Commodification and the official discourse of higher education

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Darryll Bravenboer

A dedication

To my mother, for her constant support and belief.

Abstract

The commodification of higher education has been described, within the philosophical and sociological literature, in opposition to, or in alliance with principled perspectives about the nature, purpose or value of 'higher education': for example, as that which is intrinsically valuable, a social good, a democratic requirement or an individual entitlement. This thesis argues that such approaches are relatively unproductive in providing descriptions that can inform higher education practice. Rather, it is argued, they largely seem to operate to reproduce the principled perspectives with which they are aligned or opposed. The thesis examines the following question:

> *How do official texts that describe higher education, operate to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of its commodification?*

The methodology employed to examine this question, locates 'official' texts as empirical objects for analysis. The analysis proceeds by identifying and organising oppositions and alliances within these texts, to produce a constructive description of how each text is operating within the higher education field. Specific descriptions of higher education within official texts are analysed in relation to constructed theoretical spaces that describe *modes of discursive action*, including the commodified mode.

The method provides a means of describing commodification as a discursive modality rather than as a representation of use-value/exchange-value or market/non-market type oppositions. This approach is productive in describing the ways that official texts operate to regulate higher education practice without reproducing a principled perspective. Despite some explicit references to the economic or commodity value of higher education, official texts tend to use such descriptions to promote the introduction or maintenance of bureaucratic and regulatory systems that actually stand in opposition to the commodified mode. This conclusion is in contrast with the idea that official descriptions of higher education are operating to promote increasing commodification.

Contents

Table of figures

Chapter one – Introduction to the idea of the commodification of higher education

Introduction

Which of these two statements, if either, can be described as true?

1. First and foremost, the institutions of higher education should be structured to nurture, examine critically and promulgate the values of a democratic society. Their fundamental normative commitment…is to the values of truthfulness, objectivity, freedom of thought and expression, personal integrity, honesty and democratic ways of thinking. (Williamson and Coffield: 1997, p124)

2. Parents think not in terms of joining an academic collegiate structure, but more in terms of buying a product from a supermarket. They want best value for money and they search [for a higher education product] in the same way. ('You pays your money and you makes your choice', Times Higher Educational Supplement: 14.11.2003)

The first reflects many of the values and purposes described in the Dearing Report *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (1997), in which higher education is also viewed as "…fundamental to the social, economic and cultural health of the nation" (p175). The second paints a different, perhaps less highly principled, picture of higher education as simply a consumer good that people buy. In other words, a commodity.

It could of course be objected that in fact neither of these statements claim 'truth' as such. However, the first does seem to be making a moral claim about what higher education institutions 'should' do and what their 'fundamental normative commitment' is. The second statement is of course of a different kind, in effect, making claims about what parents think about and want, in relation to higher education. This deliberately dramatic opposition is designed to illustrate how different descriptions of higher education can be related to the idea of its commodification. This thesis will not attempt to discover which kind of description of higher education (commodified or otherwise) is true or false, or seek to find out what the fundamental principles of higher education are or should be. It will also not present a critique of descriptions of higher education on the basis that they represent a flawed or partial realisation of educational principles. Rather, this thesis will attempt to describe how descriptions of higher education are operating within the discursive field. In particular, the thesis will attempt to describe how descriptions of higher education position the idea of its commodification.

This work is primarily concerned with higher education within the United Kingdom (UK) and particularly England, although some of the theoretical references will draw on work that discusses higher education in the context of other countries. Specifically, the work is concerned with descriptions of the commodification of higher education or the ways in which higher education is described as commodified. This can include various associated aspects and elements of higher education (and its related practices) being described as having become, becoming more like, or being treated like, commodities in some way. There are other possible terms that have been used to describe associated processes, such as 'commoditisation', 'marketisation', 'privatisation', 'corporatisation' and 'academic capitalism', all of which, for the purposes of this introduction, are related to and implied by the term commodification. For example, Meek (2003) has argued that

The trend towards marketisation and privatisation of public sector higher education has been well established over the last decade or more and is clearly visible in the language of policy documents (students as clients, knowledge as a product or commodity, price and quality relations etc) and in their implementation: the introduction of tuition fees, performance based funding and conditional contracting. (Meek: 2003, p4)

This statement associates the 'trend' towards marketisation and privatisation, or what I call commodification, with both a perceived change in the use of language to describe 'higher education' and perceived changes to the ways in which it operates. The description of higher education, as becoming subject to marketisation and privatisation, is implicitly contrasted with a description of what higher education 'has been', or even perhaps what it 'should be'. In other words, the description of marketised and privatised higher education constructs an opposition with descriptions of higher education as a public sector good. Descriptions of the commodification of higher education are implicated in the discursive struggles to establish which descriptions of higher education have predominance in the field. The construction of these descriptions is, I argue, implicated in explicit or implicit textual strategies, which operate to regulate discursive exchange. The thesis will analyse how such descriptions operate within texts that have 'official' status. By this I mean those texts that have been authored, produced or commissioned by official or governmental bodies and agencies.

The method employed to analyse these texts will attempt to identify associations and differentiations, or oppositions and alliances, within each official description of higher education. Through considering such oppositions and alliances, the analysis will attempt to describe the strategies employed within official texts that position some descriptions of higher education in relation to others. The thesis will be concerned with the ways in which descriptions of higher education commodification are strategically and dynamically (re)produced within official higher education texts that are positioned to influence higher education practices. My hybridisation of the word '(re)production' is designed to signify that I am concerned with both the 'production' and the 'reproduction' of the idea of the commodification of higher education.

The selected official texts, as representative instances of socio-cultural action in the higher education field, will constitute the empirical evidence for analysis in the thesis. The rationale for selecting these particular kinds of texts will be discussed further in Chapter Two; for now it is sufficient to say that they are all designed to have an impact upon the practice of higher education. They are related to, implicated in and emergent upon the historically contingent social structures and cultural practices of the higher education discursive field. Official texts contain particular kinds of descriptions of higher education and as such, it is possible that these descriptions are positioned in opposition to or in alliance with the idea of its commodification. In other words, these texts could operate to reproduce descriptions of the commodification of higher education or they could operate to resist such descriptions.

The research question that the thesis will attempt to answer is:

How do official texts that describe higher education, operate to reproduce and/or resist the idea of its commodification?

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of the wide variety of descriptions related to the commodification of higher education within the higher education discursive field to map the territory within which the thesis will operate. This will include references from philosophical and sociological theory, as well as descriptions from official texts. The first part of this chapter will aim to introduce the idea of the commodification of higher education in broad terms. This section will consider some of the ways in which higher education can be described as a commodity, a consumption good, a means to capitalise human assets or as an industry sector with a role to stimulate economic growth. The next section introduces some examples of the principled ideas of higher education that have been contrasted with or allied with its commodification. These are selected as example descriptions that attempt to criticise or support the legitimacy of commodification in relation to principles that determine the value, nature or purpose of higher education. In other words, such approaches describe commodification in opposition to, or in alliance with an ideal or principle of some kind. For example, descriptions of higher education legitimised through reference to its contribution to social justice or as an antidote to a pernicious ideology.

I argue that such descriptions position commodification as a flawed realisation of higher education in relation to principles that are constructed as 'truth'.[1] I also argue that this construction is itself a historical and cultural phenomenon that is implicated in processes of discursive formation in the higher education field. The remaining chapters of the thesis set out to firstly develop an alternative approach to the analysis of the commodification of higher education and secondly to produce analyses of official texts to address the research question. This chapter will conclude by providing an overview of the structure of the thesis.

THE IDEA OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This section will attempt to introduce some of the ways in which the idea of the commodification of higher education has been described within higher education related discourse. As indicated above, the examples given will be introduced as a means of providing illustrations of the idea of the commodification of higher education rather than as an attempt to *define* it.

The contemporary cultural, social and economic context of higher education, positioned as a commodity, is potentially complex. For some, the previously predominant modernist idea of education as emancipation, has become problematised and universities and colleges have been described as "factories for the production of degree holders" (Hutton: 1996, p216)

> Education, not so long ago regarded as a universal welfare right under a social democratic model, has been recast as a leading sub-sector of the economy and one of the main enterprises of the future 'post-industrial' economy (Peters, M: 1995, p394)

In this context, students may be less likely to be conceived of as individuals seeking personal enlightenment within a grand scheme intrinsically valued for its contribution to the progress of mankind. Rather, they are described as customers seeking value for money, in relation to their marketability within an increasingly competitive employment market. Similarly, in a situation where government plays a diminishing role in higher education funding, (see for example Trow 1996, Robertson: 1997, 1999, Neuman and Guthrie 2002) higher education institutions compete with each other to secure their continued existence as commercial enterprises.

Lyotard (1984) identifies aspects of late capitalism that position higher education as a means of optimising the performance of the global economy. In Lyotard's terms the 'grand narrative' justification of education as an intrinsic good leading to the eventual emancipation of mankind is illusionary and therefore oppressive. There can be no teleological justification of education and therefore the efficiency with which the present system functions becomes the only available value.

> The social system is going 'nowhere' even as it changes it is simply being driven to maximise efficiency…The task of education is to operate in the most efficient ways possible to provide individuals with the learning they require to optimise their contribution to the social system. (Lyotard: 1984)

Higher education's traditional grounding in the positivist notion of greater access to truth via scientific method have, according to this analysis, been replaced by notions of efficiency, utility and saleability. Lyotard's term for these processes is 'performativity', where the valued outcome of education (or other social discourses), becomes the successful performance of activities that have social utility as defined by late capitalism.

