts magnate Frank Stronach, a staunchly anti-union industrialist (Gindin 2008; Allen 2006; CAW 1999).

In terms of the higher education sector, the Conservative agenda was similarly extensive, even though it was frustrated at several turns<sup>160</sup>: tuition-fees for most undergraduate programs were raised by over 55% during the Tory tenure and were deregulated entirely for certain professional programs; massive cutbacks were made to the Ontario Student Loan Program, including lower annual borrowing limits and higher expected parent contributions (Doucet 2004; Johanna-Young 1997). The pioneering efforts of the Liberal government to press the universities closer to industry through conditional financing arrangements, which had been expanded by the NDP, were further expanded by the Tories (Trick 2005b, 339).<sup>161</sup> The government also extended degree granting powers to

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<sup>160</sup> The frustrations to which I am referring: 1) planned attacks on tenure were turned back or not attempted (Trick 2005b, 245); 2) income indexed loan repayment programs proved a no-go (Johanna-Young 1997, 27–29), and the universities successfully opposed the government's proposal to have them monitored by the Education Quality Assessment Office (Royce 1998, 208)

<sup>161</sup> As Trick notes, the Ontario Research and Development Challenge Fund saw the Provincial Government link provincial funding to the amount of support a university received from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, one of the Federal Government's main avenues through which commercialization has been encouraged.

Ontario's 24 colleges, and opened the door to private degree-granting institutions, both with an eye towards generating competition for students and, through that competition, institutional differentiation (PEQAB 2013)(Trick 2005b, 380). The Tories also abolished the OCUA, thereby ending the period during which Ontario's system operated with an institutional "buffer" between the universities and the Government. However much the OCUA had been sidelined through the 1970s and 1980s, when it proved unable to navigate a solution to the BIU controversy that had raged during that time, in abolishing the OCUA, the Tories clarified their desire for a more direct and interventionist approach to higher education. (Trick 2005b, 266)

At the same time, the Tories did prove content to follow the spirit of the Bovey Report, at least in so far as competition was concerned. Thus, rather than directly administer tuition- and other ancillary-fees, the Tories downloaded that task to university boards, which had of course by that time also been thoroughly reconstituted as a juggernaut of neoliberalism (Carroll and Beaton 2000; Trick 2005b, 258–261). The abolition of the OCUA, must therefore be read as an effort to intervene more directly, not to abandon the "steer not row" approach entirely. In terms of their internal management, the colleges and universities were forced to prepare annual business plans and reviews and were barred from running deficits at the threat of being taken over by the province (Gov. of Ontario 1999). And the colleges were forced to prepare and publish various quality assessment data in the form of Key Performance Indicators (Doucet 2004; G. Jones 2004).

In as much as the universities allegedly escaped such requirements, they did so by proactively responding to the government's direction: in 1996, under cover of the COU, the universities created the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC) (Council of Ontario Universities 2012, 1).<sup>162</sup> As it had previously, program review and audit based on peer-review appealed to the universities more so than did what apparently still appeared as cruder and more instrumental forms of management, namely KPIs.

Arguably, one of the reasons why the Government was prepared to allow the universities to extend/establish their own system of QA was the Government's already troubled relationship with elementary and secondary school teachers, which boiled into a massive strike in 1997 (Greenberg 2004; Bedard and Lawion 2000a). Coupled with the obvious tensions and opposition from both students the faculty associations in the higher education sector, most clearly demonstrated in the 1997 York University Faculty Association strike, the Government may well have opted to pick their battles. The Tory era was also marked by significant tensions between the government and the universities, most poignantly exhibited in an exchange between the then Premier Harris and the COU.<sup>163</sup> As tense as relations between the universities and the government may have become, however, they were not completely sour.

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<sup>162</sup> This move was taken just as the Ontario Government was in the process of legislating requirements for the colleges that involved the periodic production of key performance indicators.

<sup>163</sup> Concerned that the government's proposed "Superbuild" program did not include on-going funds for the maintenance and operation of new buildings, the COU wrote to Harris asking for both a meeting and clarification on the matter. As the then Minister of Education Diane

By the middle of the 1990's, university administrators generally shared the Government's vision of the sector. In fact, the COU came out in support of fully deregulating tuition-fees and income indexed loan repayment programs, marking a move from earlier efforts to have the government increase, but not fully deregulate fees. The COU also began working on performance indicators and various other measures of accountability, initially at the behest of the Broadhurst Commission and subsequently of its own accord (Trick 2005a, 241). At the same time, the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) began to lobby in support of government programs that linked research funding to performance indicators and commercialization. This pattern only intensified after 1995, following the formation of the so-called G10 "research intensive universities" as a working group within the AUCC, thereby enabling the AUCC's most powerful members to collectively press for government funding for commercialization programs (Metcalf 2010; Trick 2005b, 334). And, as was just mentioned, the COU formed the UPRAC without government involvement. Thus, while there were unquestionably key differences between the Tories and the universities, most notably around levels of core operating funds, such differences should not be exaggerated.<sup>164</sup> The sometimes tense communications between the

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Cunningham subsequently noted, "the government's reply challenged them [the universities] to name the universities in this position [of concern] so their funding could be given to others instead (Gesink-Walsh 2007, 221)".

<sup>164</sup> On the one hand, the universities wanted either more funding or for tuition-fees to be allowed to increase, by at least as much as government funding was cut-back. On the other hand, the government was looking to trim operating grants by more than it was prepared to allow tuition-fees to rise. And there were frequently rhetorical flourishes from Mike Harris sounding



Government and the universities merely glossed over remarkable similarities, even if they did add tension to relations within the “policy network”.

Nowhere are such similarities clearer than in the report of the Report of the Government’s, “Task Force on the Future Role of Postsecondary Education”, which it commissioned in 1996. The Chair of that task force, David C. Smith, had recently ended a 10-year run as the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Queens University where he had previously sat as chair of the economics department. As an economist, Smith published with, among others, the likes of Thomas Corcherane, a highly touted avatar of fiscal federalism and of neoliberal economics more generally. The four other members of the panel included former Tory Minister of Colleges and Universities, Bette Stephenson; David Cameron, a much noted institutionalist from the UofT; Fred Gorbet, a now private consultant and long-time member of the right-wing think tank, the C.D. Howe Institute; and, Catherine Henderson, who would eventually become a contractor to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, the institutional brainchild of Bob Rae, but who at the time the Task Force was formed was in the middle of a stint as the President of Centennial College. That the members of the taskforce were stalwart Conservatives was hardly something the universities noted. Indeed, when the Report was released, the COU and its members were quite supportive (Trick 2005a, 221). The Task Force made 18 recommendations in all, including:

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like a right-wing neophyte determined to instrumentalize and commodify everything that the universities and colleges did. (Gesink-Walsh 2007, 221–223)

the total deregulation of tuition fees; higher levels of provincial funding; income indexed loan repayment programs; performance based pay for faculty; and more public-private partnerships to finance research (D. C. Smith 1996).

Several hallmarks of neoliberal approaches to governance also jump out of that Report. First, in terms of private research sponsorship, the Task Force concluded that universities and colleges should “more actively” seek-out private research dollars subject to internally developed “guidelines that preserve the integrity of their institutions in such partnerships (D. C. Smith 1996, recommendation 9)”. In other words, the Task Force was happy to have universities decide for themselves how, or if, to regulate private research monies. Second, the Task Force encouraged the government to make individualized savings programs specific to higher education (Registered Education Savings Plans or ‘RESPs’) tax deductible. Similarly, interest paid on student loans was to be made tax deductible. Here the report likened students to individual businesses:

It is a clear principle of income taxation that interest paid on money borrowed to earn income should be tax deductible, and taking out a loan to make an investment in education is analogous to taking out a loan to make a business investment. This measure should be implemented by the Government of Canada, and we urge the Government of Ontario to indicate to the federal government that it supports such a change and is prepared to forego the provincial tax revenue involved. (D. C. Smith 1996, recommendation 5)

The Task Force also does a fantastic job of conflating, as no previous report had done, a student's responsibility to participate actively in learning, with an apparent responsibility to pay ever-higher tuition-fees:

Postsecondary education is not a constitutional right. Education cannot be given, nor received on demand. It must be acquired through active learning, and for most it is achieved only by dint of very hard work. We speak, therefore, not of rights but of shared responsibilities – of government, institutions, students, families, and private business. This is not without financial consequences. Within the framework of shared responsibilities, we think it falls to government to ensure that the public colleges and universities of this province have an adequate and stable base of operating support. This is not now the case. In the current situation, the contribution of students and their parents, through tuition fees, will increase in some circumstances, if we are to escape the slippery slope to mediocrity. We accept this as necessary, but only on the condition that those qualified but in need are not barred from admission. (D. C. Smith 1996)

Also suggestive of a fundamentally new doctrine is the absence in the Report of any mention of manpower forecasting. Present in virtually every other report concerned with higher education, concern over rationalization is now replaced with a call for 'differentiation' and 'deregulation' without reference to the kind of centralized market forecasts that even Bovey had mentioned. On the contrary, the Report indicates that human capital requirements are best met by institutions that stay close and responsive to the needs of industry (D. C. Smith 1996).

