
Managerialism and performativity in higher education: where they come from, where they might be taking us, and whether we should be worried

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Abstract

Situating itself within the debate engendered by the 2006 Council for Higher Education colloquium ‘Ten years of higher education under democracy’, this article examines the sources of the twin phenomena of managerialist accountability regimes and performativity in higher education, as manifested particularly in quality assurance practices such as programme accreditation, institutional audits, and forms of performance management.

The roots of managerialism are traced in New Public Management and neo-liberal ideology, and the outworking of these theories in higher education quality assurance practices is explored. The article argues that quality assurance regimes are not neutral efforts to improve higher education, nor simply the unproblematic product of the growing power of management over academics. Rather they rest on a value-laden, hegemonic world view of which many of the affected academics seem relatively unaware. Foucault’s notion of governmentality is enlisted to shed light on how neo-liberal ideology manifests itself in actual ‘technologies’ and practices of governing or ‘steering from a distance’, legitimised and maintained by ‘mentalities’ of marketisation. The article concludes with a call to contest, and deepen the debate around, quality assurance in higher education.

Introduction

This article attempts to engage with some relatively recent South African writings about quality assurance (QA) and other managerialist practices in higher education. It is also an attempt to begin to develop a theoretical framework for understanding QA and accountability regimes, and to begin to open up an enabling discursive space for the articulation of possible alternatives. It shares the Foucauldian aim of “grasp(ing) certain present realities, thus providing a more informed basis for practical choice and imagination” (Gordon, 1991, p.46).

The article takes as its starting point a high-level colloquium organised by the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and published in the CHE’s *Kagisano*

Higher Education Discussion Series (Issue 4, Winter 2006). It does not seek to summarise the papers in this publication, but rather engages with some of the key points raised in them. It then attempts to take up the question implicit (or rather, expressed in different ways) in Prof Colin Bundy's keynote *Kagisano* paper: is it possible to de-couple the quality assurance (QA) system that has been established in South African higher education from its origins in New Public Management and other manifestations of neo-liberal ideology, "adopting this element of the international model, adapting that, and rejecting the other" (Bundy, 2006, p.18)? If its roots lie in the technical rationality of managerialism, can QA drive South African higher education firmly towards the transformative post-apartheid imperatives of equity and redress, and develop an ethos in which freedom is not seen primarily or exclusively as the freedom of the customer, investor or entrepreneur?

After discussing why it is important to pursue these questions, the article briefly explores some of the roots of the New Public Management phenomenon, especially in the theories associated with the Chicago School. It then goes on to explore the outworking of these theories, and of neo-liberal ideology, in higher education QA practices. The article provides evidence for the argument that quality assurance regimes are not neutral efforts to improve higher education, nor simply the unproblematic product of the growing power of management over academics. This argument is represented graphically using the metaphor of an iceberg, in which the visible manifestations of audit culture and quality assurance regimes rest on a particular world view that has become globally hegemonic and thus taken for granted, but by the same token is obscure (below the surface) to many of those participating.

In pursuance of an understanding of this 'deep structure', Foucault's notion of governmentality (as developed by scholars like Rose, Lemke and Dean) is enlisted to shed light on how neo-liberal ideology manifests itself in actual 'technologies' and practices of governing or steering from a distance, legitimised and maintained by 'mentalities' of marketisation: entrepreneurship, competition, responsibility for self-government, a customer orientation and so on.

The article concludes with a call to contest, and deepen the debate around, quality assurance, audits and performance management in higher education, questioning not only the forms but also the origins and rationale of these policies and practices. With a view to such contestation, some contradictions in these policies and practices are identified.

The terms of the debate: massification, marketisation, managerialism - and transformation

For anyone interested in such issues, the CHE's *Kagisano* (Issue 4, Winter 2006) is a remarkable publication. Firstly because it is significant that the CHE is prepared to publish such strong criticism of trends in which it plays a central role. Bundy's central piece, first presented at a CHE colloquium in 2004 and later published in *Perspectives in Education* (2005), is probably the strongest critique of managerialism and related trends in higher education written by a South African.¹ Secondly, because the debate that unfolds in the *Kagisano* pages crystallises issues that have been raised or partly articulated by a number of South African academics regarding these trends, as well as encapsulating many of the essential points of the international critique. Thirdly, the publication is noteworthy because in some academic quarters, these issues have been subjected to little scholarly debate. For these reasons, the *Kagisano* publication serves as a valuable 'way in' to the topic of this article.²

Basing his argument on his experience as Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of prominent universities in both the United Kingdom and South Africa, as well as on the highly developed critical literature from beyond our borders on globalisation and the impact of neo-liberal ideology on higher education, Bundy argues in 'Global Patterns, Local Options?' that the post-apartheid reform of South African higher education has been shaped by neo-liberal reform strategies, essentially replicating the patterns of *massification*, *marketisation* and *managerialism* that have marked an 'epochal shift' in higher education globally, towards the performativity identified by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). Bundy is particularly critical of the advent of managerialism and the 'performance audit culture' under Thatcher in the UK, which have

¹ Bundy was serving as the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of London at the time.