Two kinds of 'consumers' of higher education

Higher education can be construed as a service industry that sells a range of products to a range of potential consumers, within the context of a competitive market. From this perspective, the higher education 'goods' sold are allocated an exchange value, related to their cultural, social or economic currency. The rights of ownership and distribution of higher education products or goods, in the context of this description, would lie with individual higher education institutions or companies who market their wares in order to attract consumers. Here, consumers would select the higher education goods they wish to purchase, pay the price and 'consume' the products. There is potential to discuss further the notion of 'consuming' higher education that could be considered relevant to the issue of its commodification. However, for the purposes of this introduction let us presume that it is at least conceivable that higher education can be consumed.

Superficially, at least, the idea of higher education as a commodity can be related to at least two types of 'consumers'. Firstly, corporations who sponsor research within higher education institutions where ownership of part, or all, of the outcomes of the research undertaken (perhaps knowledge or products) is exchanged for the price of such sponsorship. The relationship between research in higher education institutions and industry is in one sense an obvious example of how higher education can produce saleable commodities, a kind of 'intellectual capital'. (Barnett: 1990). Within this formulation, private funds are exchanged for private (or corporate) ownership, and/or consumption, of higher education commodities. Robertson (1999) provides such as description.

> As resources from public sources has tightened, so universities have offered themselves as partners with corporations...And as companies begin to describe themselves in terms of knowledge creation...so universities respond by positioning themselves as part of the knowledge economy. (Robertson: 1999, p.18)

More recently, Willmott has argued that

In addition to, or perhaps instead of, producing 'knowledge', academies are increasingly identified and valued as producers of income earning 'commodities' in the form of publications, awards and patents. (Willmott: 2003, p14)

The second type of potential 'consumers' are students who pay to enrol on an identified higher education programmes or modules. If students buy or pay for higher education service commodities, what is it that they get in exchange for their money? Some students gain what could be broadly described as professional license. Doctors, lawyers, accountants and teachers, for example, are legally restricted from some professional practices until they (or someone else) have paid for the opportunity to gain professional qualifications. Similarly, other higher education qualifications may provide students with an employment advantage in a competitive employment market. Both of these examples demonstrate what students may get in exchange for their money. In material form, such qualifications are represented by certificates that seem to serve as evidence (or perhaps signifiers) of something immaterial. This might be the knowledge, understanding, skills and experience that a student has in some way demonstrated and is therefore presumed to 'possess'.

In this sense, it is possible to conceive of higher education qualifications as a primary commodity, bought by students to enable them to position 'themselves' as a more complex commodity, available for purchase (or hire) in a flexible employment market. Qualifications and higher education credentials could be compared with product packaging where the nature of the product (or perhaps graduate), is communicated to an intended target audience (or employer), providing a form of quality guarantee. It is also possible that employers are, in part, able to 'exchange' part of a salary package, for the right to 'use' the qualifications of its employees, to add market value to the services that are offered to potential customers. It could be argued, that such qualifications represent the 'human capital' of those who posses them. Perhaps, it could also be argued that the recognition of such 'capital' enables and facilitates the exchange of human or cultural capital for economic capital. This will be further discussed in chapter two but it is an area of current debate within the higher education sector. For example, a recent article entitled 'Fees 'do not buy' a guaranteed degree' stated that:

It needs to be stressed that the payment of tuition fees is not a matter of 'buying' a degree ('results guaranteed'), as if purchasing a holiday or some other consumer service. (THE: 10.1.08)

Higher education institutions (with degree awarding powers) have the legal power to 'admit' students to higher education qualifications, usually in recognition of some form of specified achievement, and as such, determine the terms of admission/recognition. This collective, institutionalised agreement concerning the authenticity and legality of qualifications is required to establish their market value. To take a different example, within *Manchester United PLC's Report and Accounts* 2002 "the acquisition of players' registrations are capitalised as intangible fixed assets". Here the human capital that is constituted in the individual players football skills is recorded, through institutionalised accounting regulations, as a financial value that is promoted as an indicator of the company's performance. This, arguably, has an affect on its share price and the overall value of Manchester United as a brand and a company. In both instances, the transference (or perhaps translation) of individual embodied skills, knowledge and abilities into a financial value, has required an agreed, collectively recognised, legal, institutionalised system: on the one hand, legally sanctioned higher education qualification awarding

powers and on the other, UK financial accounting standards. For example, the 'value' of academic staff in terms of their research status and output could quite reasonably be capitalised by higher education institutions in the same way as a recent article suggests:

> The RAE [Research Assessment Exercise] transfer market had led to the inflation of top salaries and worries that some Vice Chancellors might have overspent on recruitment with little guarantee of strong financial returns (THE: 10.1.08)

There seems to be a difference with simple commodities here, as in both cases the skills, knowledge and abilities that are associated with the financial value are embodied and bound up with specific individuals. Here the 'product', (football player or qualified person), has, to some extent, the opportunity to make conscious choices about what kind of product it wants to be. Football players can choose to try to develop football skills perhaps by paying for professional training. Students can choose to try to acquire a wide variety of educational qualifications, by paying for a higher education service. For students, this could be a means of both defining and communicating, 'who they are and/or what they are worth', through embodied and institutionalised human or, perhaps, cultural capital.

Scott (1997) has argued that:

> Increasingly graduate status will be the principal signifier of cultural capital...students by participating in Higher Education, will be able to construct their own reflexive biographies… If Higher Education...regarded as a consumption good...is associated with lifestyles rather than life chances, it becomes more difficult to argue that it should be treated differently from other consumption. (Scott: 1997, p46)

There is here, an implied assumption that if higher education is associated with 'life chances', it may be possible to argue that it should be treated differently from other kinds of consumption. This identifies a potential binary opposition. On the one hand, higher education is a 'lifestyle choice' consumption good, appropriately provided though similar mechanisms to other such goods or commodities, i.e. a market. On the other hand, it could be a life chance enhancing good, providing individual (and perhaps social) benefits. Here, life chance enhancing goods may be seen as being justifiably provided through other mechanisms than those associated with other consumer goods, i.e. non-market or in addition to a market. Such a justification for treating higher education differently could perhaps be related to notions of social justice, democratic and/or human rights. It may be possible to describe higher education as a commodity and to describe what kind of a commodity higher education might be. It may also be possible, to consider the type of entitlement to higher education that may or may not be justifiable or legitimate, if it is described as such. However, we could also analyse the significance of describing higher education as a commodity, in the context of the functioning of social and economic structures.

THE STATE AS 'CONSUMER' OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is still, to a significant extent, publicly funded by the state through centrally collected taxation. Does this mean that the State can also be described as 'consuming' higher education products? Firstly, were this the case, it must represent a more generalised form of

consumption, as funding arrangements support an extremely broad range of products, marketed by a very broad range of higher education institutions. Secondly we could ask, what is it that the State gets for its money on our behalf? Who consumes or owns the products the State buys? Perhaps it is possible to suggest that the State is buying a range of services that collectively contribute to the economic competitiveness of the nation, thereby securing economic growth and increased prosperity. Willmott argues that in fact

> Universities transact with the state as a monopoly purchaser of teaching and pure research in circumstances where opportunities to switch to an alternative source of funding are limited. (Willmott: 2003, p3)

The products that higher education institutions market are largely consumed by individuals, who are members of the State, within which, higher education is funded. Perhaps the State's 'consumption' of higher education, can be seen as facilitating individual consumption, which itself is thought to be of instrumental economic value to the State. However, this presumed instrumental value has itself been questioned. David Smith (1999) argues that:

> There is a clear link between being a graduate and having improved earning capacity, but there is no rigorously proven causal link between the numbers of graduates a country produces and its economic prosperity. (Smith: 1999, p172)

For this reason, Smith believes State funding for higher education will continue to decline and that the individual consumer of higher education will contribute an increasing amount towards the cost of their learning. For Meek (2003) the moral issue is not whether, or how much, public sector higher education should be privately or individually funded but rather that of governmental decision making about the distribution of funds.

> …when does decline in government funding responsibility reach the point where government no longer has the 'moral' authority over national higher education policy. (Meek: 2003, p18)

From a more cultural/economic perspective, Shumar (1997) relates the commodification (or as he calls it commoditization) of higher education to global economic post war contexts. He traces global economic developments from a Fordist/Keynesian, mass production, high wage interventionist economy to a flexible accumulation model. Within this model Shumar describes the process of the production of diverse tailored products that exploit global variations in employment and resource markets.

> Primarily, commoditization is a term to describe the way in which institutions and systems of thought change as the dynamic infrastructure of capitalisation moves to deal with its internal contradictions. (Shumar: 1997, p310)

Shumar analyses the process of commodification from several perspectives. He adopts an anthropological view of the changing status of academic staff within faculty considering how the casualisation of labour within global economy is reflected within faculty working patterns.