In response to the Task Force's recommendations, the Government immediately did very little. Tuition-fees were allowed to rise, but were only deregulated in particular programs. Anticipated cuts to operating budgets were stopped, if only temporarily. The Government made it possible for private

universities to open, ostensibly so as to increase competition within the higher education marketplace. Competition was also encouraged via programs that matched private-sector donations for research and operating purposes, compelling the universities to aggressively market themselves to corporate Canada, alumni, and the general public. The Government also licensed Ontario's colleges to offer applied baccalaureate degrees, again with an eye towards creating competition and institutional differentiation. A new university, the awkwardly named, University Ontario Institute of Technology was built, apparently so as to provide an MIT-like competitor to the ever-more densely populated marketplace. The Government was not able to set-up, however, an ICLRP program. It also proved unwilling to form a new advisory body, which Smith had recommended. As for the Report's other recommendations, very little was really required of the government in terms of legislative action. Instead, the government needed simply to support universities' efforts to differentiate themselves via market-like mechanisms (i.e. conditional forms of research-funding, and the progressive de-regulation of tuition-fee ceilings).

To the extent that the government's apparent appetite for the use of KPIs was placated via the COU's move to self-regulate, the Tories program was perhaps somewhat less developed than might have ideally been liked. On the other hand, the publication of Maclean's Magazine's annual ranking of universities had since 1991 been mimicking the US News and World Report exercise in relying heavily on the use of KPIs. While the Maclean's exercise was

initially criticized by a couple of institutions, such criticism quickly faded (Doucet 2004). The rapid abatement of any opposition to the Maclean's exercise is exemplary of how QA works to regulate value. Because data was assembled irrespective of whether or not an institution chose to participate, those institutions that decided to forgo participation in the Maclean's exercise were likely concerned about the enthusiasm with which certain institutions did participate. Furthermore, the popularity of the annual issue made it clear that resistance was futile and counter-productive; unless institutions undertook to control the production of the data Maclean's relied upon, institutional managers appeared to understand that they were sacrificing what could usefully be thought of as "reputational capital". Indeed, Maclean's ranking became an obvious boon to highly ranked institutions which used results to fundraise, attract prospective students, boost their profile in policy-making circles, and attract corporate research partners. A decade after the Maclean's rankings began in 1991, "RESEARCH INFOSOURCE", a division of "The Impact Group Inc., a private consulting firm, began publishing its own widely distributed annual ranking of Canadian universities based exclusively on research-related KPIs. The Government, in other words, hardly needed to enforce that which the "market" already had.

It also bears repeating that program review was – and had long been – less controversial, and was in fact seen by the universities as an effective way in which to side-step government intervention without creating overly much debate with

faculty. Not only did the COU's system of periodic review rely on peer assessments, and thus on a widely accepted practice, the results of COU reviews were *not* linked to core funding, at least outside of programs that failed to obtain a basic standard, which has not happened with any frequency (see note 5).

Though it does not appear to have occurred to the government (or to faculty, or to administrators), there was nonetheless an important inter-connectedness to the Province's system of program review and the more plainly quantitative efforts of private-sector rankings exercises. As I argued in Chapter 4, once subject to a system of valuation, as is the case with private-sector rankings exercises, the qualitative aspects of higher education become relevant only in so far as they are productive of exchange value. This is because, "quality", even on a peer reviewed basis, is necessarily adjusted to reflect the exigencies of accumulation, at least if the program or institution that "produced" such "quality" is to remain financially viable. In other words, program reviews are for naught unless they aid programs in either developing or maintaining a curriculum that responds to students' and administrators demands, which have been shaped by the call to instrumental logic reflected in both rankings exercises and programs designed to press the university closer to industry. In this latter respect, the efforts of the provincial government during the Tories' tenure were aggressively supplemented by the policies of the federal government. Herein, I would point to the Federal government's creation of the Canadian Foundations for Innovation in 1997. Not only have the sums delivered through the CFI become massive, effectively

overwhelming the funding available through Industry Canada's three research granting councils, but, as Polster describes, the operation of the CFI has shifted the focus of research (C. Polster 2007).

Tracking the degree to which the universities were transformed during the Tories' tenure is a difficult endeavor, not least because of the paucity of data that is available. Statistics Canada, which has been subject to vicious spending cuts over the last several years, indicates that between 1998 and 2008 the value of private sector research contracts grew fully ten-fold, from \$288 million to just under \$3 billion. While this would imply that the commercialization program was not fully mature in the early 2000s, it is important to remember that this figure hardly represents all of the money spent on commercially *oriented* research, or any of the money spent either federally or provincially on their respective Centre's for Excellence programs, which operate outside of the university sector, strictly defined. In terms of the taught programs at Ontario universities, levels of enrolment by program have held rather steady over the last 40 years. But such gross data pays little attention to the evolution of thought within different programs, or to the emphasis placed on, for example, the study of the classical texts of political science or more contemporary works related to public administration. What is clear is that participation rates climbed throughout the 1990s, suggesting that the alleged value of a university degree (the credential more than the education) was understood ever more widely.

Another indication of what was happening “on the ground” in the universities, was the faculty strike in 1997 at York University.

According to Newson (Newson 1998b, 295–296), the 1997 YUFA strike, though initially about salary increases, pay equity for female faculty, retirement packages, and the like, quickly evolved into a strike about the neoliberal university itself. And it bears keeping in mind that the late 1990s was the moment that the anti-globalization movement peaked, with protests in Seattle in 1999 and in Quebec City in 2001. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the potential of then turning back the tide of commercialization, managerialism, and of QA seems limited.

Perhaps more than anything else, the vibrancy of the anti-globalization movement, needs to be evaluated relative to the position of organized labour, which was not, at the time, nearly as vibrant. It is also important to recognize the speed and depth of the cuts that the Tories imposed under first Mike Harris and then Ernie Eves. Student opposition to the Tories’ agenda, which was fevered, was nonetheless a kind of rear-guard action that aimed to stop the cuts and restore levels of government funding, which had of course also been cut under the previous NDP government. At the same time, faculty had been rapidly subjected to an intensified work-regime, in part via the system of conditional financing arrangements that had been created both federally and provincially, and in part via the new managerialism that was then firmly rooted in Ontario’s universities. No less important was the myriad ways in which the faculty ranks had become



fractured, particularly as the universities came through the Harris-Eves era to rely more heavily on contract faculty (Newson and Buchbinder 1988; Rajagopal 2002a). And as Bob Rae's 2005 Report would subsequently testify, Ontario was seen, through the closing of the 1990s, as having to compete for foreign direct investment in a globalized and knowledge-based economy. As such, the value of higher education in the province, like all those within it, was necessarily judged against the benchmark of virtue: the American research-intensive institution and its "manufacture". In the end, the limits faced by progressive forces were perhaps most clearly on display in 2003, when the Liberals rode to power on a platform inspired by Third Way Neoliberalism. With the promise of a tuition freeze and more money for higher education, the Liberals were able to consolidate the neoliberal program and press the universities further than they had yet gone towards the creation of a QA system more and more akin to that in operation in the UK.

### **7.2.6 The Education Premier: Roll-Out Neoliberalism and the Liberals in Ontario**

In 2003, the Liberal government was elected on a platform that promised to bring together the fiscal conservatism of the Progressive Conservatives under both Harris and Eves, and the progressive social spending plans generally associated with the New Democrats. Specifically, Ontario's Liberal party under Dalton McGuinty promised to roll-back Conservative tax cuts and to renew spending on social services without any additional tax increases. The platform,

which relied heavily upon economic projections of a rather dubious nature, signaled that the Liberals would seek to mimic the politics of the Third Way (Evans 2007). Of course, as I have argued, the arrival to Ontario of Third Way politics had taken place, if not with the Social Contract, then certainly during the Tories' first term, when the labour movement was forced to reckon with the betrayal of the NDP, the program of roll-back neo-liberalism that was then being promoted by the Progressive Conservative party, and the after-effects of organized labour's momentous defeat around first the FTA and subsequently the NAFTA (Panitch 1994, 76–79). Again, by 2003 the CAW, that weathervane of industrial relations and working class politics in Ontario, had itself pitched firmly toward a Third Way politic wherein social spending on things such as education and healthcare had become a competitive advantage and subsidies targeted at the provinces largest industrial sectors, namely auto, became the *sin qua non* of the union (Stanford 2003). The CAW also started to waver on the issue of free-trade. As the CAW had it, Japanese markets needed to be opened, the province needed to invest in innovation, and human capital was key to attracting and maintaining high levels of foreign direct investment. More than this, figures such as Ken Georgetti and Buzz Hargrove had helped make “life-long learning” synonymous with “re-training” and staunchly workforce and occupationally oriented forms of education (Georgetti 2002). And the market, even in the midst of massive financial turmoil in the United States, was heralded by labour as most efficient

mechanism for the allocation of capital.<sup>165</sup> Public private partnerships, which the Liberals re-branded as “alternative finance proposals” were also warmly embraced, as were cap and trade type environmental regulatory programs (Gindin 1995; Gindin 2008).