² Much recent debate has also focused on the effect which the corporatisation of universities, and its progeny, quality assurance and performance management, are having on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, or more broadly, democracy. As Du Toit has argued, university autonomy is not really the issue, as this lets *internal* institutional management 'off the hook' (see Bentley, Habib and Morrow, 2006). However, this aspect of the debates around the identity, governance and autonomy of higher education institutions in South Africa is beyond the scope of this article.

undermined collegial governance systems, changed power relations between state and higher education institutions, reduced institutional autonomy, corroded academic status, increased external surveillance, and introduced market principles of privatisation, competition, entrepreneurialism and performance-related funding into higher education (Singh, neatly summarising Bundy, 2006, p.64).

Recounting Britain's history of *massification*, Bundy points out that in the 1960s, post-war massification reflected the idea that education is a social good that should be equally available to all. The second wave of expanded access to higher education, however, was entirely different – part of Thatcher's rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state, in which universities became a resource for human capital development and the production of skills to benefit the economy.³

Regarding *marketisation*, Bundy notes that universities across the industrialised world have had to 'do more with less'. Importantly, this forces them to rely increasingly on 'user cost' recovery (tuition fees), third stream income including the commercialisation of intellectual property, and relentless competition for students, grants, contracts and esteem, seeking competitive advantage in market research, branding and image-management/public relations. All this has been promoted by a powerful discourse, derived from commerce, of 'productivity', 'customers', 'marketable skills', 'accountability' and 'audits'. Responsiveness has been thinned down to 'market responsiveness', and massification carries connotations of increased income (an expanded market) at least as much as it betokens expanded access to a social good.

External audits, with their 'torrents of data', and internal compliance have been, according to Bundy, the most important 'political technology' and visible manifestation of *managerialism* in higher education, legitimised by a "self-justificatory vocabulary of quality, ... best practice and accountability" (Bundy, 2006, p.6). Simultaneously deregulating and more effectively regulating universities, governments steer higher education 'at a distance, through compliance with centrally set norms'. Quoting British academics (2006, p.7), Bundy describes the effect that this has:

an 'ethos of beratement and surveillance' (Morley, 2003, p.160) is replicated locally. The logic of performativity penetrates the campus and corridors, creating a 'climate of unease and hyperactivity' (Shore and Wright, 1999, p.72).

³ This distinction is significant for a point that Seepe makes with regard to South Africa in the same collection (see below).

As a consequence, academia is characterised by ‘less autonomy, less secure employment . . . and a corrosive loss of status and esteem’.

Turning his attention to South Africa, Bundy finds that key goals set out in the National Commission on Higher Education Report (NCHE, 1996) have proved elusive. According to him, increased access to higher education has not yet unequivocally produced greater equity, historically disadvantaged institutions have been further disadvantaged, and crass managerialism and interventionist mergers have substituted for transformatory governance (Bundy, 2006). However, Bundy notes that there has been “limited reflection in South Africa on the overall direction being taken by the sector, on the resemblances between local developments and those occurring elsewhere, or on the reasons for this isomorphism” (Bundy, 2006, p.10).

Bundy situates his argument firmly within the context of the fundamental tension recognised by the South African government, the CHE and many scholars, between the pursuit of equity and redress on one hand, and the pursuit of economic development towards global economic competitiveness on the other. He argues that “the dilemma of competing imperatives continued to be addressed rhetorically while in reality the scales tilted increasingly towards the global and away from the local field of force” (2006, p.16). Bundy links this to the South African government’s adoption from 1996 of the neo-liberal macro-economic GEAR programme (Growth, Employment and Redistribution).

Bundy concludes by posing some questions for the future (not all of them quoted below):

. . . is it possible to formulate policy selectively, adopting this element of the international model, adapting that, and rejecting the other? Or is there an overall policy package – ideologically coherent, internationally endorsed – that is for all practical purposes irresistible . . . a higher education equivalent of the Washington Consensus? . . . (2006, p.18)

. . . (will) market-led ‘reforms’ see a reneging on fundamental equity goals? (2006, p.18)

. . . will South African higher education become subject to the negative aspects associated with ‘the audit culture’ elsewhere? Is it possible to introduce . . . the HEQC, and the monitoring and evaluation measures inherent in the funding/planning nexus, without importing in addition a whole set of unintended consequences? (2006, pp.18–19)

. . . can any monitoring and evaluative system operate *independently* of the underlying assumptions and policy objectives of the Treasury? (2006, p.19)

. . . if massification, marketisation and managerialism have impacted significantly upon the academic profession elsewhere, will this happen in South Africa? (2006, p.19)