Perhaps the image to come is one of faculty as pieceworker in a international system of knowledge and technologies (Shumar: 1997,p186)

Shumar's analysis provides a critique of commodification of higher education as a threat to 'the life world of human interaction' where relations between people are increasingly governed by the mechanisms of consumption. From this perspective, the cultural context of higher education could be said, arguably, to have changed in relation to developments in late capitalism. It could be argued that higher education is increasingly viewed by governments as a mechanism for generating individual and national economic prosperity, rather than being valued as an 'intrinsic collective good' (Raz: 1986) or an individual right. For example, Slaughter and Leslie (1999) have argued that post-secondary education in Britain, Australia, Canada and the US has been increasingly

…directed towards national 'wealth creation' and away from its traditional concern with the liberal education of undergraduates (Slaughter and Leslie: 1999, p37)

Slaughter and Leslie go on to argue that increasingly higher education institutions are acting like private corporations as a consequence of what they call 'academic capitalism'. Many University Vice Chancellors have called for greater independence from government funding which would enable their institutions to charge tuition fees that they think the market would bear (for example, Guardian, Higher Education 21.5.02). In general Universities and other higher education providers may indeed own their assets in a similar way to a private company or business. Shumar has argued in *College for Sale* (1997) that

While the university does not produce a commodity in the traditional sense, the service it provides is taken as product and the institution uses capitalist institutional arrangements to produce it. This for me is the commoditization of higher education, the evolution of a vision of education as, not just a product to be bought and sold… but the entire institutional rearrangement of higher education into a productive industry. (Shumar: 1997, p31)

For Frow (1997), capitalism and particularly late capitalist economies seem to inexorably translate all forms of exchange into the commodity form.

Frow (1997) identifies three stages of commodification:
i)   Capital resources are applied to an area of production expanding production and destroying all related non-commodified activities.
ii) The existing cultural context or purpose is replaced by a profit related purpose.
iii) Common resources are transformed into private resources.

It could be possible to approach the analysis of the commodification of higher education by attempting to establish the extent to which the stages Frow identifies have occurred or are occurring in relation to higher education. For example, if we consider these stages in relation to higher education in the UK, the government has expanded higher education provision seeking a participation rate of 50% by the year 2010 (DfES: 2003). Increased capital resources have been applied to higher education but not solely or necessarily from government funds but from tuition fees and what has been called 'third steam funding' (otherwise known as business investment).

Naidoo has argued that government policies have led to the "erosion of the boundary between higher education and society" (Naidoo: 2005, p29) which has changed the basis upon which value is determined in higher education practice. She describes this as a shift from "being measured according to academic principles to being measured according to narrow financial criteria" (Naidoo: 2005, p29). Naidoo argues that such a shift is likely to result in the positioning of research as a commercial enterprise that compromises the independence of researchers and leads to a 'distortion of teaching'.

> Education is likely to be reconceptualised as a commercial transaction, the lecturer as the 'commodity producer' and the student as the consumer. (Naidoo: 2005, p29)

The introduction of variable tuition fees in the UK has led to discussion concerning the economic value of higher education qualifications in relation to enhanced future earnings compared with the amount of debt incurred. Similarly, governmental bodies have sought to establish the economic value of higher education. For example, the Greater London Authority (GLA) specifically commissioned a report entitled *World City, World Knowledge* to establish 'the economic contribution of London's higher education sector' (GLA: April 2004). This report suggests that higher education provides a good return for individuals, is a significant UK industry and employer, as well as providing a return to society as a whole.

> Higher education is generally seen as a form of investment. However, it can also be viewed, at least partially, as a consumption good…As with any good, people with higher incomes are more likely to consume more higher education than those with lower incomes…The social return from education is the extent to which society benefits from an increase in the overall level of education. (Greater London Authority: 2004, p29)

As an aside, it may however, be a presumption that all goods will be consumed to a greater extent by those with higher incomes. For example, low quality food products seem likely to be consumed more by those with low incomes at least partially as a consequence of the price. Higher education is presumed to be a high value consumption good. Here, the 'value' of higher education that is presented, is discussed solely in economic terms. The report goes on to discuss the future of higher education. It concludes, that if the significant economic contribution of higher education is to be maintained, and if participation of 18 to 30 years olds in higher education rose to 50%, in line with the Government target, then the sector will require more funds. However, it also states that

> The issue of whether and how the costs of higher education should be shared between the students benefiting from it and society as a whole is currently the subject of much political debate (GLA: April 2004, p63)

Similarly, the draft recommendations of the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (AHESG - The Schwartz Review) state that:

> Higher education (HE) is a valuable commodity: it can affect salary, job security and power to influence society. Despite the introduction of fees and the abolition of grants, the financial return of an HE qualification in terms of increased earnings is large and is holding

steady…Because of the expansion of HE, there is room for almost everyone who applies. But the sector is diverse and the   choice of course and institution matters…The graduates of the most selective universities and courses tend to do well in later life. They get good jobs, they are admitted to the best postgraduate programmes and they develop relationships which will support them throughout their careers.
(AHESG: 2003, sections A5 and A6)

This change in funding patterns provides a significant context for the discourse surrounding the political and economic legitimation of higher education. Higher education has here been positioned as the kind of 'good' that is economically valuable to individuals, in that it positively positions those who have it for success in a competitive employment market. It has also been positioned as a kind of public good that is of economic value to the nation, as well as providing other 'social' benefits. There is also an implied relationship between access to top higher education 'brands' or 'products' and the cultural and social capital that results from such access. The entitlement to access to higher education, raised in the Schwartz consultation (DfES: 2003), fairly explicitly acknowledges the existence of a higher education provider market that includes diversity of 'product' and consumer choice. The Schwartz justification for fair access to higher education seems largely predicated upon a conflation between consumer rights and an entitlement to equality of opportunity, which in turn, could be derived from notions of broader human or democratic rights and social justice.

There is a fairly obvious relationship between descriptions relating to the commodification of higher education, and the legitimation of higher education as contributing to national economic prosperity. Here, higher education is positioned as a major industry sector, a significant national employer and wealth creator. This includes its contribution to the 'knowledge economy' as a generator of intellectual capital resulting in wealth creating business 'spin offs'. Higher education is also positioned as contributing to the nations economic competitiveness through the creation of human capital and a highly educated and skilled workforce. For example, the Leitch Report *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills* (2006) states that

> We have made enormous progress expanding higher education – and this is critical to becoming a high-skill economy. Over one quarter of adults hold a degree, but this is less than many of our key comparators, who also invest more. (HM Treasury, 2006, p7)

Peters (2005) has argued that the ideology of 'useful knowledge' and the 'knowledge economy' are operating to re-describe 'traditional relationships' between research, reaching and scholarship as corporate management models and quality assurance procedures are employed to regulate higher education.

> …the reform process now underway is a shift in regulatory mode, an epistemic shift in Foucault's sense, whereby liberal norms and values, based on authority and expertise of the academic-professional is progressively giving way, slowly and imperceptibly, to a neo-liberal regulatory regime…What is being witnessed is the end of the liberal modernist university.
> (Peters: 2005, p47)

These examples provide illustrations of some of the multiple and/or competing ideas about the value and purpose of higher education. The principles that may underlie these ideas are also the subject of theoretical discourse within the field of higher education. The following section will attempt to introduce some 'principled' ideas about higher education, and to consider how they have been described in opposition, or in alliance, with the idea of its commodification.

Principled ideas about higher education and its commodification

There is a history of a variety of theorists, describing the value and purpose of higher education from a principled perspective, often in opposition to ideas of its instrumental value or economic productivity. Whilst other theorists have criticised the elitist nature of some legitimatory positions, they have also described the move towards the commodification of higher education, as a move away from some, more genuine or legitimate principle or purpose. Those who criticise the commodification of higher education, more or less explicitly, do so in opposition to an 'idea' of what higher education's value, nature or purpose 'is', or 'should be'. Those who do not, argue that commodification is either desirable, unavoidable or unobjectionable in relation to the achievement of an 'idea' of what higher education's value, nature or purpose 'is' or 'should be'. In other words, even when there are polarised or oppositional perspectives concerning the commodification of higher education, such perspectives can be related in that they are 'principled'. The range of principled perspectives described below cannot be exhaustive within the scope of the thesis. However, the range selected is designed to illustrate a variety of principled positions taken that are of relevance to the idea of the commodification of higher education.

In *The Idea of a University* Newman describes

> …a Liberal Education [as] something far higher…than what is commonly called a useful education…[where]…knowledge is capable of being its own end…[and]…the culture of the intellect is a good itself (Newman in Tristram: 1952, p 27-32)

Here, there is a clear binary opposition between higher education that is intrinsically valuable, 'a good in itself', and that, which is 'useful', instrumentally valuable or that, perhaps, has 'use value'. 'The University' (taken here as equivalent to higher education), is legitimated by a conception of the educated 'man' as a transcendental virtuous ideal. A university education here separates the educated from the uneducated and professional skills are positioned as very secondary to the value of an immersion in 'high culture'.

R. S. Peters argued that the concept of education is, in his terms, "part of the concept of the university" (Peters: 1970, p65). However, universities are sharply contrasted with technical or regional colleges. Here, applied subjects (such as accountancy) provided in colleges are described as ephemeral and in opposition to the 'fundamental principles' (such as the theory of numbers) provided by the university. Colleges and even some non-residential universities, are also criticised in that

> They approximate to supermarkets where knowledge is available for those who wish to pick it up. (Peters: 1970. p71)

Peters also argues that a university implies engagement with research involved with the advancement of knowledge rather than just teaching.

> A university…is a community of scholars and research workers who also regard it as their business to initiate others in the pursuit of truth (Peters: 1970, p72)

Perhaps the clearest distinction is between Peters' view of the value of a 'pursuit of truth' type university education, and that which might be received at, what he described as, technical or regional colleges. This is illustrated by his judgement concerning the relative merits of qualifications awarded by each type of institution.

> Whatever the realities of the matter may be, no one will accord the same status to a degree awarded by the CNAA to a student at a Regional College as is accorded to a proper university degree (Peters: 1970, p70)

Within this (and Newman's) conception, higher education within the university might have moralistic and elitist overtones that may seem problematic to those who position higher education as having a more democratic role.