In this context, what the Liberals would prove able to accomplish in the Province’s higher education sector was the consolidation of the Province’s various QA mechanisms and processes. As in the UK, this would not mean the complete integration of those mechanisms that had been used to assess and evaluate the quality of research and those that were used in the assessment of teaching. But it did mean that the COU’s various audit programs were eventually placed under the banner of the COQA as described above, and that, as a consequence, a continuum of value (i.e. the specification of learning outcomes and degree level expectations within a seamless system of audit that thereby integrated graduate and undergraduate programs) was created such that Government could begin to contemplate the rationalization of base-level funding in a manner that it has, to

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<sup>165</sup> This statement requires some qualification. The CAW does not talk directly about the relative efficiency of private sector investment decisions. However, it has consistently supported a program of subsidies and incentives that reward private-sector players for investing – in particular ways and sectors - in the Canadian economy. This is a far cry from advocating a development program that could forestall companies from being able to demand subsidies in exchange for jobs, (through things like targeted capital controls, meaningful forms of international solidarity through coordinated shut-downs and strikes). Indeed, the CAW’s strategy, places it in the same camp as the left-wing neoliberals, who have, like Romer, made technological change and progress a potential by-product of wise and targeted government investment. Notably, Jim Stanford, the CAW’s senior economist constructs this as something that fits within the limits of the possible (Stanford 2003). Thus, but for his awareness of the problems in so doing, Stanford might have chosen to abandon the title of his talk, “Industrial Policy in the Era of Free Trade: What Isn’t and Is Possible” for a more apt title: “Industrial Policy in the Era of Free Trade: There is No Alternative Alternative”.

date, still avoided. In doing this, the Government – with the full cooperation of the universities – has also been able to embed the commodity form ever more deeply in Ontario’s universities. Where the evaluative scale used in program reviews did not previously offer “product” specifications, the new system now does.

The evolution of the Liberal program began with the 2004 budget speech, in which the Government announced the formation a seven member advisory panel on higher education (Sorbara 2004). The announcement came in advance of the expiration of a 2-year freeze on tuition-fees, which the Liberals had promised during the 2003 election and delivered upon shortly after coming to power. The freeze, which had been aggressively fought for by students and steadfastly opposed by the universities, was pitched by the government as a kind of cooling-off period during which the government could consult, plan, and develop a way forward. Thus, neither the government nor its advisory panel felt bound by a promise of low tuition-fees, or of significantly increased public transfers. On the contrary, the panel, which was chaired by former NDP Premier Bob Rae, who had come out publicly as a proponent of the Third Way, was given a broad mandate to make recommendations on everything from the design of the Province’s publicly funded system of post-secondary education to the funding of that system. In that mandate, as much as in Rae’s report itself, the discourse of “innovation, of “competitiveness” as well as of “shared responsibility” were all writ large (Rae 2005, 1). Following this lead, Rae also made every effort to frame

the conversation both before and during the “consultations” that the Panel conducted in preparing the Report. Prior to the release of the Report, in the Fall of 2004, Rae released a “green paper” (reminiscent of the Labour government’s White Paper in the UK) as a backgrounder on higher education. That backgrounder was accompanied by a questionnaire and a bibliography, the former as a way of having interested parties frame submissions in terms already decided by the panel, and the latter as a way of indicating what research the Panel was using in its deliberations (Rae 2004). The Review panel, never as an entirety, subsequently attended a series of “town hall” and “round-table” meetings across the province.

The final report of the Review, entitled, **Ontario a Leader in Learning**, made 28 recommendations, many of them strikingly similar to those found in the Report delivered by the 1996 Task Force on the Future of Postsecondary Education. Accordingly: tuition-fees were to be deregulated in a regulated (i.e. staged way); an income-indexed loan repayment program was recommended; a new advisory body, focused on QA and sector-research was to be formed; more collaboration with industry was to be encouraged; new programs focused on lifelong learning and the validation of out-of-school work were to be developed; teaching and research excellence were to be rewarded. To make all of this happen, the government was to increase transfers to the sector, though only by an amount that would, at the time of its announcement, see levels of government funding reach the national average. (Rae 2005)

The media along with several of the players in the sector focused almost entirely on the promise of new money. Rae had apparently struck the perfect balance between individual responsibility and that of state. He had also effectively balanced the need to maintain university autonomy and the need for institutional accountability. In reality the Rae Report did precious little, if only cement the trajectory of the status-quo and simultaneously develop how such a program should best be presented to the public.<sup>166</sup> The universities roundly supported the findings of the Report. Indeed, even the OCUFA initially applauded Rae's Report, though it moderated its stance when the CAUT was flatly critical of it. It was primarily only students who presented an opposition. Indeed, the Canadian Federation of Students and its provincial component, the Ontario Federation of Students fought feverishly, most notably following the release of the Committee's initial "green paper" which foreshadowed the final report quite clearly (University of Saskatchewan 2005). But the students' opposition may have backfired. By the end of the consultative process Rae had softened his message and begun to cloak his agenda in the language of the Left; even the language used in documents such as the UK's White Paper, so clearly demonstrative of Third Way logics was perfected (Canadian Federation of Students 2005, 15).

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<sup>166</sup> I have outlined how this is so in the introduction to Chapter 2.

In its 2005 budget the government's response to the Rae Review became formalized: a 6.2 billion dollar investment through 2009-2010, would see net transfers to universities increase to just below the national average by the end of the 2010 school year, assuming enrolment numbers were only as high as was projected (they have proven to be significantly higher). The plan, which the government ironically called "Reaching Higher," also earmarked significant envelopes of funding for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), which is Ontario's government funded student loans program, as well as for graduate education. In terms of OSAP, the government's new funding program re-introduced some up-front grants, effectively re-creating the program of up-front grants that had been cut by the Rae government in 1992. Notably, the threshold for qualification in that program of grants was set at a low level such that only a small fraction of students could hope to qualify. (Gov. of Ontario 2005a)

In terms of graduate education, the government looked to more than double the number of student spaces during the life of the Reaching Higher plan. To do this, the government promised additional BIU funding to universities that could add capacity to their graduate programs. Growth was to be negotiated both between the universities themselves and the government through what Rae had termed in his report "multi-year agreements (MYA)," and which the government later labeled, "multi-year accountability agreements" (Rae 2005; Gov. of Ontario 2005a). MYAA's are three-year rolling agreements negotiated annually between each university and college and the government. All of the agreements have

required that the universities each publish data on stipulated KPIs, that they participate in the NSSE (and its graduate counterpart), and that each university specify what quality-improvement efforts and targets it will make over the three-year life of the agreement. The MYAA's also specify enrolment targets by faculty. In exchange for having concluded and abided by the terms of an MYAA, the government delivers two envelopes of funding to a university, the first, amounting to about 60% of the increased funding is delivered at the beginning of the year in which the agreed upon enrolment growth takes place. The second envelope is delivered at the beginning of the second term (in January) when enrolment numbers can be finally proved (i.e. once attrition has taken place). What this means is that the universities have received funding to pay for the hiring of additional faculty needed to teach ever larger compliments of graduate students only after their programs have grown.

The 2005 budget announcing Reaching Higher also saw the government form the Ministry of Research and Innovation (MRI), initially headed by the Premier himself, but subsequently taken over by John Wilkinson, a one-time paid advisor to the Liberal government and successful small business-man from small-town Ontario. The MRI, which was actually just a reformed version of the Tories Ministry of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation, was created with the intent of leveraging the universities in Ontario to very specific ends. Accordingly, the Ministry looked to create new and deeper ties between industry and the university with the aim of generating more commercializable research, and of



teaching students throughout the university what were referred to as “commerce skills”. The Government argued that such skills were fundamental to the creation of an entrepreneurial society attractive to investors, foreign and domestic alike. Accordingly, the MRI has been pushing the universities to do things like harmonize practices with respect to the management of intellectual property and patent rights, and to develop capacities to instruct students in every discipline within the university about the ways and means of commerce and business. The MRI also houses the Ontario Research and Innovation Council, a thirteen member advisory panel made up of business leaders, a few academics and researchers, and university administrators, several of whom have significant private-sector experience. The Council’s stated purpose is to, “...look at how and where innovation happens in the province. It will advise the government on a strategy that keeps Ontario’s economy strong by capitalizing on our ability to transform creative, cutting-edge ideas into long-lasting economic advantages” (Gov. of Ontario 2006)

Finally, the Reaching Higher program also led to the creation of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), an arm’s length advisory body. The Act creating HEQCO, the, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act (2005), mandates 6 different functions for the Council. First among those function is the issue of targeting and performance: HEQCO is, “to develop and make recommendations to the Minister,

(i) on *targets to be achieved* in improving the quality of post-secondary education, on the *methods* of achieving those targets and on the *time frame* for doing so, and

(ii) on *performance measures to be used* to evaluate the post-secondary education sector;”

Functions two through five are less “ends” focused, and more “means” directed. The second function with which HEQCO has been tasked is to actually evaluate post-secondary education in Ontario, specifically in light of the first function (i.e. the degree to which institutions have “dependable” internal QA mechanisms in place. The third function is to undertake research relevant to the management of the sector. The fourth function keeps the door open for the Minister of Training Colleges and Universities and the Government to outline new functions on an as needed basis. The final function asks HEQCO to evaluate the degree to which students without cash on hand are able to attend increasingly expensive colleges and universities. (Gov. of Ontario 2005b)

It is not entirely clear to what extent the HEQCO has been actively involved in the policy process. In its advisory capacity the HEQCO has generated some 33 research papers between 2007 and 2013 (HEQCO 2013). The quality of that research is questionable, as is the organization’s commitment to evidence based advice, which it claims to prize.<sup>167</sup> In fact, the HEQCO’s positions have