Can the very real local issues of post-apartheid South Africa be translated into progressive policy outcomes, or will they be subject to the globalising tendencies of the post-industrial world? (2006, p.20)

Although Bundy's paper encompasses a wider scope than the impact of the HEQC, in the same *Kagisano* publication Lange and Singh both defend the role of this body. Both argue that quality assurance in post-apartheid South African higher education is driven by the national goals of transformation (individual and institutional) and quality education for all, rather than by a neo-liberal agenda of accountability and surveillance alone ("transformative accountability" rather than "managerialist accountability" – Singh, 2006, p.73). And both in effect agree that ongoing critique of the monitoring and regulatory system is necessary to keep the excesses of neo-liberalism at bay.

Counter to Bundy's central theme, Lange explores the *differences* between the changes in South African higher education and those in industrial societies, noting in particular that when writing about South African institutions, Bundy divorces them from their own history and denies their agency.

It is as if change had taken place out of bureaucratic whim rather than as the result of a socio-political process in which higher education institutions played an active part. It often seems that we have forgotten that the massification of higher education was a response to broad political and social phenomena. We forget that there was a time when women, black people and working people could not study at universities (Lange, 2006, p.42).

Of course, Bundy himself makes the point that massification policies were pursued in the UK by successive governments for very different ends, one of which was egalitarian. In the same collection (2006, p.54) Seepe argues that

Massification is a matter of national redress and an attempt to redress the historical injustice of the exclusion of the majority . . . (however) similar strategies applied in different contexts may produce different results.

Like Lange, Singh also strikes a note of agency, but looking to the future rather than the past when she points out that "actors within the education reform project (must) consciously and continuously struggle, in the spaces that they inhabit, to make the social justice issues . . . 'trump' other more ideologically powerful countervailing factors" (Singh, 2006, p.67).

Lange argues that when many other countries were grappling with the crisis of the left, and the death of grand narratives and of the subject under the influence of post-modernism, South Africa was 'living' a grand narrative developed through decades of political struggle. Legislation and policy alike

were consciously based on the Constitution and Bill of Rights, higher education policy included. However, when Lange deduces from this that “South African higher education policy was informed *not* by neo-liberalism but by social justice principles and the idea that it was possible to collectively embrace a political project” (Lange, 2006, p.44, italics mine), her reductionist argument fails to convince.

Responding to what she takes to be Bundy’s underlying question: ‘whether it is possible to achieve progressive ends using tools with conservative origins’ (Lange, 2006, p.40), Lange contends that the implementation of policies intended to steer institutions towards transformation still needs to be *measured* so that the government can know how much change is in fact taking place.

for whatever reasons the British government seeks this information (Bundy’s ‘torrents of data’), in the South African case it is the kind of information that policy makers cannot do without if they are to monitor progress and institute measures aimed at addressing the historical legacy of racial exclusion.

Singh too makes the point (2006, p.70) that the CHE’s

strategic choices had to do with interpreting, modifying and using the standard (quality assurance) methodologies in ways that took contextual legacies and challenges into account, especially the issue of access to good quality education for all as a transformative goal.

Finally, Lange argues that the monitoring system was informed by a contextual understanding of change, and of each institution in its own right rather than on specific system-based targets or benchmarks, or performance indicators that generate a response of tired compliance (2006, p.49).

In the *Kagisano* debate, a different tack is followed by Kotecha, whose response to the bleak picture of neo-liberal managerialism is to “go to the heart of the matter and ask meta-questions about the identity of the contemporary university, its functions and purposes especially within the context of Africa” (2006, p.22). She revisits classic notions of the modern university in Newman, von Humboldt and others – as a place for ‘critical intellectual citizenship’ (Readings, 1996), occupying a space that is as much psychological as it is physical, where knowledge is gained across disciplines via interaction with others. Kotecha turns the neo-liberal notion of the student as customer/consumer on its head with a telling quotation from Elton (2001) which reminds us that unlike schools, which deal largely with ‘closed and settled bodies of knowledge’, higher education always treats learning

in terms of not yet completely solved problems, remaining at all times in a research mode (i.e. being engaged in an unceasing process of inquiry) . . . At the higher level, the teacher is *not there for the sake of the student; both have their justification in the service of scholarship* (Kotecha, 2006, p.29 – my italics).⁴

It is not possible here to do justice to the rich debate in the pages of the *Kagisano collection*. Bundy's paper, as the centrepiece, is essentially a warning. He paints a picture of the destructive potential of neo-liberal managerialism and the corporatisation and commodification of higher education, as experienced in the UK, Australia and New Zealand but essentially based on the same model that is to be found globally in societies seeking to modernise their social institutions. Although his theme concerns the implications of global models for South African higher education, he is rightly taken to task by Seepe for not attending to the existing body of African scholarship on the identity of the contemporary university (2006). His argument is also seen by Lange and Singh as reductionist and insufficiently nuanced in recognising the specificities and challenges of transformation in the South African context.⁵

Neo-liberal managerialism and performativity

Nevertheless Bundy's concluding questions still stand, all of them reflected in the question: If marketisation, managerialism and neo-liberal forms of massification have impacted so significantly upon the academic profession elsewhere, will this not happen in South Africa? Is it not naïve to think that South African higher education can escape the effects of the "darker depths of QA" (Singh and Lange, 2007, p.xiv), with its roots in New Public Management and neo-liberalism?