In *Towards a Rational Society*, for example, Habermas makes a plea for a unification of the

> …immanent relation between the enterprise of knowledge at the university and the critical enterprise. (Habermas: 1987, p11)

For Habermas, this 'critical enterprise' is political in character; students should be engaged in discussion and decision-making where, either externally or internally university activity is related to politically significant issues or areas of discourse.

> Two tendencies are competing with each other. Either increasing productivity is the sole basis of a reform that smoothly integrates the depoliticized university into the system of social labour and at the same time inconspicuously cuts its ties to the political, public realm. Or the university asserts itself within the democratic system. (Habermas: 1987, p5)

This statement clearly describes a binary opposition, between the university as either a means to increase (presumably economic) productivity, or as a means to sustain the democratic system, this latter role, being achieved through critical engagement by students and academic staff, in political discourse. The university seems not be described here, as intrinsically valuable, rather, the 'value' of the university is derived from the value of the 'rational society' it sustains. Within this second formulation, higher education is positioned as a positive democratic political force that can be employed to counter depoliticising 'technocratic consciousness', where only technically exploitable knowledge is positioned as valuable.

One of the most prevalent principles employed to legitimatise ideas of higher education, within 'official' discourse, is that of social justice. One of the most influential is Rawls' (2001) conception of egalitarian liberalism and justice. For Rawls, the notion of individual rights is broadly premised on rational decisions that individuals *would* take concerning the liberties that they *would* choose to be available to them, in an imagined scenario. Within this scenario, the specific circumstances of those making the decisions are not known to them, until after 'the veil of ignorance' is lifted. Rawls employs this device to universalise the principles of egalitarian, liberalism and justice he describes.

These principles are elaborated by Brighouse (2002) to consider what constitutes social justice in relation to education provision. Brighouse argues for 'fair equality of opportunity' attempting to establish a meritocratic principle within his conception of educational justice. Brighouse considers the relative social justice of educational policy in the allocation of resources to support the education of individuals in relation to a variety of different systems of distribution with outcomes more or less justifiable from the perspective of his description of egalitarian liberal social justice.

In discussing *School Choice and Social Justice*, Brighouse (2000), describes the issue of the commodification of education as one of a number of 'red herrings' that do not undermine his proposals for educational choice. He argues that "some degree of commodification of education is both unavoidable and unobjectionable" (Brighouse: 2000, p48). Brighouse considers three possible objections to the commodification of education. Firstly, that education is the kind of good "which by its nature should not be a commodity" (Brighouse: 2000, p47), in other words, that valuing education in relation to market related values is morally wrong. Secondly, that distributing education through market or market like processes changes and damages education "resulting in a loss of an important source of value" (Brighouse: 2000, p48). Thirdly, that the market-like distribution of education "reduces the scope for public democratic deliberation" (Brighouse: 2000, p 48).

Brighouse concludes that there is nothing inherent in education, itself, that would morally prohibit its distribution through market like processes. This is perhaps unsurprising, as Brighouse is positioning social justice as the prime determinant of other values, although this value also seems to be dependent upon a privileging of the value of individual autonomy, as consistent with liberal egalitarianism. If therefore, in Brighouse's terms, the 'market like' distribution of education is socially just, facilitating autonomy and educational equality, it is legitimate. Brighouse also argues that it seems unavoidable and unobjectionable to train and pay teachers for the job they perform in providing education. Education is something that must be bought and paid for and is, as such, to this extent commodified.

Lastly, Brighouse argues that the 'market like' distribution of education does not necessarily reduce opportunities for democratic participation by stakeholders in relation to choices concerning the provision of education. In fact, Brighouse argues that some market mechanisms facilitate increased choice and the greater involvement of parents in decision-making. In addition, Brighouse also concludes that the value of democracy should not be the guiding principle when designing educational institutions. He argues that, the value of any system for the delivery of education is dependent upon the greater value of the individual rights of those being educated rather than the

value of democracy per se. Brighouse also argues that, 'the proper interests of the children' should be the guiding principle in the provision of education and schooling, in accordance with the values of personal autonomy and educational equality. Brighouse's specific argument is concerned with school age children and not adults engaging with higher education. However, it is an example of a rejection of objections to the commodification of education, which is reliant on the value of egalitarian liberalism and social justice

Tooley (1991, 1994, 2000, 2002, 2003) argues that market based delivery mechanisms are actually better placed to achieve outcomes that are appropriate to egalitarian liberal values than state regulated mechanisms. Tooley contrasts privately funded educational provision with state or publicly funded provision. Tooley criticises the legitimation of public funding derived from notions of education as a public good, or as that which is required to bring about desirable public good 'externalities', (such as social cohesion or less crime perhaps). Tooley argues that private funding arrangements are, at least equally, able to result in the promotion of such externalities. He provides a range of examples of privately funded systems that he argues effectively deliver educational opportunity (in relation to the principle of egalitarian liberalism) in a variety of contexts. In parallel, Tooley also argues that public funding is a co-requisite of state regulation of education, which he describes as antithetical to liberal values of institutional or practitioner autonomy. Tooley also describes such regulation, as inhibiting the enhancement and innovation of educational provision. Tooley's solution is, broadly, private funding of provision with only minimal regulation, driven by market forces. The 'brands' of successful educational providers would 'self regulate' in the market place, as education providers, perceived to be of poor quality by consumers, would not be able to sustain their market position.

Despite this being a formulation that some educational theorists might object to (see for example, Wringe: 1994, White: 1994, Grace: 1994, Jonathan: 1997, Robertson: 1999), there is a principled claim for the 'true' or 'real' nature, value or purpose of higher education in Tooley's description. Higher education is described as a good that all citizens have equal consumer rights to, and that the best way to provide appropriate access to this good, for Tooley, is through the operation of an appropriate market. It is of course also the case, that this description is reliant upon broader notions of consumer and other rights in general. Such a description (like some others) would seem to assert that higher education 'is' such a good. This implies that it is possible to discern, perhaps through rational discourse, the 'right way' to deliver higher education, derived from principles that determine its nature, value or purpose. This would be true of such descriptions even where the 'nature' of higher education is minimally and non-uniquely described.

THE PRINCIPLED CRITIQUE OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In contrast with Tooley's attempt to legitimise a move towards market principles, some theorists have engaged in zealous critique of commodification. For example, in considering the predictive power of Lyotard's (1984) work in relation to developments in New Zealand's higher education provision, Roberts (1998) concludes that Lyotard was 'stunningly accurate'.

> Several phases in the commodification of knowledge can be identified: the development of
> standardised units for trading qualifications (and parts of qualifications); the concentration on

skills and information in curriculum policy; and, most importantly the redefinition of the concept of 'education' itself. (Roberts: 1998, p8)

This would of course seem to imply that there is 'a concept' of education to be defined. Roberts argues that faith in meta-narrative legitimations of higher education such as democratic socialism has been undermined and replaced by 'market liberalism', as "universities…are now expected to measure up to the new imperatives of performativity" (Roberts: 1998, p9)

In 'Degrees R Us – The marketisation of the university' (2001) Bertelsen argues that the notion of 'transformation' in the provision of higher education is open to two types of interpretation, one related to 'democratic justice' and one related to 'the neo-liberal tenets of business'. In this context Bertelsen argues that higher education "…is recast as a service industry for capitalist enterprise" (Bertelsen: 2001, p3) and that:

> Obliged to sell their image and position themselves in a competitive market, universities adopt 'branding' strategies developed in business schools to sell the image of companies, with a jargon of 'mission' (divine calling) and 'excellence' (quality control and profit) indistinguishable from the mission statement of one's Wimpy or local bank. While such idiom retains a sense of grand endeavour (to make over and change), it surrenders the idea of change to the market, with its compelling creed of efficiency, profit and transformative power. In the university's new mission, *what* gets taught or researched matters less than that it is excellently taught or researched, that is, that it satisfies market demand. (Bertelsen: 2001, p3)

Bertelsen seeks to take this argument to what she sees as its logical conclusion by describing a higher education enterprise called 'Degrees R Us'. This enterprise operates by mirroring business practices and marketing its products as a "…genuine 'knowledge business'" (Bertelsen: 2001, p5) would do. However, this ironic proposal is only ironic because it is positioned in opposition to higher education's "Time-honoured principles of truth and intellectual rigour" (Bertelsen: 2001, p4). In addition, there does seem to be a rather romanticised notion of the academic community being described in opposition to 'the new corporate model', where

> University culture, while not without its problems, has tended to be intensely collegial and value-driven, with decisions made by self-governing academics. (Bertelsen: 2001, p4)

In 'The University of Life plc - The Industrialisation of Higher Education' Richard Winter (1999) argues that,

> ...the essence of a commodity...is not that it is a 'thing', but that its value is determined by its capacity for being marketed for profit, rather than by its usefulness in contributing to 'genuine' human need" (Winter: 1999, p199)

Here, although the word 'genuine' is in inverted commas, Winter is contrasting marketable exchange value with 'genuine' human need. Within this argument, human need, or perhaps use-value derived

from human needs, is privileged as being more 'genuine' than exchange-value. Winter goes on to argue that

> ...this thing-like quality disguises the fact that these properties are merely constructs necessitated by the social relationships embodied in the structure of the market, within which alone the commodity has value and meaning. The commodity form is thus a displacement of meaning (Winter: 1999, p191)

Winter seems to be describing an ideological function of commodity form when applied to higher education. Commodity form is seen as masking the 'real' value and meaning of higher education and further to this that,

> To acquiesce completely in the commodification of knowledge would thus be, at the very least, a cultural disaster (Winter: 1999, p.195)

Winter's text attempts to describe recent market related developments in higher education and to identify contradictions, within some of these developments. At the same time Winter does indicate that some valuable contributions to "liberating citizens from subjections to elitist cultural authority" (Winter: 1999, p194) have been made by the inclusion of market perspectives. However, it seems that Winter believes that markets themselves perform an ideological function.