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<sup>167</sup> In its 6-year history, much of the HEQCO’s research has been performed by contractors to the organization. Those contractors, like one-time collaborators and business partners Ross Finnie and Alex Usher, have tended to either share or be to the right of the HEQCO. This appears to not have been the case in 2012, however, when three Phd candidates at Queens University were contracted to write a research paper for the HEQCO. Upon reading the

tended to reflect precisely those of the Liberal government that created the Council. For example, in 2009, the HEQCO sponsored the publication of “*Academic Transformations: The Forces Reshaping Higher Education in Ontario*” (Clark 2009), a book that, among other things, mapped out a plan for the reform of Ontario’s system that was strikingly similar to that proposed by Rae in his 2005 Review. More recently still, and as if in anticipation of this thesis, the HEQCO itself has published, “*Performance Indicators: a report on where we are and where we are going*” (2013). Under the heading “Big Picture” the HEQCO offers this:

While none of these measures [all of the measures used in Ontario to date] has fully satisfied, they work together to inform the assessment of quality, albeit in an incomplete manner. Investments in measuring engagement (such as NSSE and student satisfaction surveys) and key performance indicators pay long-term dividends in understanding the system, tracking trends and helping inform management decisions at the institutional level and policy direction at the provincial level. There is a new generation of quality measures emerging in the form of learning outcomes and informed perspectives on employer needs. With new and Improved data, we Will know more Tomorrow than we Do today about Quality in Ontario’s Postsecondary system. (HEQCO 2013, 3)

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conclusions and implications section of that paper, the HEQCO’s current president, Harvey Weingarten, demanded that Queens make changes, which it did, entirely without the consent or knowledge of the authors. Those changes were made so that the paper better reflected the ideological disposition of both the Government and the HEQCO. Investigation by the OCUFA subsequently led to the expression of concern about the HEQCO’s research practices as well as to the issuance of a warning to its members about working with/for the HEQCO. The OCUFA also took the HEQCO to task for describing itself as an “arms-length” institution, which it is not.

### **7.2.7 Hitting the Wall: Global Economic Crisis and Austerity**

The global economic crisis that has rocked the global economy since 2008, initially saw governments throughout the developed world, introduce aggressive stimulus packages aimed at stabilizing their respective economies. But after that initial wave of government spending, governments around the world looked to pare back government spending through another round of draconian cuts. In Ontario, the Liberal government found itself with a ballooned deficit and pressure from a growing chorus of business elites to cut government spending. Popular opposition to austerity, however, made it difficult for the Government to simply impose cuts. In an apparent effort to triangulate support for austerity, the Government therefore, hired the former chief economist of TD Price Waterhouse, Donald Drummond to review Ontario's public services with an eye towards establishing a draconian baseline against which the Government could then impose a slightly less austere budget. (Drummond 2012, Chapter 3)

The Government's triangulation was obvious: in hiring a fiscal conservative with stalwartly Liberal credentials, the Liberals could depend on Drummond to produce a Report that would call for massive and politically unpopular cuts to provincial spending. By positioning itself to the left of Drummond, the Government could appear as the lesser of evils.<sup>168</sup> Using

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<sup>168</sup> Former insider at the federal finance department, Drummond has worked under then Finance Minister Paul Martin, to completely overhaul and dispense with Canada's "nanny state". And as the chief economist of at TD Bank, and a member of Rae's advisory panel during the Rae Review process, Drummond had consistently positioned himself as a fiscal conservative.

economic projections of a questionable nature, Drummond's Report indicated a looming crisis, and called for the Government to make massive and deep cuts. For the colleges and universities, the course, according to Drummond was also clear, and measurement factored largely:

The government should provide grants to post-secondary institutions in a way that allows them to maintain best practices, pursue continuous improvement and improve quality across the board. Setting outcome targets based on the individual mandates of each institution is integral because it is unreasonable and potentially unproductive to expect all institutions to deliver the same results. For some institutions, government might bias the performance measures towards research output and productivity. For others, the performance matrix might be biased to excellence in undergraduate teaching. For still others, regional economic development would take on greater importance. (Drummond 2012)

The sector's response, by way of the COQA, has done little, if anything, to even mildly alter the direction of policy.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

More than twenty-five years ago, with the certainty that comes from the pen of a freshly minted PdD graduate, I wrote that in the post-World War II period Ontario "universities were perceived, both by the individual and by society as a whole, as a critical element in the process of generating and accumulation wealth, and for this reason they were generously supported" (Axelrod, 1982, p.214). Though now far less certain about most things, I have found little reason to alter my belief that the fate of higher education turns on the principle of perceived economic utility. Any number of current references would support this claim, though perhaps none resonates quite as powerfully, or as crudely, as the declaration in 1971 by the Ontario minister of university affairs that higher education should generate "more scholar for the dollar" (cited in Axelrod, 1982, p147). (Axelrod 2008, 90)

In as much as Axelrod obtains something true about Ontario's system of higher education through the post-war era, his insight simultaneously serves to obscure crucial issues from view. Certainly Axelrod, both as a hubris-filled young Phd and a more tentative senior academic, would admit that the tactics used to 'generate more scholar for the dollar' have changed in myriad ways between Frost and Harris. However, the issue is not that the successive governments have used different tactics to ensure the same end, but rather that the transformation of the tactics reflects a transformation of the perceived purposes and beneficiaries of higher education in Ontario. To say that, within capitalism, higher education is viewed instrumentally, is to offer very little more than that which, as Axelrod puts it, 'any number of current references would support'. In Ontario, as elsewhere, the drive to "productive efficiency" has involved, as Sears (2003) has outlined, a fundamental "retooling of the mind factory" and, therein, a fundamental redirection/redefinition of the purposes to which higher education is said to usefully be put. While the creation of wealth and prosperity has always been at the forefront, what has changed is the purpose to which - and for whom - such wealth should accrue. This said, the late arrival of Ontario to the QA party does suggest something potentially useful in Axelrod's analysis that would allow us to distinguish as I claim it is essential to do, the transition to neoliberal forms of higher education. Perhaps the relatively late decision by the government - and the sector itself - to develop a vigorous system of QA is indicative of the durability, in Ontario, of more egalitarian or nationalistic values around the

university (i.e. the durability of the early-post-war ethic associated with the massification of Ontario's system)?<sup>169</sup> History seems to indicate otherwise. As I have argued above, several factors stalled the development of neoliberalism and of QA in Ontario's universities. The relative absence of the kind of social discord that rocked American and British universities through the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with a relatively more mobilized and militant working class during that same period, suggest that the government and the universities were anxious not to ignite further opposition at the very moment when Thatcher and Reagan were most concerned to crush it. The history and economic significance of Ontario's branch-plant economy meant that capital did not look to leverage the universities as it had in the US at least until the 1980s. And when in the 1980s capital did organize to leverage the universities in service of the emerging finance and knowledge based economy, the militancy of organized labour, in both the private and public sectors, arguably limited capital's room for maneuver. By the mid-1990s, however, by which time organized labour in the private sector was more clearly defeated, and when Ontario's manufacturing sector was more obviously in

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<sup>169</sup> Later in the same paper, Axelrod himself suggests that the delayed use of QA in Ontario is not indicative of the degree to which Ontario's system of higher education has always been viewed instrumentally. In outlining the transformations effected by the Harris-Eves Tories, he writes that, "increasingly, market-based values were shaping higher education policy in Ontario" (Axelrod 2008, 99). Unfortunately, Axelrod never outlines what he means by 'market-based values'. Likewise, he never (in any of his works on the subject) explores the apparent contradiction between the consistency he notes regarding the government's instrumental understanding of higher education throughout the post-war era, and the emergence of the kind of 'market based values', he associates with successive governments from 1995 on.

terminal decline, both capital and the state turned their attentions to the Province's public sector and therein its schools. Again, oppositional movements – and the maladroit calculations of the PC's - stalled the progress of the neoliberal program, at least temporarily. Through the late 1990s and early 2000s the floodgates of neoliberal policy – and of QA – opened: both federal and provincial commercialization programs grew and took effect; economics imperialism unfolded in the Province's universities; the benefits of commercialization accrued unevenly in the professoriate, creating deep divisions amongst professors; the tide of managerialism that had grown in response to over 20-years of “belt-tightening” were more firmly institutionalized, as were the socio-political cleavages that managerial strategies such as the increased use of contract faculty created; increased capital mobility and improved IP and patent protection fueled the development of a world market in higher education and in university-based research, all but pushing the universities to play ball; private-sector rankings exercises became ever-more important to the competitive struggle that the government encouraged; the logic of finance became both a part of “everyday life”, and the root of students' growing concern about the ‘value’ of their diplomas and degrees; and, the efforts of the universities to defend against direct forms of government intervention embedded the logic of neoliberalism and QA ever-more deeply into the fabric of their institutions.