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This view is supported by Lomas (2007, p.42), whose research found that while senior management were supportive of the view that students should be regarded as customers, in general academic staff rejected this view on the grounds that higher education is not like other forms of service provision – a product or service that is sold to students.

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All of these positions have echoes in the work of other scholars, in South Africa and other developing countries: for instance, Bundy's arguments resonate with Vale (2005), Le Grange (2009), Waghid (2004) and Lemaitre (2005); Seepe's with Mamdani (1999); Lange's and Singh's downplaying of the analytical significance of managerialism with that of Harley and Parker (2006); and their insistence on the HEQC's role having a strong transformational rationale with Badat (2008) and Soudien (2007), but with some support from both of these for Bundy's broad proposition concerning managerialism.

Even if we accept the position that quality assurance in South Africa is focused primarily on improvement, even transformation, and that monitoring need not mean “buying into the conceptualisation of the evaluative state” (Lange, 2006, p.51), the other trends described by Bundy are still undeniably there: massification, marketisation and managerialism, in a multiplicity of forms. Are we to believe that the machinery of quality assurance will remain untainted by all this, a bastion of improvement and transformation, when the daily experience of academics tells them otherwise? Off-the-record criticism of quality assurance, audits and accountability procedures in South Africa has chiefly taken the form of complaint rather than critique, but much of this common-sense complaint has point: are we measuring (and monitoring) the pig too much for it to get fat?

It is debatable how successfully the HEQC conveyed the impression to academics and senior management, in the crucial early rounds of programme accreditation and audit, that improvement and transformation were the first priorities in our universities (as for instance happened in the early stages of QA in Sweden – Danø and Stensaker, 2007; Harvey, 2007). Despite the emphasis in Lange and Singh on a transformation agenda, a scan of the CHE’s *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, *Criteria for Institutional Audits*, *Framework for Programme Accreditation* and *Framework for Institutional Audits*, as well as the various Powerpoint presentations used to introduce the system to institutions and academics, reveals virtually no reference to this agenda. The words ‘equity’ and ‘redress’ (or equivalent terms) do not appear in these documents, while the word ‘transformation’ appears only twice in the Foreword of each Framework document – amidst over 40 to 60 pages of procedures, criteria and requirements. The overwhelming impression gained from a reading of these induction documents is one of bureaucratic regulation and the need for compliance, rather than the “progressive and reflective thought and action” that Lange claims was the outcome of monitoring which the CHE espoused (2006, p.47).

There are a number of reasons why continuing work must be done in deconstructing the discourse of higher education quality assurance, audit and accountability in South Africa. Despite the concern with transformation, South Africa has adopted the broad OECD quality assurance model (Luckett, 2007) which has been analysed by numerous scholars (including Shore and Wright, 1999; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Besley and Peters, 2006) as being shaped by neo-liberal ideology and based on the principles of New Public Management, marketisation, the entrepreneurial subject, competition, transparency (read self-declaration and self-justification), and so on. A number of studies (mainly

European, British and Australian) have also revealingly analysed quality assurance, audit and accountability using post-structuralist and post-modernist concepts, key ones being the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, and Lyotard's conception of performativity.

Another reason for attempting to deconstruct the disciplinary regime of quality assurance, audits and accountability is that ideologies and discourses tend to perpetuate themselves once they have established hegemony, hence the danger expressed by Morley (2003, p.51): "quality parades as a universal truth and therefore continually extends its domain". Yet another, related, reason is that a pattern has already been established of accreditation criteria and their implicit benchmarks being predetermined externally by a central authority, leading to a certain ethos of dependency among many academics. Of course, a deconstructive analysis will also help us to think about possible future trajectories of the quality assurance regime in South Africa and internationally.

Figure 1 on page 33 is an attempt to depict in a coherent way how the above-mentioned key analytical concepts may be integrated into a theoretical framework to assist in understanding the structures that underlie current quality assurance, audit and accountability regimes in higher education. One disadvantage of such a representation is that the iceberg metaphor on which it is based does not convey a time dimension – the important point being that the internationally-adopted model of quality assurance, audit and accountability mechanisms did not simply present itself as an ideologically neutral 'good idea' for promoting the effectiveness of higher education and research – either internationally or in South Africa. Nor are these phenomena simply the unproblematic product of the growing power of management over academics. As Foucault has shown, such practices, and the rationalities by which they are made to seem 'normal' or inevitable, are not foundational truths, but the result of a mix of evolving ideas, strategies, contingent circumstances and calculations in response to circumstances on the part of those who exercise power (Christie, 2006).