> …market orientation (for educational processes as for anything else) involves not simply a rational functional relevance but a systematic distortion of meaning, an evasion of questions of value, need and ultimate purpose. (Winter: 1999, p194-5)

There do seem to be theoretical paradigms of a broadly Marxian perspective that are not made explicit. For example, the notion of 'genuine human need' is untheorised and the 'displacement of meaning' would seem to indicate the existence of 'real' meaning although the means by which 'real' meaning is established is not made clear. Winter's critique is however, premised on such principles. It is also perhaps arguable that the ascription 'value' to all types of 'things' is necessarily related to social constructs and that, as such, a market value for higher education is no more or less 'genuine', or more or less ideological.

BARNETT'S IDEAS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Ron Barnett has been influential in higher education discourse in proposing descriptions of higher education's nature, purpose and value. In his book *The Idea of Higher Education*, Barnett (1990) argues against the notion that higher education should be seen as a subset of the broader conceptual category of 'education'. He argues conversely, that the broader conceptual category is 'higher education', as it encompasses all that is implied by the term education, and over and above this, that which is implied by 'higher' education. Here higher education is

> …not 'further education'; it is not simply more of what has gone before. Rather, the term (higher education) is a reference to a level of individual development over and above that normally implied by the term 'education'. (Barnett: 1990 p.6)

Here, Barnett has attempted to identify 'higher' education as a separate conceptual category from 'further' education and to identify, through logical argument and conceptual analysis, the characteristics that define 'the' idea of higher education. This analysis has been criticised (Aviram: 1992, White: 1997) as being fundamentally flawed. Both Aviram and White identify problems with the general methodology of conceptual analysis as originally employed in educational philosophy by Peters (Peters: 1970) and latterly by Barnett. Conceptual analysis is intended by Barnett to establish, that which can reasonably be said to be implied, or connoted, by the word 'higher' when used in the context of the term higher education. As can be seen from the above quote, Barnett (here) constitutes this to be logically different from that which is implied or connoted by the word 'further'. However, as White (1997) points out, it is not clear why this should be thought of as a logical distinction rather than an arbitrary, culturally specific one based on largely administrative considerations. Conceptual analysis has, so Aviram (1992) and White (1997) argue, tended to conceal inherent ideological value judgements that pre-dispose the result of such analysis, which undermines any claims for objectivity of the outcomes. Aviram (1992) notes that Barnett (1990) refers to the qualities, ideas or concepts that 'any well informed person' would associate with higher education, without making clear, who such 'well informed persons' are, or what values they hold.

Barnett (1990) also distinguishes 'higher' education as being indicative of a particular kind of 'individual development'. Specifically, White (1997) points out that the word 'higher' in the term 'higher education' is associated, by Barnett, with 'higher order thinking'. However, White argues that there is no necessary or specific relationship between the uses of the word 'higher' in each context. One of the problems with the methodology of conceptual analysis is that the analysis itself is reliant upon establishing a relationship between the concept (as described by the use of certain words) and other concepts (also described by certain words) that is assumed not to be arbitrary, culturally or ideologically contingent.

As White (1997) argues it is possible to conceive of a person being engaged with higher-order thinking in the context of a secondary education or we could conceive of higher-order thinking as human beings' ability to use language or to think abstractly. None of these are the preserve of higher education, it depends how 'higher-order thinking' is conceptualised or what associations and connotations an author brings to it. Barnett defines the 'higher' element of higher education, by associating it with certain types of activity and ways of being, certain types of individual development, certain types of approaches and responses to knowledge. As such, Barnett is making a plea for a particular kind of higher education but there is nothing inherent in the use of the word 'higher' that necessitates support for one kind of higher education or another.

It should be noted that this represents Barnett's early work and that his concept of higher education and the university have significantly changed. Although, even his later work still explicitly seeks to 'recover the liberal university' (Barnett: 2003).

In *Realising the University*, Barnet (2000) acknowledges that the idea of the university has been comprehensively undermined as a consequence of the 'supercomplexity' of the world in which the university exits.

> …supercomplexity is shorthand for the state of affairs in which we find ourselves. It is … characterised, at its heart, by uncertainty, unpredictability, challengeability and contestability…[this] has led us to conclude that any determinate set of ideas – built around such concepts as knowledge, work, democracy, or emancipation – has to be entertained only with large provisos. (Barnett: 2000, p167-8)

However, despite this, Barnett does in fact see the university continuing to fulfil its enlightenment heritage. By embracing this supercomplexity in all the university's practices it is able to perform a civic function in better enabling the wider community to live with uncertainty.

> Supercomplexity requires of its universities…that they become sites for the continual production of revolutionary ideas, that graduates are able to live effectively amid radical uncertainty, and that the wider society is enabled to understand its condition and make ever more insightful evaluations of the large issues in front of it. (Barnett: 2000, p172)

In *Beyond All Reason*, Barnett (2003) argues that despite the lack of any 'meta-narrative' foundations for higher education, ideology remains. Barnett identifies two forms of ideology that he agues are present within the university - pernicious and virtuous ideologies. The pernicious ideologies that are discussed are entrepreneurialism, competition, state sponsored quality and the myth of the academic community. Barnet proposes the promotion of virtuous 'ide*a*logies' to counter these pernicious ideologies. This is to be achieved by appealing to the virtuous ideals and values that, he believes, exist "buried deep in the university's self understanding" (Barnett: 2003, p131), and can yet be uncovered. The liberal university, that Barnett is proposing, 'self-consciously' takes responsibility for promoting values of open, reflexive, reasonable, critical debate and reflection.

> …the university in the twenty first century turns out to be a particular kind of discursive space, a generous space that provides for the development of various kinds of human being and for their mutual engagement. In its becoming such a generous space, the university neutralises any ideology that has found houseroom within it. It also, at the same time takes forward, as positive ide*a*logies, the virtuous ideals implicit in the ideals of the university. (Barnett: 2003, p175)

Barnett seems (although not explicitly) to be suggesting here, that the university has a moral responsibility to create, sustain and continually evolve as a 'generous' discursive space to counter the pernicious ideologies he identifies. Ide*a*logies are distinguished from ideologies in that the former do not actually distort the virtuous ideals of the university. Barnett's strategy here is to firstly acknowledge the impossibility of the 'grand narrative' legitimation of higher education but then to point out the pernicious effects of existing ideologies. These effects are pernicious, in Barnett's terms, when compared with the virtuous ideals inherent within the university that Barnett identifies. Barnett then provides us with a stark choice, either universities contribute 'to the making of a better world', or succumb to a 'darker prospect'.

> Reasonableness, collective self-learning and humanity on the one hand or dogma, blind assurance and inhumanity on the other hand: which is it to be? (Barnett: 2003. p171)

Barnett seems to be proposing that the university's purpose can be re-described by drawing on a kind of Habermasian 'ideal speech community' which is legitimised by MacIntyrian 'practices' (MacIntyre: 1981), that are sustained by virtues inherent to the 'practice' of the university. Barnett clearly still sees an emancipatory role for the university, both for the individual as a space for personal development and as a positive force for world betterment. Despite Barnett's discussion of the problems of 'supercomplexity' and the traditional enlightenment project, we are left with a reified notion of the university and a grand narrative with a happy ending. In asserting this positive role for the university, Barnett is willing to take a leap of faith, as a counter to theorists Barnett describes as pessimists. If we do not sign up to the positive description of the university that Barnett describes we must presumably, according to Barnett, be signing up with the pessimists and the 'the darker prospect' of dogma and inhumanity. This is, for Barnett, the 'contested ground' for the future of the university.

Analysis beyond the 'truth' of the educational principle

If the starting point of educational theorising is about the 'true' or 'real' nature, value or purpose of higher education, with respect to polarised principled positions concerning the process of commodification, then such theorising may become preoccupied with non-market or market related legitimations of higher education. In other words, theoretical educational discourse, that positions the idea of the commodification of higher education as ideological, may be limited to theories that relate to the market/non-market binary opposition or dichotomy. This, arguably, excludes potential aspects of educational theoretical discourse that do not fit within this oppositional framework. In addition, such an approach assumes that a 'true' or 'real' nature, value or purpose for higher education can exist and that it can be accessed through 'rational' discourse. It could perhaps be argued that a principled legitimation of higher education must be oppositional in character, in that, to 'define' what something 'is', or what its value or purpose 'should be', is at the same time to 'define' what it is not or should not be.

However, Foucault has argued the notion of ideology may itself be problematic and limited in its usefulness for a number of reasons.

> The first is that, like it or not, it is always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing a line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientific truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.
> (Foucault in Rabinow: 1984, p60)

There are of course conceptions of the term 'ideology' that do not describe it as that which 'stands in virtual opposition' to that which is described as 'truth', for example see Gramsci (Forgacs (Ed), 1988). However, if we take, for example, Barnett's description of (pernicious) ideology, it is positioned in opposition to the 'true' values of the university that Barnett argues he is able to uncover. However, even his description of (virtuous) 'ideology', defined in opposition to ideology, does not seem to account for its own discursive construction within his text. Where authors construct an oppositional discourse that seeks to identify the 'truth' about higher education from a principled perspective, they present a de-historicised description of the 'object' or 'thing' they refer to.