On this last point, it is of course important to recognize that the same trend is evident has been evident in both the US and the UK; administrators both



individually and collectively often created systems of QA as a way of keeping governmental authorities out of the universities business. If anything, Ontario's universities have, of late, appeared to support the QA enterprise more cohesively than have administrators in either the UK or the US. Why is this the case? What my analysis suggests is that there is a need to emphasize both the relative size and global significance of Ontario's system of higher education and the popular appeal of QA as reasons why there has been a terrific degree of cohesion within organizations such as the COU around the development of the Province's QA system. With the development of a highly competitive – and rank-ordered - market in higher education, first in the US, and then internationally, Canadian universities have been forced to adopt the kind of practices that have long been used elsewhere, especially in the face of government cutbacks and planned austerity. In fact, the sums at stake in the global higher education and research marketplace are massive (see note 146 above), and the potential benefit to any institution or group of institutions in being able to attract even a small proportion of the monies that now flow to American research intensive institutions, would, for example, be equally large. Since the price of admission to such “markets” is an institution's willingness to produce prices (necessary to demonstrate the “value” of investment), systems of QA have proliferated in jurisdictions like Ontario. The decision by Canada's “research intensive” universities to organize separately within the fold of the larger Association of University and Colleges Canada, coupled with the support that group has received from both federal and

provincial governments, is no doubt exemplary of how Ontario's adjustment to global flows has happened: as bigger more research intensive institutions have adjusted to the rhythms of accumulation both in and outside of Ontario and Canada, every other institution has been compelled to participate in the development of QA.

Similarly, QA has proven to be an effective mechanism in the reproduction of popular consent for the neoliberal university, and therein for both government cutbacks and higher tuition-fees. The now long-standing support of the COU for higher tuition-fees, which the universities presumably see as key to making-up for short-falls in government funding, has been supported by widespread concern with the ROI a university education provides. As "quality" is putatively linked to post-graduation incomes, universities have been want to prove the advantages of investment as a means by which to rationalize higher-tuition fees.

In the end, capital, the state and the universities in Ontario increasingly speak with a single voice, at least on the issue of QA. Without much immediate potential for either popular or sector-based opposition, the universities and colleges in the Province are now subject to a system of QA that involves the full suite of measures and mechanisms discussed in chapter 3. The law of value reigns.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion<sup>170</sup>

However much the debate around QA has, in the UK, been more extensive than in other jurisdictions, nowhere within mainstream and policy-making circles has that debate transcended the apparent tension between autonomy (academic freedom) and accountability (QA). Indeed, mainstream accounts and analyses of QA in each of the three jurisdictions under investigation have tended to become mired in facile distinctions between university administrations and administrators intent on preserving institutional autonomy as a means of protecting academic freedom, and penny-pinching neo-liberal politicians and bureaucrats whose aim it is to cut costs and drive “innovation”. Such distinctions are facile on several grounds. First, whether or not university administrators – and many academics – have reluctantly submitted to government operated systems of QA, or, as has periodically been the case in all three of the jurisdictions under investigation, designed their own systems of QA so as to stave off government intervention, academics have been made obviously less free to research, investigate and understand as they see fit. In Ontario, as in the UK, as in the US, academics are subject to the disciplinary forces of either/both commercialization policy or the market. Indeed, the “publish or perish” orthodoxy is a potent force in everywhere, even in Ontario, whose system of QA is arguably the most under-developed of those I have investigated.

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<sup>170</sup> But for points not made previously, I will not cite sources in this conclusion.

Second, to pretend, as one must in order to argue the autonomy vs. efficiency / government vs. academy position, that university administrators and a huge swathe of the academy (and even the student body), have not actively promoted the kind of neoliberal forms of education of which QA is inextricably a part, is simply dishonest. Through myriad means, such as the Business Higher Education Forum in the US, or the Corporate-Higher Education Forum in Ontario, or via the development of offices of both technology transfer or research and innovation, university administrators have long advocated for closer ties with the private sector and “better” corporate-industrial type managerial practices within their institutions, generally to the detriment of more collegial forms of self-governance (Slaughter and Rhodes 2004; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Newson and Buchbinder 1988). Outside of the administrative ranks, many academics have likewise pressed forward the neoliberal program and avidly supported the development of QA. Not least among those who have supported the “neoliberalization” of the academy from inside its ranks are people like Gary Becker and his myriad acolytes, who have consciously sought to colonize and transform the social sciences according to the dictates of neo-classical economics and methodological individualism (Fine and Milonakis 2009). In the natural sciences, ghost authorship could not have become as normalized as it has, without the complete cooperation of university based researchers and the willful ignorance of the academic journals that ostensibly police the publication of new knowledge (Sismondo 2007; Sismondo 2009). Of course, such blindness and

cooperation is belied the fact that many academics have both benefitted from and actively supported the commercialization of science (Feldman and Desrochers 2004; Jain, George, and Maltarich 2009). And the same is true of so many of the now mundane practices that regulate the academic program: the constant search for external funding; the protection of IP; closed doctoral defenses. All are practices to which a large swathe of the academy has, at minimum, submitted, and thereby, committed.

Students have similarly submitted to the QA game. Indeed, in the US, students gave birth to the kind of satisfaction surveys that are linked to the development and ubiquity of SETs and, more recently, the NSSE (Gray and Bergmann 2003).<sup>171</sup> In the UK, opposition from the “official” students’ movement to institutional audit was ended by the QAA’s decision to include one student on each audit committee (QAA 2013; University and College Union 2010). In Ontario, students have tended to be more concerned to talk about quality in terms that hardly question the logic of QA. On the contrary, students have taken up the language of engagement and employment in a manner that will do little to foment a move away from QA (Canadian Federation of Students Ontario 2012, 31–33). Indeed, all too ironically the student-as-consumer logic has been adopted by oppositional forces in an attempt to advance their demands

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<sup>171</sup> Though their efforts in so doing might have been linked to campaigns aimed at breaking the intellectual hold that liberal and conservative thinkers had long-maintained over the American academy, the fact that they sought to do so in a manner that has functioned to reproduce a more confined intellectual landscape is hardly ironic. On the contrary, the fact that students used a tactic that was little more than a short-lived consumer boycott is tell-tale.

for affordable (free) access to higher education (i.e. because engagement (service) levels are low, tuition-fees should also be low).

But for the interventions of mainstream social scientists, policy-makers, government officials, and even some oppositional groups, the history and evolution of QA is only superficially about autonomy and academic freedom. In fact, it is arguably the case that the efforts of institutions and academics to develop vigorous, but allegedly autonomous, systems of QA, have only reproduced ever-more detailed QA programs that in effect circumscribe academic freedom to an ever-greater extent. After all, the adumbration of increasingly detailed descriptions of learning outcomes or of research “impact” amount to an ever-more standardized and industrialized system of commodity production.<sup>172</sup> Here-in the application of the law of value to the “productive” activities of the university is advanced.

### **8.1 Misreading QA: The Theory and Politics of “Quality”**

This misreading of QA by mainstream and some critical scholars is what has occupied a significant portion of this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I outlined the theoretical foundations of mainstream analyses, which I see as being tied to neo-classical economics, methodological individualism, and the “New” social

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<sup>172</sup> While the QAA’s voluminous set of learning outcomes was developed under the auspices of the QAA, a government owned “quango”, the specific objectives were determined by a panel of academics. Ontario’s recently adopted system of learning objectives was determined entirely by the sector, via the Council of Ontario Universities. And to the extent that processes of accreditation use such “descriptors”, all are developed by university administrators and academics.

sciences. In discussing the eclectic nature of the CIHE literature, I further argued that the field lacked a sense of its own disciplinary history. The policy orientation of the field has meant that the CIHE tends towards the kind of problem-solving theories that, as Cox (1992) would have it, take the prevailing set of social, political, and economic institutions as the framework of analysis, without ever inquiring as to the utility or necessity or history of those institutions. As such there is a degree to which the CIHE literature is largely unaware of the interests and purposes it serves.<sup>173</sup>

Throughout this dissertation, I have also argued that the nature of the CIHE literature, and thus the scholarly roots of QA, is not just a-historical and derivative, it is so for specific reasons, some more immediate and others less so. In Chapter 5, I argued that the roots of QA lay in the history of American higher education. Specifically, I argued that accreditation emerged as a result of the

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<sup>173</sup> It should come as no surprise to anyone that the CIHE literature is derivative and a-historical. In the context of budget cuts and belt-tightening, it is understandable that academics and policy-wonks, university administrators, almost anyone interested in seeing university coffers topped-up, would take-up the cause of New Growth Theory (i.e. roll-out neo-liberalism), the history of that theory be damned. Not coincidentally, the great bulk of today's economists are totally unaware of the history of their own discipline. By way of example: [http://worthwhile.typepad.com/worthwhile\\_canadian\\_initi/2012/09/the-cambridge-capital-debate-the-very-short-version.html](http://worthwhile.typepad.com/worthwhile_canadian_initi/2012/09/the-cambridge-capital-debate-the-very-short-version.html). The blog-post by Nick Rowe on his well-read if ironically titled blog, "Worthwhile Canadian Initiative" illustrates a complete misunderstanding of the Cambridge Capital Controversy and its consequences for the fate of Neo- and New-classical economics, of which Rowe is most certainly a practitioner. In the comments that follow Rowe's post, a few interlocutors highlight the real nature of the debate and what was really at stake. Rowe and friends obviously ignore, or else fail to understand these interventions, however. Their response is consistently the same: they adjust the assumptions underlying the econometric models that they use, mixing static and flow variables like "time preferences", for example, to shore-up the neo-classical parable. In passing, Rowe mentions both his own lack of familiarity with the subject and the fact that students are not taught "capital theory", as such, or at least the history of the debates surrounding capital theory.

concerted efforts of pioneering American industrialists and engineers to craft a system of higher education “by design” (Noble 1977). No less important, however, was the role played by high-ranking and influential American social scientists cum policy experts who developed a particular kind of social science in the hopes of gaining status and power (Silva and Slaughter 1984). Packaged together in a dynamic political economy, the American research university and system of higher education developed and grew more rapidly than any other in the world. In other words, the most significant antecedents to contemporary QA were developed in an academic and political economic setting that was almost ideal. Indeed, in the context of what Dorothy Ross (1991) describes as a tendency towards a-historical forms of analysis, which again, Silva and Slaughter (1984) argue was consciously cultivated, standardized testing and accreditation could easily be paraded about as mechanisms of American meritocracy, particularly given the significant advantages that American industry developed in key industrial and manufacturing sectors early on in the 20th century (Noble 1977; Lehman 1999). While the Great Depression might have triggered a shift away from such logics, it did not. The weight of a-historicism bore on American progressives too greatly, as did the impact and spread of right-to-work legislation, the bureaucratization of organized labour as unions shifted their focus from the labour process under capitalism to the wage packet and therein the ability of workers to consume.