New Public Management has emerged as a highly theorised 'technology of governance', an instance of what Foucault (2008) characterised as neo-liberal governmentality. The notion of governmentality, or 'governmental rationality', encompasses both government as an activity or practice (techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour, or 'regimes of practices' – Foucault, 1991), and the ways of thinking about how that activity might be carried on (literally, rationalities of government, which make these

same practices appear ‘normal’, in other words, as the only way they *could* be – ‘regimes of truth’).

Foucault saw neo-liberal governmentality as a form of governing in which, by governing the individual members of society (or rather by causing them to govern themselves), the governing of the whole population would largely take care of itself (Pongratz, 2006). It is, in fact, about governing ‘all and each’ internally, and became a possibility with the development of democratic states, in which it was no longer necessary (and with the advance of liberalism, no longer desirable) to govern by means of force or the threat of force, in other words, externally.

A key assumption of neo-liberalism is the applicability and superiority of market dynamics for *all* social transactions, and (unlike the distrust of governmental power in classical liberalism) a ‘positive’ role for the state in creating and maintaining the optimum conditions for markets to operate, including shaping the consciousness of individuals as enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs in their own interests (*‘homo economicus’* – again, this departs from the classic liberal notion of the self-interested individual as a *natural* state) (Foucault, 2008).

One of the key *preoccupations* of modern governmentality is security, and the limitation of risk to within manageable bounds. Thus for example ill health, crime and the threat of litigation (and in higher education, student under-performance, and low teaching and research outputs, which in South Africa as in many other countries, have important financial, economic and social implications) are studied in statistical form to enable the risk of these to be brought within predictable and thus potentially controllable limits (Dean, 1999).

These concerns with risk management and reshaping identities and relationships in terms of market dynamics reflect the influence of neo-liberal economic and business theory on the regulation and operation of public sector institutions, particularly higher education. Indeed, as Althaus has pointed out (1997), the neo-liberal reform project has been conspicuous in its use of theory. Here the influence of the Chicago school (James Buchanan and his collaborators) has been great, arguing as it did for the introduction of market principles into the public sector, as well as for a government role in engineering the conditions for efficient economic production and the containment of risk and inefficiency. This is to be achieved by “extracting willing compliance” from individuals, through (for instance) systems that

measure performance according to externally imposed and internally reinforced targets (Olssen and Peters, 2005, pp.318–319).

Principal/Agency theory, one of the raft of theories that shape the neo-liberal structuring of the public sector, is largely responsible for many of the significant changes that have come about in higher education under ‘New Public Management’. It construes all work relations as hierarchical, contractual relations between ‘principals’ and ‘agents’ (Besley and Peters, 2006). A principal is an agent for those higher up the command chain, which is seen as a series of clearly specified contracts, against which performance can be measured. A key concern is how to extract as much compliance and productivity as possible (read pre-specified work targets) from the agents ‘below’ one in a voluntary exchange based on dependency and clear-cut rewards or sanctions. The aim, of course, is that described by Lyotard as “the best possible input/output equation” – his basic definition of performativity (1979, p.46).

Principal/Agency theory has a number of distinct and important effects in organisations. One of the most important outcomes for the organisation of *academic* work is the tendency to install a contractual system based on clear goals, the detailed specification of roles and tasks, and comprehensive, reliable reporting (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Contractual obligation, along with targets, rewards and sanctions also comes to replace intrinsic motivation based on loyalty or commitment to one’s profession, vocation, discipline or colleagues (the supplanting of ‘covenant’ by ‘contract’).

Various risk factors, for instance what is referred to as ‘bounded rationality’, have the potential to disrupt all such relations. One example is uncertainty and differential access to information on which decisions are based (which can give ‘agents’ an advantage over their ‘principals’); another is ‘opportunism’ – ‘agents’ acting in their own self-interest rather than that of the organisation (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Such factors incur costs (often hidden but nevertheless quantifiable), which it is the purpose of Transaction Cost Economics to monitor, analyse, account for and minimise – essentially a pervasive risk containment system and efficiency mechanism (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Rendering performance ‘transparent’ and open to management in this way is also one of the important functions of performance appraisal. The submission of reports on almost every aspect of a faculty’s or an individual’s operations is required to supply the need for information (committed to writing) as an ‘input’ in strategic planning.