Hunter (1994), has described how both 'conservative' and 'progressive' intellectuals, have criticised educational proposals, as not representing the 'true principles of education', within public policy relating to school education. Not only are such principles problematic for Hunter, but he also argues that such approaches serve to devalue the contingent cultural, and other circumstances, that have operated to position (and perhaps construct) 'the school'. It is argued here, that this may also be the case with higher education. The idea of the commodification of higher education has been employed by some writers (for example, Lawrence and Sharma: 2002, Bertelsen: 2001, Winter: 1999, Neimark: 1998) pejoratively to describe a move away from principled descriptions of higher education's purpose or value. Broadly, the application of market, or 'market like', mechanisms in the provision of higher education, are described in opposition to ideas of higher education as that which is intrinsically valuable in the search for truth, a social good and a democratic requirement or an individual entitlement within the context of social justice.

However, Hunter (1994) argues that such, seemingly, 'principled positions' within academic debate concerning school education actually have a common principle to which they are committed, "the famous image of the person as a self reflective and self realising moral agent" (Hunter: 1994, p2). Hunter believes that it is in relation to this ideal image that all descriptions of the school are positioned as the "flawed or partial realisation of the principles of education" (Hunter: 1994, p3). It is not difficult to see how the principled descriptions of higher education, by authors such as Barnett, can also require the description of higher education provision and practice as flawed in relation to a similar ideal principle. Hunter proposes that we

> …free ourselves from the spell of the educational principle. To achieve this exorcism it will be necessary to expel our belief in the metaphysical distinction between the ideal and the real, the abstract and the concrete, theory and history. More particularly, this will involve learning to treat adherence to educational principle itself as an historical phenomenon. (Hunter: 1994, p3)

This thesis will attempt to develop an alternative approach to the analysis of descriptions of the commodification of higher education beyond that of critique in relation to principled perspectives. The following chapters will seek to describe a method that can generate descriptions of how official texts operate to strategically position the idea of the commodification of higher education and then use this method to describe how official texts operate to deploy commodified descriptions to construct the 'truth' about higher education.

An overview of the remaining chapters of the thesis

CHAPTER TWO – SPECIALISING AND LOCALISING THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD
Chapter two sets out to establish the theoretical ground for the alternative methodological approach to the analysis of descriptions of the commodification of higher education. This includes the description of 'higher education' as a discursive field, drawing on the work of Foucault (1972) and Bourdieu (1988). Reference is also made to Simola et al's (1998) Foucaultian 'catalogue of possibilities' that describe technologies of 'truth'. This is as a useful means of describing the theoretical terrain of the higher education discursive field. However, this methodology alone is also described as being too self-referential to generate constructive analytical descriptions motivated by

empirical sites (in this case object texts). It is, however, described as a coherent means of selecting the official texts as empirical objects for analysis. The analysis proceeds to consider the technologies that empower and constrain social and cultural (re)production in relation to Bourdieu's (1998) conception of the social discursive field and the exchange of different forms of cultural capital.

The higher education discursive field is then localised as a site for empirical enquiry by selecting three kinds of official text in relation to the technologies of 'truth' described by Simola et al (1998). The QAA Handbook for Academic Review (2004) is selected as an example of the 'technologies of subjectivity' describing the processes of determining who is an 'approved' higher education provider. The Future of Higher Education' White Paper (DfES: 2003) is selected as an example of the 'technologies of government' that describes 'why' the Government is right to implement change in higher education provision. *The Schwartz Report* (AHESG: September 2004) is selected as an example of the 'technologies of discourse' and the construction of 'knowledge' about fair admissions to higher education..

Following this, Dowling's method of 'constructive description' (2004, 2007, in press) is introduced with reference to a range of textual examples are provided to illustrate how discursive formation can operate to regulate practice. Lastly, the thesis is itself identified as an object text implicated in the construction of the organisational language employed to generate recontextualised descriptions of higher education.

CHAPTER THREE –
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SPECIALISED ORGANISATIONAL LANGUAGE
This chapter further 'specialises' the theoretical field by constructing an 'organisational language' designed to generate analytical descriptions of the dynamic relations between identified strategies operating within selected object texts. Dowling's (2004a, 2007, in press) 'modes of authority action' are employed to introduce this method in the analysis of the QAA Handbook for Academic Review.

I then introduce my specialised theory and describe two modes of action. Firstly, I describe *modes of capital exchange* drawn from Bourdieu's (1998) opposition between 'explicit economic capital exchange' and 'euphemistic symbolic capital exchange'. Secondly, I describe *modes of discursive objectification* drawn from Kopytoff's (1986), opposition between unique, singular and non-comparable things and non-unique, homogeneous, comparable commodities. This mode of action describes 'aesthetic', 'iconic/ symbolic', 'institutional' and 'commodified' modes. This specialised theoretical device provides a means of generating descriptions of the ways in which official texts are operating to (re)produce and/or resist of the idea of the commodification of higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR –
READING THE REGULATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE
This chapter focuses on the analysis of the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review* (2004). The chapter locates the Handbook within the higher education field and identifies other related texts, which are described within the Handbook as the 'Academic Infrastructure'. The analysis considers the specific authorial and audience voices that are constructed within the Handbook, such as 'the QAA', as the prime authorial voice and higher education provider institutions, as the audience. In doing so it is argued that the Handbook constructs an esoteric domain of higher education practice

and that it operates as a pedagogic text apprenticing reviewers and academic staff into the practice of Academic Review.

A *modes of review* discursive space is constructed from identified oppositions and alliances within the text. This space is specifically constructed from the binary variables of 'insider' or 'outsider' relations (as textual subjectivities) and non-hierarchical/hierarchical authority relations. Modes include 'facilitation/therapy', 'inspection', 'peer review' and 'peer exchange'. The analysis considers the strategic distribution of these modes within the Handbook text. Lastly, the oppositions described in relation to *modes of review* are recontextualised in the analysis of *modes of discursive objectification.*

Chapter five – Reading the Future of Higher Education

This chapter is an analysis of *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper (DfES: 2003). The analysis proceeds by locating the text within the higher education discursive field in relation to a range of antecedent policy texts including; *The Dearing Report* (NCIHE, 1997); *The Learning Age* (DFEE, 1997); and *Higher Education and the 21st Century* (DfEE1998). *The Future of Higher Education* text is identified as a key document in the UK higher education policy context.

Having described the construction of the authorial and audience voices within the White Paper, the analysis considers the specific ways in which the text has recontextualised higher education as governmental practice. As a product of this analysis oppositions and alliances are identified within the text, which are employed to construct a specialised and localised mode of action – modes of higher education participation. The White Paper describes closed categories of potential participants such as 'the talented and the best' and in doing so constructs an opposition with an open category of participants. At the same time the White paper also describes the introduction of governmental means of regulating access to higher education such as the creation of an 'Access Regulator'. Such descriptions construct an opposition between access that is not formally regulated and that which is. By relating these two sets of binary variables I construct a discursive space with which to generate descriptions of how the text is operating in any of four *modes of higher education participation*. The *modes of higher education participation* described include; 'Bespoke', 'Selected', 'Mass' and 'Universal' modes.

The oppositions and alliances that are described in the analysis are then recontextualised in relation to *modes of discursive objectification* to generate a description of the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode. This analysis specifically considers the dynamic relationships between the ways in which the texts operates across all modes and consider the extent to which this constitutes strategic discursive action.

Chapter six – Reading fair admissions to higher education

This chapter is an analysis of the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group's *Fair admissions to higher education: Recommendations for good practice*, known as *The Schwartz Report* (DfES: September 2004). The analysis proceeds by locating the text within the higher education discursive field. An overview of the textual authorial and audience voices describes the processes by which this independent review was commissioned by the Government. This includes the appointment of the members of the Steering Group and the specific terms of references within which the Steering Group

are required to operate. The analysis also considers how the text operates to recontextualise higher education as fair admissions practice. For example, by describing higher education in relation to the issues and problems in admissions practice and the 'high-level principles' that are positioned as the solutions to the problems identified.

One of the key tasks of the Steering Group is described as providing recommendations for best practice in assessing the merit of applicants to higher education. By identifying oppositions and alliance within the text I construct a localised and specialised mode of action – *modes of assessing merit and potential*. The text describes the validity and the reliability of methods of assessing merit and potential as a high-level principle of fair admissions. By relating the binary variables of valid/non-valid methods, and reliable/non-reliable methods I generate descriptions of how the text is operating in relation to *modes of assessing merit and potential*. The oppositions and alliances that have been described in the analysis are then recontextualised in relation to *modes of discursive objectification* to generate a description of the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode reflecting the method of analysis employed in chapters four and five.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter provides a description of the achievements and outcomes of the research undertaken, an identification of the scope of the findings and the implications for practice including some examples of potential future work. This chapter also provides some examples of how the outcomes of the research are of direct relevance to contemporary higher education discourse and national debates. The development of a method of analysis that avoids reliance on one or other educational principle is identified as an achievement in providing a non-reproductive approach to textual analysis. In particular, the development of a method of analysis that can generate descriptions of the ways in which texts operate in a commodified mode (in relation to other modes) is described as an original contribution to knowledge.