Not until the outgrowth of the American state during and following the Second World War, however, did the American system of higher education – and within it QA – really become the paragon of virtue it is now seen to be and to which myriad league tables ranking universities globally now attest. The growth and dynamism of America’s universities as well as its system of higher education was both supported, and in many ways authored, by the American state (in particular, the Department of Defence). Also critical were the host of private-sector not-for-profits, like the Ford and Carnegie Foundations, that worked assiduously to grow, both intensively (i.e. within the US) and extensively (i.e. outside of the US) American style higher education, inclusive of standardized testing and other mechanisms of American ‘meritocracy’, immediately following the end of World War Two (prior to the War, the same Foundations were critical to the design of American higher education) (Arnove 1982; Klees 2002). The vigorous pace at which the post-war American economy grew lent additional and enormous weight and credibility of efforts that aimed to spread American-style higher education. By the time the post-war economy became exhausted, in the 1970s and 1980s, accreditation and standardized testing were all but completely normalized, at least in the US. Arguably, one of the most notable catalysts in the development of QA after 1980, both in the US and around the world, was the emergence of private-sector league tables ranking universities in 1983<sup>174</sup>, which of course happened in the midst of what was then the most severe recession since

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<sup>174</sup> The US News and World Report ranking of universities was first published in that year.

the Great Depression. The US News and World Report ranking of universities and colleges, fit neatly with the rhetoric of low inflation, economic growth, and value-for-money that reflected the orthodoxy of the time. More than this, such ranking exercises seamlessly extended the logic that had underscored standardized testing and accreditation for decades. Indeed, the idea that resources needed to be directed strategically and on the basis of “excellence” had come of age.

In the UK and Ontario, QA is a by-product of more recent events and processes. As I indicated above, the logic of economics imperialism has had a decided impact on the social sciences throughout the developed world. Of course, QA was taken up by governments and the academy, first in the UK and subsequently in Ontario, less as a by-product of economics imperialism (at least in the form I have used it in this dissertation), than as a program directed at changing the culture inside and around those jurisdictions’ systems of higher education. The most glaring example of this was Thatcher’s efforts to rationalize funding for university-based research, both through the creation of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and by effectively ending traditional forms of tenure (Willmott 2003). Of course, Thatcher’s legacy was carried forward, not just by John Major, who ended the binary divide and introduced institutional audits, but also by successive administrations under Tony Blair’s New Labour, which over and over again, acted to beef-up the RAE and deepen the program of audits that the Conservatives had established.

Ontario's system of QA has developed very much in the wake of the UK's, often by way of policy-borrowing. The lag between the development of the UK's system and that of Ontario's relates to the Province's economic position coupled with a relatively vigorous labour movement at the very moment when Thatcher's program was hitting a fever-pitch. Simply, the militancy of Ontario's labour movement through to the end of the early 1990s, meant that the government's sights were set more firmly on breaking the back of organized labour, than they were on restructuring Ontario's colleges and universities. Ontario's system of QA therefore evolved in dribs and drabs, only becoming meaningfully comparable to the UK's system very recently. Of course, Ontario's universities have been subject to private-sector ranking exercises since the mid-1990s, when Maclean's began publishing its annual issue comparing Canadian universities in a manner modelled on the pioneering effort undertaken by US News and World Report. In other words, the ranking of universities using numerical representations of allegedly qualitative variables (i.e. the financial form), pre-dates the development of the intensely and expansively bureaucratic systems that today describe the UK's and Ontario's systems of QA.

In fact, the development of such private-sector ranking was arguably a key catalysts to the development and extension of government- and sector-led systems of QA. Given the popularity of and demand for rankings exercises, as well as the methodologies they employ, governments set about attempting to take ownership of such tools as exercises in "accountability" and "transparency",

consistently defined in respect of government expenditures (i.e. value-for-money). As I have outlined, the universities in both the UK and Ontario reacted, but without really challenging the form or the logic underlying the programs of QA that they sometimes opposed. The fact that the US's system of QA followed precisely the opposite path (i.e. private-sector players with the financial endorsement of both federal and state authorities developed systems of accreditation and standardized testing before the emergence of private-sector rankings exercises), is an indication that the American system stands as both ground-zero in the globalization of QA, and the key to understanding the real purpose and effect of QA.

## **8.2 From Critical Theory to Value Theory**

In outlining the theoretical position from which I view QA, I argued for a conceptual lens that could access the way in which QA endeavours to impose the law of value on all aspects of the university. I argued that the necessity of so measuring and managing value in and around the university related to: 1) the exhaustion of the post-war political economy and of Keynesianism; and, 2) the increased significance of the university in mainstream economic policy, (itself a by-product of both 1) and of massively increased participation rates and the transition to a finance-led, services-based political economy.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> To this point I have not spent overly much time challenging either conventional or critical accounts of what I have referred to as the “so-called” knowledge based economy. This subject is arguably the basis for some future research. I do not believe that the economies of the

Of the few critical theorizations of QA that do exist, only a few make reference to a Marxian value-theory as I do in this dissertation, and none do so on a comparative basis that suggests the emergence and development of a world-market in higher education, which is ripe within this dissertation (for example see: De Angelis and Harvie 2009; D. Harvie 2006; David Harvie 2000). Other theorizations, particularly those which posit the emergence of an “audit society” (Power 2003; Power 1994) or an “audit culture” (Shore and Wright 1999), offer terrific insight into the disciplinary, coercive, and reproductive power of audit and QA. Moreover, such analyses correctly locate the “audit explosion” (Power 1994) in the emergence of Thatcherism, and neo-liberalism. Shore and Wright (1999, 58), even make mention of the transnational nature of these motive forces, where Power (1994) explicitly sees the “audit explosion” as a phenomenon peculiar to the UK (1994, 2–5), albeit to some subsequent regret (Power 2000, 114). Nonetheless, such analyses have a serious blind-spot: in missing the connective tissue (value) that binds such coercive technologies together, theorizations that link QA to the development of an “audit culture” preclude the kind of structural analysis that a value-theoretic opens up. For however deep is our understanding of the policy-networks that enable the spread of QA, there remains a need to position the university within the neo-liberal program and pattern of accumulation, not least because in doing so we highlight both the

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global North are any more “knowledge-based” that they were prior to 1980. I do, however, think it fair to say that the political economies of the global North are more technology intensive.

potency of the financial form as a mode and mechanism of social, political and economic management and also suggest the class-based dynamics of such processes.<sup>176</sup>

But for some additional exceptions,<sup>177</sup> the critical literature on the commercialization and/or neoliberalization of the university, does a still less spectacular job of outlining either the sources or particularities of the neo-liberal university (a prime example is Marginson and Rhoades 2002). Again, the theoretical failings of such analyses have less to do with the absence of a lens that is sensitive to the issue of value as I have framed it here, as it is to the particular nature of neoliberalism.

### **8.3 Testing the Value Proposition**

As I made clear in the introduction of this dissertation, my research has demonstrated that QA needed to be understood as a price-type signaling system that endeavours to render all aspects of the university as commodities that are, in turn, subject to the law of value. Theoretically, this argument has been built upon the assertion that capital needs to be understood as a social relationship and that,

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<sup>176</sup> I have not taken up the issue of ‘class’ to any significant extent in this dissertation, as it too is beyond the scope of this project. I have however, suggested how the boundaries of class are being redefined. I have, for example, talked about the redistribution of income alongside discussion of the “proletarianization” of the professoriate, or at least a large and growing segment thereof. I would further submit that my discussion of alienation in Chapter 4, also suggests something about class and “class consciousness”, particularly in light of my discussion in Chapter 3, of literacy and the degree to which the university is today generative of a particular form of such. But again, these are but suggestions that could usefully be given far more detail and attention.

<sup>177</sup> Though I mention and make use of these works in Chapter 4, (and other chapters), I should highlight again: (Sears 2003; C. Polster 2001; Claire Polster 2003; Newson and Buchbinder 1988; Newson 1998)

as such, “values”, defined as relative prices, are indicative of the socially necessary labour time required to produce a given commodity.