An aspect of neo-liberal ‘reform’ that is perhaps more recognisable than the application of the above theories to the public sector, is the marketisation and corporatisation of higher education. This brings with it the redefinition of students as ‘consumers’, or even ‘customers’, resonating with the neo-liberal notion of the ‘entrepreneurial subject’. Individuals are encouraged through technologies of the market and technologies of the self (Rose, 1999, pp.76–87)⁶ to see themselves as, and to become, enterprising, rational individuals who govern themselves in their own interests and thus require only limited direct governing or support by the state. The entrepreneurial subject is constantly encouraged to make an ‘enterprise’ of his or her life, in some senses running it like a business and maximising his or her own human capital.

This positioning of the student as ‘customer’ constructs him or her as sophisticated and self-entrepreneurial (‘The customer knows what s/he wants’) rather than as naïve (‘We’ll deliver something good on the basis of what we, the experts, know’). As increasing numbers of students have come to take on this identity, the relationships between academics and students in general have been affected, with students tending to become more assertive of their rights as ‘consumers’, and in some cases more instrumentalist in their approach to their studies.

The other side of the ‘consumer’ coin is that institutions are to see themselves as the ‘providers’ of services to these consumers (Strathern, 2000). Government ‘purchases’ these services on behalf of the consumers, and defines its own role as the underwriter of quality in terms of ‘value for (taxpayers’) money’ and ‘fitness for purpose’. How do these new relations and constructions ‘position’ the academic? As Ball has pointed out (2003), in order for academics not to be side-lined as ‘out of date’, it is now necessary to think of themselves, and even to talk about themselves, as ‘providers’, as educational entrepreneurs, as managers. This involves performativity in terms of *enactments* of oneself as identifying with these roles. Ball (2003) says that we are required to become adept at representing ourselves in terms of this new managerial vocabulary, and because the possibilities of resisting this are limited, we find ourselves enacting a form of ‘ventriloquism’, manipulated into speaking with voices not our own.

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This is a clear instance of neo-liberalism’s acceptance of the need often to *engineer* the requisite conditions in individuals to promote the smooth functioning of the (market) economy.

It is, of course, in terms of the government's role as underwriter and guarantor of quality, and to protect the interests of consumers, that regular auditing is justified. As Strathern puts it (2000, p.2):

The concept of audit has broken loose from its cultural moorings in finance and accounting; its own expanded presence gives it the power of a descriptor seemingly applicable to all kinds of reckonings, evaluations and measurements.

As Shore and Wright have noted (1999, p.559), "the discourse of audit has become a vehicle for changing the way people relate to the workplace, to authority, to each other and, most importantly, to themselves". Academics are required to learn to see themselves as 'resources' whose *performance* must be audited regularly. Shore and Wright also point out how this requirement of surveillance is legitimated in terms of 'empowerment' and 'self-actualisation', enabling individuals and institutions to monitor and 'enhance' their own performance according to targets and standards that they set for themselves.

The rhetoric in which the culture of audit is justified thus renders it unproblematic and uncontestable. However, this technology of self-enhancement requires the regular re-setting of targets ('there is always something that can be improved'). Thus academics, who generally subscribe to professional values and tend to be motivated by intrinsic, vocational rewards, are interpellated as being perpetually in deficit mode and in pursuit of an 'excellence' which is always elusive.

Relevant here is Foucault's paradigmatic use of Bentham's idea of the panopticon (Foucault, 1997), in which the inmates are never sure whether they are being observed or not, and thus become their own guardians. "By inducing a state of conscious and permanent visibility, the panopticon transforms the inmate into the instrument of his own subjugation, and thereby guarantees the automatic functioning of power" (Shore and Roberts, 1993, p.3).

The exposure of almost every aspect of academic work to simultaneous external surveillance and internal self-surveillance through accreditation exercises, audits and various forms of performance management is seemingly counterbalanced by the neo-liberal belief in self-regulation, which seem to imply academic freedom, professional accountability and institutional autonomy (Le Grange, 2009, p.113). Thus the HEQC requires processes of self-evaluation and peer review which can result in the award of self-accreditation status. However, as Le Grange points out, self-regulation and self-accreditation are misleading terms because

these terms do not mean the relinquishment of state control, but the establishment of a new form of control – what Du Gay (1996) calls ‘controlled de-control’ or what Vidovich (2002) calls ‘steering at a distance’ – performativity remains the regulatory regime.

In addition, as Shore and Wright argue (1999, p.559):

The . . . habitual grouping of ‘audit’ with words like ‘efficiency’, ‘effectiveness’, ‘best practice’ and ‘value for money’ disguises its hierarchical and paternalistic roots and plays down its coercive . . . implications.

Neo-liberal governmentality is about ‘conducting the conduct’ of populations through individual self-regulation (‘steering from a distance’) by means of ‘technologies of the self’, ‘the technology of responsabilisation’, ‘technologies of the market’ and so on, which define individuals as free subjects in particular circumscribed ways, encouraging them to be active in their own self-government, and in their own self-interests (Lemke, 2000). In their responses to the ‘panopticism’ reflected in the audit culture, we see how the technology of responsabilisation tends to engineer professionals (read ‘academics’) into internalising the ‘identity’ of their institution, and taking on the responsibility for its prosperity and right conduct, relieving the state or its regulatory arms of at least part of the responsibility for expending resources in this direction.