Other achievements include the description of the ways in which official texts construct 'higher education' in a variety of modes that are often in dynamic relationships with each other. The description of these constructed relationships can inform practice by demonstrating of how they are operating strategically to promote the regulation of various aspects of practice. The research also identifies that even where official texts explicitly describe higher education as a commodity or in terms of its economic value, this does not mean that such texts are primarily operating to reproduce the idea of its commodification.

Chapter two – Specialising and localising the higher education field

Introduction

The last chapter began by asking which, if any, of two very different descriptions of higher education could be described as 'true'. Each description exemplified different perspectives concerning the value, role or purpose of higher education. One description represented a principled view of the democratic purposes of higher education, which was juxtapositioned for the purposes of dramatic effect, in relation to a description of higher education as something similar to a supermarket product (or commodity). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, I will not, within this work, be seeking to establish what might be a 'true' and/or untrue, description of higher education, from any 'principled' perspective, or indeed at all.

Rather, I will attempt to describe higher education as a historical phenomenon in the context of social structures, cultural practices and discursive action. This will include the description of higher education as a 'discursive field' drawing on the work of Foucault and Bourdieu. As such, I will consider *how* the idea that descriptions of higher education are 'true', is produced. What is included, and what is excluded, in the production of such 'truths', how are techniques employed to (re)produce and legitimise such 'truths'? In other words, what are the technologies that afford and constrain social and cultural (re)production within the higher education discursive field? In particular, Bourdieu's conception of the exchange forms of cultural capital will be considered with reference to the idea of higher education as a (re)productive social mechanism.

This chapter will also describe the rationale the selection of specific 'official' higher education texts, as the localised instances of the higher education empirical field, for analysis. Lastly, I will discuss Dowling's approach to 'constructive description', as a means of generating analytical descriptions of texts in preparation for the description of my specialised theory and method in chapter three.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION DISCURSIVE FIELD AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'TRUTH'

Foucault's conception of 'discourses' (Foucault: 1972) can be employed to analyse the idea of higher education commodification. For Foucault discourses are not a way to uncover the hidden meaning of a concept or text by unravelling layers of signification. Foucault's approach is

> …to distinguish among events to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another…a recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics. (Foucault in Rabinow: 1984, p56)

Discourses, for Foucault, are not in themselves true or false, the question is rather how are 'truths' produced and sanctioned. For example, in higher education discourse, what types of statements are accepted and not accepted as 'true'? What are the ways in which 'true' and 'false' statements are identified and who is empowered with the status, or role, to determine what is and what is not 'true'? As indicated in the previous chapter, Hunter (1994) adopted a Foucaultian approach to his analysis of the school. Rather than trying to access 'the truth' about the nature, value or purpose of the school, Hunter considered how the contingent economic, social and historical factors, related to the school, as a practice, have operated. Simola, Heikkinen and Silvonen (1998), have also attempted to

adopt a Foucaultian approach to educational research by developing an analytical tool based on the idea of discourses.

> Discourses, in the Foucaultian sense of the word, are first and foremost techniques, practices, and rules, which can be divided into three sets: those concerning the speaking subject, those connected with power relations, and those internal to discourse itself. (Simola, Heikkinen and Silvonen: 1998, p65)

Simola et al's approach includes the construction of a research tool to analyse discourses that, they argue, can be used to generate 'a catalogue of possibilities' rather than any specific totalising theory of 'truth'.

> It is not a method for concrete empirical research, but a way to ask questions about conditions of empirical inquiry, going beyond dichotomies of essentialism and nominalism or deduction and induction. (Simola, et al: 1998, p84)
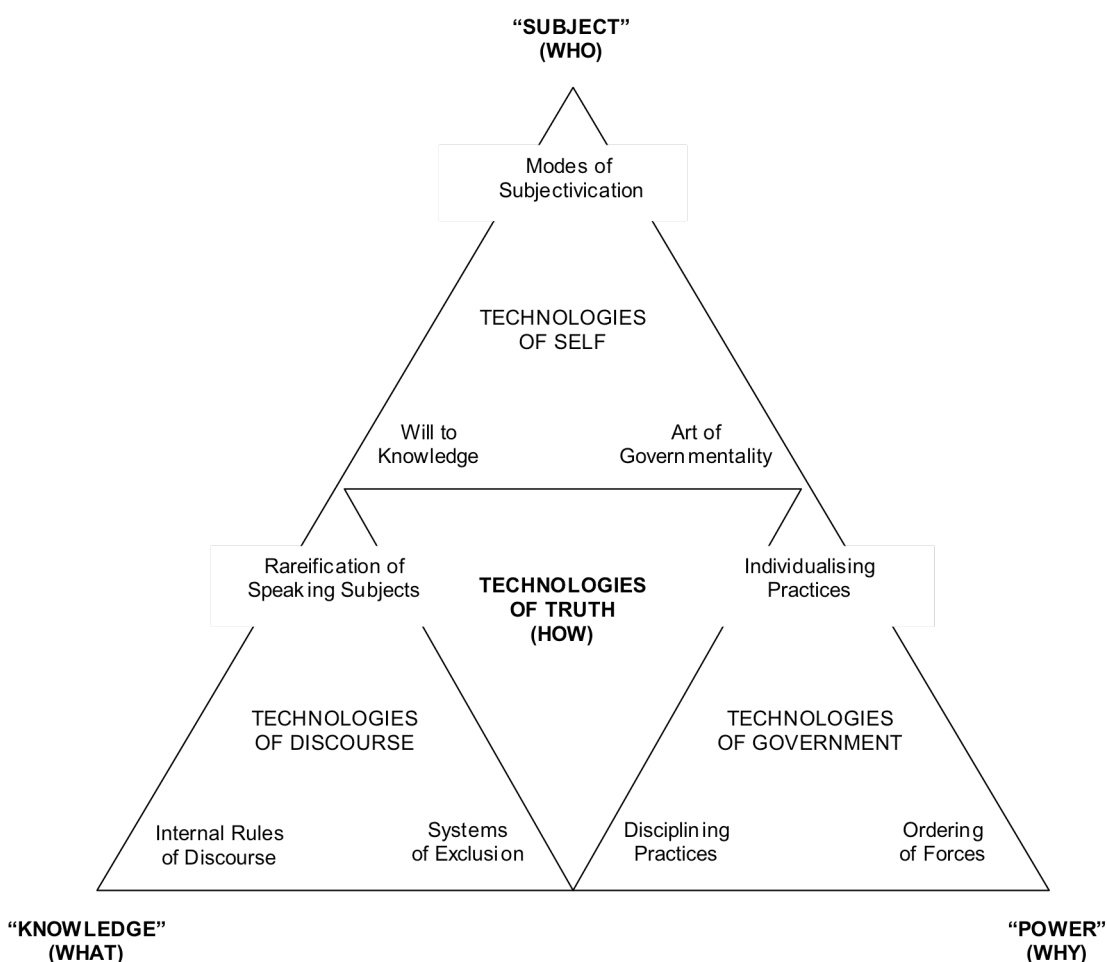
FIGURE 1: TECHNOLOGIES OF TRUTH (SIMOLA, HEIKKINEN AND SILVONEN: 1998, P70)

Simola et al construct an equilateral triangular model (Figure 1) at the centre of which is the question 'how are the technologies of truth operating within an identified discourse?' The bottom left corner of the triangle is concerned with questions about knowledge or the 'techniques of discourse'. This

includes questions such as; what are the rules internal to a discourse that allow the reproduction of knowledge? Who has access to the means with which to speak such knowledge; what cannot be said and by what means are some statements excluded?

The top of the triangle is concerned with questions about subjectivity or 'the techniques of self'. This includes questions such as; through what means do human beings recognise themselves as subjects in relation to moral agency? How are subjects created in the enactment of governmentality, in other words "..the capacity simultaneously to govern and be governed" (Simola, et al: 1998, p67)? Through what ways is the willingness to subjectify oneself in relation to knowledge regimes through self-examination and categorisation facilitated?

The bottom right of the triangle is concerned with questions about power or 'the techniques of government'. This includes questions such as; how is power strategically and tactically employed. What are the disciplining practices employed? Who are included and who are excluded by individualising (dividing) practices?

Simola et al describe of *the technologies of truth* model using the three 'axes' of *knowledge*, *subjectivity* and *power*. The model is fractal in construction in that each axis (*knowledge, subjectivity and power*) is repeated when considering each specific technology. For example, *technologies of discourse* include 'the internal rules of discourse' (*knowledge*), 'the rareification of speaking subjects' (*subjectivity*) and 'systems of exclusion' (*power*). Simola et al relate this model to 'the truths of the modern Finnish teacher' but following this example, it could be possible to construct a similar 'catalogue of possibilities', in relation to the 'truths' of higher education in the UK. This could provide a theoretical map of the higher education discursive field, by cataloguing the possible 'differentiated networks', 'lines along which they are connected', 'relations of force, strategic developments and tactics' (Foucault in Rabinow: 1984).

In relation to the *knowledge* axis, we might consider, 'what is the true knowledge about higher education'? If we consider this question in relation to knowledge, subjectivity and power, we might ask, 'what is spoken (or written) about higher education', 'who is authorised to speak (or write) about higher education and how', and 'what, is not to be spoken (or written) about higher education and how'? In relation to the *subjectivity* axis, we might consider the question, 'who is the 'good' higher education subject'? Again, if we consider this question in relation to knowledge, subjectivity and power we might ask, 'what must a 'good' higher education subject know and want to know'. 'What must a higher education subject do to be 'good', and 'how must a 'good' higher education subject be able to govern and be governed'? Lastly, in relation to the *power* axis, we might ask, 'what kind of power is legitimate in relation to higher education'? If we consider this question in relation to knowledge, subjectivity and power we might ask, 'how is the higher education subject to be examined', 'how is the higher education subject to be individualised', and 'how is the higher education subject bound up in relations of forces'? It should be noted here that the term 'higher education subject' is deliberately employed here to avoid individualising differentiations such as 'practitioner' or 'student' that are themselves bound up in power/knowledge relations.