The transformation of the university into a site of commodity production was evidenced, in the first instance, by reference to the myriad tools and techniques of QA. In so doing, I sought to test the claims made by the proponents of QA with respect to the reliability of QA as a means by which to assess the “qualitative” aspects (i.e. use values) of the commodities being produced in the contemporary university. In so testing the claims of QA’s boosters, I found that the use-values being produced in the contemporary university are not, in fact, so useful.

Qualitatively, the commodities being put-out by the university are of questionable “utility”, both in absolute and relative terms. In other words, the research being generated by even the best and most research-intensive universities is not breathtakingly innovative, at least not in terms of such things as the development of new drugs or software. And the graduates of the contemporary (neo-liberal) university are not, on average, highly literate, even by the impoverished standards of the OECD.

I further demonstrated that, in each of the jurisdictions whose systems of QA I examined, the alleged battle over autonomy and academic freedom was something of a side-show; irrespective of whether or not QA was sector- or government-led, QA was always and everywhere about assessing the economic value of both research commodities and graduates (as potential workers, i.e. the labour-power commodity). Indeed, via reference to myriad government reports,

sector studies, and the like, I clarified that the entire QA enterprise was most clearly about pressing the university into the service of capitalist accumulation. I also discussed the way in which QA is reproductive of neo-liberalism. QA functions as an increasingly important tool in the constant renegotiation of capital, by which I mean the socio-political and economic milieu within which decisions about production and distribution are made (i.e. the particular and prevailing form of capitalist accumulation in a given jurisdiction at a given point in time). This is not a correlation that can be tested directly. The correlation between the advent of QA, and the deepening of labour market flexibility, understood here as the relative quiescence of labour within a context of stagnant or falling wages, rising profits (in relative terms) and a growing income gap, is neither strict nor directly testable. But it is, at minimum, notable that in each of the jurisdictions under investigation, the emergence of QA and the deepening of labour market flexibility appear to have emerged at more or less the same time. Indeed, as Fast (2013, 215–261) has demonstrated, since 1980, the Gini coefficients for Canada, the US, and the UK, (and, in fact, the entire G7), have consistently risen.<sup>178</sup> More than this, it is almost impossible to avoid even mainstream analyses of public policy that do not pin-point a qualitative change in the orientation of public policy to the election of Thatcher, Reagan, and Mulroney

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<sup>178</sup> Fast does note that the late 1990's does appear to mark a temporary departure from this trend for workers in the UK's manufacturing sector. However, Fast also notes that this blip relates not to workers' share of value added rising, but to the sector's declining profits alongside temporarily fixed labour costs. (Fast 2013, 224–225)



(Gesink-Walsh 2007, provides a stunningly conventional account of QA that asserts precisely these linkages). In as much as there were clear precursors to the fundamental redirection of policy that the 1980s ushered in<sup>179</sup>, the almost simultaneous election of populist right-wing politicians whose programs were informed by Hayekian, neo-classical economics is unmistakable. So too are the macro-economic trends that date to the same moment. The maintenance and/or acceleration of those trends (i.e. declines in union density, increase of Gini coefficients, workers' declining share of value-added) through the 1990s is similarly coincident with the advent of the New Public Management, New Growth Theory, and New Labour. Even the economic crisis that began in 2008 has not in any meaningful way disturbed either the centrality that neo-liberal theory has enjoyed in policy making circles or the on-going redistribution of wealth that such policy has facilitated. Austerity is hardly a departure from the kind of orthodoxy of which QA is an outgrowth. Indeed, the neoliberal regime has proven to be remarkably durable. I would argue that such durability is at least partly related to QA. Indeed, therein lies the real value of QA.

#### **8.4 Wither Quality, Wither Power?**

As one reader has critically noted, the theorization and account of QA I have provided in this dissertation seems to indicate that the neoliberal university

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<sup>179</sup> The efforts of the Wilson and Callaghan governments to carry forward a left-of-centre program whilst side-lining more radical elements inside the Labour Party come immediately to mind (Panitch and Leys 2001).

is productive of so much mediocrity as to undermine neoliberalism. In so noting, it is alleged that I have perhaps failed to recognize the outstanding intellectual achievements of some students and scholars (with whom I might not agree), as well as some ground-breaking scientific innovations that have come out of American, British and Canadian universities in recent decades. Is my account of the neo-liberal university and of QA and its effects perhaps too neat?

First, there is much to suggest that the long-term stability of the current global political economic order will not be undermined by the efficiency with which the neoliberal university is productive of a populace that is only moderately literate, or a scientific base that is generative of so much junk science. We should not mistake the efficient production of either/both the moderately literate and/or innovative, for the absence of an ability to train a sufficiently large number of remarkably bright people capable of operating with stunning efficiency within the dominant paradigm. Similarly, we should not mistake the degree to which neoliberalism imperils some more idyllic form of science, with the potential of neoliberal science to efficiently deliver more and more “false wants” or the technologies necessary for the maintenance and intensification of the current world order, or to efficiently produce a work force sensitive to the need for time discipline, team work, and a market-friendly disposition.

It is also no longer useful to think of any single nation’s science base or labour pool as a source of competitive advantage necessary to underscore the durability of the neo-liberal program, particularly if that state happens to be

either prominent or pre-eminent within the prevailing world order. Today, the owners of intellectual property are global corporations that enjoy considerable transnational mobility and remarkable levels of state-support. This should not be taken to mean that states do not – and will not - remain utterly central. Rather, it is to say that the ability of any one state to dominate on the world stage will not necessarily be built on its ability to educate *en masse* a highly literate domestic labour-force or to generate meaningful forms of innovation exclusively within its territorial borders. Instead, the projection of power will arguably rest on the ability of key states to corral and control both brain power and intellectual property by leveraging existing economic and institutional advantages. For example, the US has been able to reproduce significant advantage by leveraging its power to develop and maintain a juridical environment favourable to American firms (Gindin and Panitch 2012, Chapter 9).

I have also not at any point suggested that the tendencies evident within the neo-liberal university should be understood as any kind of teleology. Indeed, what the preceding implores us to understand is that however theoretically and empirically weak is the evidence used to support the neo-liberal university, it remains incredibly potent politically, so much so that the forces supporting the development and deepening of QA have hardly abated even in the face of intense economic dislocation. But this does not at all mean that the potency of QA is absolute – there are cracks and fissures emerging all around which need to be

exploited if we are to get “somewhere else”. Further, one can only guess at what spark will ignite change.

## **8.5 Cracks in the Neo-liberal Program**

The first of the aforementioned cracks has to do with the persistent inability of neo-liberal forms of education to provide a fulfilling learning experience. This inability stems from the logic that informs the neo-liberal enterprise wherein economic well-being is conflated with enlightenment, fulfilment, and happiness.<sup>180</sup> On its face, this claim is false. One does not have to be Plato to understand that enlightenment or fulfilment are not things that can be purchased. The reform of universities and of taught programs in ways that look to enhance a graduate’s attractiveness in labour-markets are not likely to provide for a fulfilling learning experience. The preference for “useful” or commercializable research is not likely to feed the native curiosity of too many young minds, however much it might command their attention. And then there is the fact that, as has been demonstrated, the kind of instrumental approaches to human behaviour that are so rewarded in the neoliberal university do a remarkably terrible job of actually explaining anything. As was the case in Paris

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<sup>180</sup> Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada, has recently launched a new advertising campaign designed to attract new students to its continuing education program. Under the image of a smiling graduate of the program, the campaign’s tag line reads: “Be the employee that employers want.” The image and the line together conflate employment (and docility), with happiness and satisfaction.

in 1968, the poverty of mainstream analyses will at some point trigger demands for a more powerful lens.

Also, the neoliberal dream is increasingly out-of-reach, even for university and college graduates. Indeed, it is crucial to bear in mind that the job prospects of recent graduates (and not so recent graduates) are not particularly bright. Not only is unemployment high among recent graduates, but the “return” one earns on an “investment” in higher education is only high if income gains are evaluated relationally, relative to those who have no education (see Chapter 3). Again, wage rates, in real terms, have been stagnant throughout the developed world over at least the last 30 years. That said, work, throughout the developed world, has shifted to the services sector, where employers have begun to require that potential employees have a degree/diploma, thereby making the average wage available primarily to those that obtain such a credential. The neoliberal program cannot deliver on its promise, even when such is evaluated on its own terms. A university degree guarantees access to neither a job nor a high-wage, which again are preconditions to the neo-liberal vision of bliss (for the masses)(Carrick 2013). As patterns of economic dislocation become more stated in unstable and stagnating economies, the neo-liberal university will perhaps become less effective in the reproduction of neoliberalism, or at least will become productive of social conditions that can be usefully exploited by oppositional movements. Though there has been some significant debate on the issue, it may well be that students’ appetite for higher education will decline in the face of rising tuition-

fees and expanding levels of student debt.<sup>181</sup> It goes without saying that the neoliberal university can only operate as an effective tool in the reproduction of neoliberalism if students are willing and able to attend. The secular increase of tuition-fees in Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, (to name a few), may emerge as obstacles in the reproduction of the neoliberal university. Presumably, neo-liberal governments around the world will look, as they have previously looked, to resolve such issues in one of two ways: 1) by introducing means-tested forms of subsidy; and, 2) by making credit more readily available to students. While the use of means-testing has been effective at reproducing a “kinder-gentler” neoliberalism, the upward creep of tuition-fees amid persistent and high levels of unemployment suggest that means-tests will become near-universal and thus not sustainable within the neoliberal program, which is presently rooted in calls for austerity. In the US and Canada, where levels of student debt have reached dizzying levels, oppositional movements are already finding a firmer footing in terms of their ability to both organize and mobilize around this very issue. In other jurisdictions, debt is similarly becoming a hot-button issue generative of, in many cases, more discord than is present in the US.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> The debate is too lengthy to summarize here. Conventional accounts tend to distinguish between “financial” and “non-financial” barriers to access, wherein a parent’s educational background is depicted as “non-financial”, while family income is declared to be “financial”. Irrespective, there is broad consensus that high-school graduates from low- and middle-low income backgrounds are less likely to attend higher education than are students from middle- and middle-high income backgrounds. For an overview see (Educational Policy Institute 2008)