Ball argues (2003) that this panopticism, coupled with competition as an instrument of entrepreneurial self-management, tends to break down collegial solidarities based on common professional identity, constructing instead new forms of individualised affiliation to the institution, and ‘community’ based on corporate culture (essentially productivity) and identity.

Another important aspect of the neo-liberal project in higher education is to infuse the market principles of competition and entrepreneurship into every possible relationship – between institutions, departments and individuals – and into how individual subjects see themselves – in the interests of efficiency and ‘productivity’ gains. At one end of the hierarchy this has led to the appointment of Vice Chancellors (often from outside the institution) who in most instances function in much the same way as corporate CEOs (Bundy, 2006). Further down there are top management and ‘Executive’ Deans who are essentially strategic directors, expected to be loyal to the central institution rather than to faculties, departments or disciplines, and to encourage similar loyalty and identification with institutional ends among faculty. But this emphasis on efficiency and productivity may hold dangers for academic institutions whose ‘outputs’ are not merely ‘products’ or commodities, or even simply services. As Jonathan warns:

. . . management slides into managerialism when managing is confused with leadership, and efficiency goals begin to threaten the purposes of the institution and the values and supporting freedoms of academics (2006, p.51).

What, apart from the obvious effects, and the self-reinforcing circle of consumer-centredness, audit, performativity, responsabilisation (and ultimately, de-professionalisation of academics), have been the more hidden consequences of the pervasive application of Principal/Agency Theory, marketisation, competitiveness and audits in higher education?

- Hierarchical line management chains of command based on specifications of job performance have tended to replace collegial or democratic governance and delegation (Olssen and Peters, 2005).
- Relations based on trust are increasingly replaced by contractual relations in which departments and individuals are constantly held to account on the basis of measurable outputs. This is, paradoxically, out of key with increasingly high-skills, post-Fordist economic development.
- Trust becomes a pre-requisite for the knowledge worker for, without it, risks will not be taken and, therefore, new ideas will remain unexpressed and hinder the development of competitiveness as well as processes of continuous improvement (Avis, 2003).
- Decentralised units within universities increasingly compete for funding that is often tied to targets or benchmarks which are centrally determined (Bundy, 2006). This does not always lead to improved 'productivity'.
- As performativity becomes an integral part of our working lives and identities, "management . . . becomes embedded in everything we do. Increasingly, we choose and judge our actions, and they are judged by others, on the basis of their contribution to organisational performance" (Ball, 2003, p.223).
- This deep identification with management combines with the sheer mechanics of performativity in preparing constant reports, accreditation portfolios and gathering supporting evidence to create a climate which may possibly elicit creative and innovative teaching in some instances, but is more likely to encourage safer, less risky and experimental approaches. In the end, spontaneity and innovation, which often involve hard work, are abandoned in favour of less risky, time- and energy-

consuming routine ideas.⁷ The students, academics, and ultimately society are the losers in this equation.

- The increasing requirement of *pre*-specified course content militates against professional discretion and flexibility to respond to ongoing developments. As Olssen and Peters note (2005, p.325), “The essence of contractual models involves a *specification*, which is fundamentally at odds with the notion of professionalism” (italics in the original).
- Thus a key consequence of New Public Management has been the creeping *de-professionalisation* of the academy, through a loss of professional autonomy and through surveillance (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Amit, 2000; Shore and Wright, 1999).
- As Marginson argues from the Australian experience, competitiveness does not benefit ‘consumers’ equally:

As competitiveness is ratcheted upwards, the seller’s market is enhanced. The leading schools and universities have long waiting lists. These institutions choose the student-consumer, more than the student choosing them. They do not need to become cheaper, more (cost) efficient, or more responsive to gain support, and to expand would be to reduce their positional value (1997, p.7–8).

Returning to Bundy’s key question of whether QA can drive South African higher education firmly towards the transformative imperatives of equity and redress, if its roots lie in the technical rationality of managerialism, or whether market-led ‘reforms’ will see a reneging on fundamental equity goals, an important pointer is identified by Waghid (2004, p.37):

higher education policy discourse . . . has increasingly minimised its initial strong thrust towards equity and redress, and instead substantively emphasised the need for efficient human resource development. . . The achievement of equity and redress which had been so prominent in earlier higher education policy discourse, became secondary to the more primary objective of making higher education more responsive to attending to economic labour market imperatives and concomitant neoliberal requirements for skill and innovative knowledge workers and producers who, in the words of Bourdieu (1998, p.2), can ensure “an unprecedented mobility of capital”.