<sup>182</sup> The Canadian Federation of Students maintains a “debt-clock” which tracks the outstanding amount of student debt in Canada as it constantly rises by virtue of compound interest (<http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/studentdebt/>). The CFS has used this and related materials to

The Quebec and Chilean student protests in 2012 and 2011-13 respectively provide important examples of how the neoliberal program can trigger mass opposition that starts with students. In both cases, students' upset over tuition-fee increases and levels of student debt triggered mass student protests. Critically, both movements benefited from widespread public support and, no less importantly, the support of organized labour, which quickly fell-in line behind students. In gaining wider support, the students' opposition to particular pieces of legislation snowballed, albeit temporarily, into a more fundamental critique of neoliberalism and austerity. In Quebec, student opposition essentially brought the Government down and forced an election (Hallward 2012). And in Chile, though protests are on-going, students' demands continue to weigh heavily on the government, which appears anxious to negotiate a solution to what it well understands is a volatile situation (Larrabure and Torchia 2011). Notably, the Quebec protests were largely unexpected, even by the student organizers who started them. However much their organizing model built from the bottom-up in a manner that should be emulated, it did not appear to anyone that the

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some effect in lobbying for lower tuition-fees (Newfoundland lowered tuition-fees, Ontario's government set-up a temporary tuition-fee freeze in 2005, which the CFS was not able to build into a larger movement for a long-term policy. In the US, student debt emerged as a major issue in the 2012 election, albeit within disappointing parameters (students wanted the interest rate charged on government guaranteed loans kept at around 6% instead of be raised as the Republicans proposed). In the UK, and indeed around Europe, the introduction of raising of tuition-fees have set-off mass protests. In Quebec, during the spring and summer of 2012, the Liberal Government's announcement that tuition-fees would rise by just \$76.00/year triggered widespread and mass protests that lasted for weeks. The Government's subsequent defeat was at least partly attributable to the student protests. Unfortunately, the newly elected PQ government also decided to raise tuition-fees (by less than the Liberals had proposed). The response from students has not been nearly as thunderous.

mobilizations would be as massive as they were, until they actually happened (Hallward 2012). Indeed, at what point mass unrest will emerge is impossible to say. That tuition-fee and interest rate increases will trigger widespread opposition seems almost inevitable.

The neoliberal program has also subjected most academics to a work-regime that is ever-more punishing, alienating, and insecure. This process of “proletarianization” can be linked to more than just the diminution of the quality of research and teaching, as outlined above, it can also be linked to increasing levels of job dissatisfaction and workplace disruptions (Smith 2000; Schmidt 2013). While academic work has traditionally provided relatively high salaries, such rates of pay are miserably low when evaluated in terms of tuition-fees paid and overall years spent in school (the neoliberal tests of return on investment) (The Economist 2010). In fact, those professions that also require lengthy periods of post-graduate study have considerably higher “yields”. The trade-off for most academics has been the flexibility that academic work allows - time to think, explore, and create. As the space for intellectual pursuit becomes more monitored, structured, and, limited, we can expect further discord within the professoriate. Historically, universities and government agencies have been able to moderate such discord by effectively dividing the professoriate into myriad different tranches – prolific researchers who earn research awards (and corporate sponsorships) are separated from those that teach, from those that teach on contract, and from those that teach on contract at multiple universities



simultaneously. By rewarding the researchers who operate at the pinnacles of the system, both governments and universities have been able to leverage the precariousness of contract faculty to prevent the emergence of militancy within the whole academy. While this has often worked, there are signs that such a divide and conquer strategy may be limited, particularly as the precariously employed begin to undertake the majority of teaching on many campuses, and therein find a potential basis for opposition and disruption (Smith 2012; Kovalik 2013; Schmidt 2011).

The last and most urgent set of contradictions I will highlight relate both to human health and the earth's ecosystem. The neoliberal program has and continues to place human health and the earth's ecosystem in jeopardy, and in ways that are becoming increasingly clear.<sup>183</sup> Such risks have emerged as a direct result of government's efforts, avidly supported by the private-sector, to press the university ever closer to industry, all in an environment where public dollars can be leveraged for private gains. The universities increased reliance on industry as a gateway to on-going government support has meant that the universities are often unwilling to question in meaningful ways the efficacy of, for example, drug

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<sup>183</sup> This too is a topic for another volume. Mirowski (2011) does an outstanding job of outlining the ways in which neoliberal science is undermining the American science-base. This poses risks to human health and the environment in myriad ways. For example, as Joel Lexchin (2004; 2003) has documented, drug trials co-sponsored by corporate interests are less reliable than those conducted exclusively with public money. The dimensions of the issues surrounding this are immense. By way of another example, Mirowski (2011) suggests that the proliferation of over-lapping patents and the decline in patent quality, are, in the US, related to government cut-backs which have left the United States Patenting Office under-staffed, over-worked, and subject to a self-regulatory, customer-service oriented regime that provides little in the way of oversight.

treatments, or industrial processes. By way of a more specific example, the University of Toronto's administration has appeared consistently unwilling to either investigate allegations of misconduct or to support the work of several whistleblowers who have highlighted the dangers to public health posed by the University's and the federal government's commercialization program. In two widely publicized cases, the University simply failed to investigate, or to investigate properly, when it was alerted to the fact that researchers and/or corporate partners were manipulating and/or hiding data so as to prove the efficacy of, in the one case, a new drug, and in the other case, a chemical used to treat drinking water (Schafer 2007; Ugarkovic 2008). In the US, the University of Pennsylvania has consistently appeared relatively unconcerned about the practice of "fracking" (an industrial process used to access stores of natural gas in rock), apparently because the oil and gas industry provides considerable amounts of financial support for research at the university (Glass 2011). Such patterns, which have already produced serious public health and environmental crises, will most assuredly continue to do so, and in the process will provide important opportunities for oppositional movements to make significant gains.

By way of some final thoughts it is necessary to turn ever so briefly to the issue of theory. At times it seems unbelievable that in the face of cogent critique anyone could continue to believe in the virtues of the neoliberal line, at least in earnest. Indeed, the poverty of the available evidence and the fact that neoliberal organizations like the Trilateral Commission have long sought to leverage higher

education to reproduce consent for a renewed and market-based form of authoritarianism seems to belie mainstream propaganda concerning notions of the relative efficiency of markets. It would appear that “the evidence” is really nothing more than a sideshow intended to draw attention away from the processes that the neoliberalization of higher education and research have helped to facilitate, namely the wholesale revision of the post-war class compromise. Such a view seems more plausible still when one discovers the degree to which the work of key thinkers – like Friedman and Hayek – was developed and advanced as a conscious political project.<sup>184</sup> The theoretical exaltation of the economist within neoliberal theory, which presents him as objective, rational, and exclusively able to judge which conceits are likely fatal, also seems to indicate that the outcomes of neoliberal policy could hardly be “unexpected”.

Of course, in as much as organizations like the Mont Pelerin Society and the Trilateral Commission have been able to corral the loyalty of key decision-makers around the world and foretell the direction of neoliberal policy rather accurately, they are still but expressions of the underlying system that they have nonetheless helped to create and reform. The neoliberal university cannot be so

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<sup>184</sup> In the 1970’s, the Trilateral Commission, a transnational neo-liberal juggernaut, published, “The Crisis of Democracy”. In that report, the Commission argued that the university was fundamental to resolving the root cause of the aforementioned crisis, which they argued was a surplus of democracy. Accordingly the university was to be re-tooled; the educational programming was to be tied more closely to the rhythms and demands of the labour market, and simultaneously leveraged to lower what were held by the Commission to be the unrealistically high expectations of graduates. As with all forms of neo-liberalism, the masses were viewed, if not contemptuously, then as limited in their ability to transcend, as do the neo-liberals (and hence the Commission), the parameters of human existence, such that they too might see that markets are relatively benevolent mechanisms around which to organize all forms of human activity.

usefully understood as merely a by-product of, as it were, “intelligent design”. Rather, it must be seen as a part of the unfolding of a renewed global capitalism within which key segments of the ruling class have worked diligently to construct and maintain a political project and an underlying program of accumulation, always in the face of very particular forms of opposition and class conflict. Only in this way can we access and assess the various forms that neo-liberal policy has taken the world over. And only in this way, can we excavate, examine, and seize, the roots and mechanisms of power that capital is presently able to leverage so well in its drive to use the university ever-more effectively in the recreation of neoliberalism.

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