⁷ This resonates with Lyotard: “any experimentation in discourse, institutions and values (with the inevitable ‘disorders’ it brings in the curriculum, student supervision and testing, and pedagogy – not to mention its socio-political repercussions) is regarded as having little or no operational value and is not given the slightest credence in the name of the seriousness of the system” (1979, p.50).

Concluding discussion

Just as there is a strong case to be made for academics in South Africa to become more vigilant and critical, even combative, recalling our role as public intellectuals, so too do we need to develop a more theoretically informed view of, and to deepen the debate around, the policies, discursive practices and governmental rationalities that regulate our work and our working lives. This requires us to examine our own practices, and the causal logic of the theories and discourses that underlie them, in cross-disciplinary ways, critically exploring the insights and liabilities of organisation development theory, economic theory, political theory, systems theory and epistemology.

For one thing, South African academics need to continue to push the agenda, as so many did during and immediately after the era of apartheid, of equity, justice and redress, no matter how it may be made to seem passé, or to jar with the prevailing discourse of universal entrepreneurship and responsabilisation. For another, we should be arguing vociferously against the abandonment of the idea of higher education as an institution for the pursuit of truth and questioning – in Lyotard’s terms, where we ask ‘Is it true?’ rather than simply ‘What use is it?’, ‘Is it saleable?’ and ‘Is it efficient?’

To maintain such arguments, academics in all fields need to position ourselves so as to better understand the factors which could affect the future trajectory of quality assurance and managerialism in South African higher education. The aim of this effort would not be to ‘manage risk’ in a managerialist sense, but to be alert to contradictions and dialectic ‘chinks’ in the ideological armour of hegemonic neo-liberalism, its vision of a world in which ‘there is nothing that is not market’, and in particular its steering of higher education. The following are but a sample of such contradictions and potential weaknesses in the latter:

- Verkleij and Westerheijden (2002), quoted in Lockett (2007, p.3), suggest that “all external quality assurance agencies experience diminishing returns, with easy wins for both accountability and improvement in the first round and increasing bureaucratisation, but also window dressing, in subsequent rounds”.
- Academics may over time develop more overt forms of resistance to the constant requirements of performativity, particularly when these lead to what Ball calls ‘fabrication’ (2003), since these deeply undermine the scholarly respect for truth.

- As Lockett points out (2007), the adopted model of quality assurance evolved from *positivist* models of social science research, yet is *pragmatic* about the methods used to generate evidence and in its foundationalist reliance on empirical evidence (derived from direct or indirect observation) in assuring the meeting of predetermined criteria. Thus it is assumed that through empirical observation, evaluators can achieve acceptable levels of accuracy, objectivity and neutrality in their judgments. From the point of view of scientific research, this is dodgy on every count, and may well undermine how some academics come to see their own scientific work if this is how their work is officially assessed (Tagg, 2002).
- Despite the de-professionalisation of academics, the position of universities as major producers of knowledge is a source of unpredictability, and a potential key driver of change in a knowledge economy (Amit, 2000; Olssen, 2005). In other words, there is at least some scope, ironically in terms of sheer economics, for academics to become more assertive in the face of unwanted accountability measures.
- Periodically we are reminded of our racist heritage, as we were by the disturbing video made by university students in which black cleaning staff were made to eat food on which students appeared to have urinated. The outcry and soul-searching in higher education which followed this at least remind us that racist hatred may persist in people too young to have known apartheid directly (Jansen, 2008), and remind us of educational imperatives that have little to do with self-entrepreneurship, competitiveness, consumer choice, contractual relations or throughput, or even with liberal freedom of expression, but everything to do with the cultivation of values and attitudes conducive to building a healed nation.

On the other hand, we need also to be prepared for the possibility of intensified marketisation and managerialism in higher education: more pressure for quantified indicators and outcomes, additional forms of self- or external surveillance, the drying up of funding for any research which is not of obvious value as an investment – or even product innovation as a specific core function of universities?

Perhaps the greatest value of the debate on the pages of *Kagisano* 4 is best captured by Singh and Lange in a later editorial piece: it is the clarity with which the need emerges to examine

beyond surfaces to fundamental questions on the premises and presumptions that underpin QA beyond improvement triumphalism or easy, sometimes simplistic, diatribes about managerialism. The global trajectory of QA across diverse higher education systems requires reflective attention by researchers and practitioners alike, with an analytical lens that should range over often-cited issues like the purposes of QA in context and the accountabilities of key actors in the enterprise to less addressed premises and assumptions embedded within QA (2007, p.viii).

Hence it is significant that the CHE not only supports colloquia like the one at which Bundy presented his paper, but is prepared to invite and publish scholarly critique and debate. As Bundy himself notes (2006), the spaces that such opportunities create for collective reflection are rare anywhere, and hence to be cherished. There is no need in South Africa to confine concerns about managerialism to the marginalised discourse of complaints in the corridor.

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