This approach is productive, to a degree, in providing a theoretical map with which to think about the kinds of 'technologies' (or perhaps strategies) that might be operating in any given discursive

instance (or object text). As indicated above, texts construct subjectivities (authors and audiences) that are bound up in power/knowledge relations. Similarly, oppositions and alliances (for example, the bureaucratic differentiation between 'university' and 'further education college') within texts can be described as operating as strategic technologies, that determine 'who' can speak, and how. By considering these possibilities, we might be able 'to ask questions about the conditions of empirical inquiry' (Simola et al: 1998) to identify the kinds of texts (as empirical objects), that are relevant for this analysis. Identified texts could include descriptions that reflect some of the possible discursive, subjective and governmental 'technologies', that may be operating to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education.

This provides a means with which to construct coherence between the theoretical and the empirical fields, relevant to this work by providing a rationale for selecting texts for analysis related to the categories of subjectivity, knowledge and power. The relationship and dynamic, between these categories seems likely to be differentially represented in individual cases. It will of course be the case that any text may be related to all three of these categories, but different types of text, may be more or less, indicative of one category than others. For example, an Act of Parliament (text) could be reasonably assumed to relate particularly (yet not exclusively) to the category of power and the technologies of government.

The oppositions and alliances contained within this model are self-referring and as a consequence coherent. Knowledge, power and subjectivity are all described in relation to each other. This self-referential (coherent) approach data. is useful for this thesis in providing a 'catalogue' or 'map' of possible kinds of oppositions and alliances, technologies and strategies within the higher education discursive field. However, whilst the model has the benefit of theoretical coherence, it does not itself facilitate sufficient purchase on the empirical to produce descriptions that can generate new theory for the purposes of this thesis.

As a consequence, the analysis of texts as empirical objects in this thesis will require analytical mechanisms that relate to, or that are constructed from, oppositions and alliances identified within the empirical sites (object texts) being investigated. In addition, the analysis of texts will also need to be able to generate descriptions that shed light on the specific research question that is the focus of this thesis. In other words, the analysis will need to generate descriptions that are directly relevant to the (re)production and/or resistance of the idea of the commodification of higher education. The following sections will attempt to specifically draw on the work of Bourdieu and Dowling to begin the process of specialising the theoretical territory relevant to this task.

Higher Education as a discursive social field

In the context of the conceptual framework being constructed within this text, higher education will be described as a discursive social 'field' (Bourdieu: 1998). This field, following Bourdieu, is conceived of as including 'agents' (individually identified entities including individual institutions, organisations etc), practices and texts. It should be noted that for the purposes of this work, 'agents' are conceived of as 'textual subjectivities', that are identifiable as a consequence of individualising strategies deployed within texts. This work will not (as Bourdieu does) be drawing on any empirical data that directly corresponds to the identification of 'agents' beyond that which emerges from the analysis of

texts. I will argue that 'subjectivities', such as authors and audiences, emerge from the structuring or patterning of oppositions and alliances identified within texts.

Higher education is conceived of here as a theoretically specialised and empirically localised field within a broader social space that includes a wide (perhaps potentially infinite) range of other fields. The nature of those relationships and the extent of the higher education field itself are conceived of as historical and to this degree, contingent.

It is the relatedness of subjects, practices and texts within this field that establishes higher education as an identifiable, if contingent, discursive social field. This approach differs from attempts to define specific disciplines in relation to their 'logically' distinct practices (such as specific criteria for establishing forms of knowledge, for example Hirst and Peters: 1970). I do not, as such, argue that higher education can be defined in relation to identified practices in any analytic sense. There is also no attempt to describe a conceptually distinct category of 'higher' education differentiated from for example, 'further' education, (see Barnett 1990 for an example of this kind of description)

Rather, the notion of a higher education field is conceived of as one in which the relational differentiation between subjects, practices and texts constitute positions that emerge out of oppositions and alliances. In this sense the higher education field largely corresponds with that described by Bourdieu.

> That is what I mean when I describe the global social space as a field. That is, both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure. (Bourdieu: 1998, p.32)

However, as indicated above, I will not seek to objectively establish the position of identified 'agents' within this conception of the higher education field. Rather, it will be primarily concerned with describing the discursive strategies employed within specified object texts and the ways in which such strategies operate to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education. The specified texts will be 'read' as instances of and the product of, socio-cultural action that operates to deploy particular descriptions of higher education (as textual objects), in relation to other potential descriptions for strategic advantage in the field.

The focus on strategic moves, rather than 'identifiable' positions within the higher education field, aligns the approach taken here with that of Foucault (1972) in relation to discursive formation. For Foucault, discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault: 1972, p49). In other words, practices are 'systematic', in that they operate in relation to a 'system', a set of more or less strongly institutionalised social structures. For example, the higher education practice of awarding degree qualifications is strongly institutionalised. Institutions wishing to validate degrees, must submit to 'examination', in relation to highly bureaucratic procedures, sanctioned by the Privy Council, to gain the power to do so. Such structures provide the framework for the construction of discursive objects, in this case recognition as a higher education institution with degree awarding powers. However, these structures are themselves dynamically formed (and

reformed) and are, as a consequence, historically contingent. The status of degree awarding powers has a history. Different institutions and organisations have employed a variety of discursive strategies to gain the status of degree awarding powers. This history ranges from the role of the ancient universities, and includes the development of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) in the 1960's, as well as the recognition of polytechnics as new universities in 1992. For example, Aldrich's (2002) *The Institute of Education 1902-2002: a centenary history* charts the history of the change in status of the institution from a Day Training College awarding teachers certificates to a University Institute awarding higher degrees. More recently, the proposals to allow some further education colleges to apply for degree awarding powers can be read as an example of the systematic, yet dynamic, formation of higher education practices. For example, The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) has described what can be read as a strategic discursive contribution of one university lobby group, in relation to this proposal.

> Universities UK said it still had concerns that extending foundation degree-awarding powers to colleges could have "serious unintended consequences" for collaborative partnerships between further and higher education. (THES: 9.3.07)

This text seems to position Universities UK as an 'authority', in relation to the identification of such "serious unintended consequences". This could be read as an attempt to assert this authority as a strategy to mitigate the potential loss of the unique powers universities hold to award degrees. Higher education is constructed within this example text as that, in relation to which, universities (or in this case a universities representative body) are uniquely authorised to speak.

It is in relation to this kind of approach, that this text will attempt to reconstitute higher education as a discursive field: not by identifying what higher education 'is', or 'is not', nor by describing what 'is' or 'is not' 'true' about higher education. Rather, this work will seek to describe the discursive strategies and tactics at play within the higher education discursive field, through the analysis of texts. The analysis of this field, as exemplified by selected texts, will identify oppositions and alliances and construct descriptions of the modes of strategic action, that higher education related texts evidence. In this way, the description of identified modes of strategic action can indicate the extent to which texts are operating to (re)produce or resist particular ideas about higher education, in this case the idea of its commodification.

The following section will consider some of the ways in which Bourdieu's conceptions of 'habitus' and 'capital' can be employed to further specialise the theoretical field and construct a means to generate descriptions of modes of strategic action.

HABITUS AND FORMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CAPITAL

The construction of the higher education subject is of direct relevance to this work, in that this text will itself construct an author and categories of audience. It is important to note that both authors and audiences are constituted by the reader of a text. My reading of the specific texts that I analyse establishes textual authors and audiences. In the same way, whilst the author of this thesis is my 'avatar' in the text, this author will also be constituted by the reader. As a thesis produced to gain recognition within the philosophical and sociological terrain of the higher education field, the audience will include practitioners who are similarly located. This text, in 'constructing' its audience is

in one sense reproducing existing institutionalised structures by conforming to the norms of thesis production when addressing an audience of academic assessors. However, as a 'thesis' (required to represent the authors original work) it is producing a specialised version of this audience. There is also an inherent presumption that there is a relationship between the constructed (textual) audiences produced, within this text, and the individuals (academic peers), within the higher education field, who read it.

Higher education has been described above in relation to historically contingent social structures and cultural practices, which operate within the higher education discursive field. Higher education managers, researchers, PhD supervisors, faculty and students, for example, are types of subjects who can be described as engaging with higher education practice, albeit in a variety of different ways. To be able to engage with higher education practice, arguably, requires an understanding of the current and accepted norms of such a practice to be taken seriously, to be accorded a voice, or perhaps, to be afforded the opportunity to so engage. As a higher education practitioner, the processes of induction into and gradual internalisation and habituation of norms of practice, arguably, constitute an identification of 'self' related to, and subject to, such norms. Even where a practitioner sought to act to resist such norms, the context of such resistance may be determined by that which is being resisted. As Blacker has put it

> One's idea of what one is struggling against has a direct impact on what one becomes as one struggles. (Blacker: 1998, p357)

Bourdieu's conception of 'habitus' is an attempt to reconcile the relation between social structures, cultural practices and the dispositions of individuals. Habitus is described as

> …that system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice; more specifically it becomes necessary to study the laws that determine the tendency of structures to reproduce themselves by producing agents endowed with the system of pre-dispositions which is capable of engendering practices adapted to the structures and thereby contributing to the reproduction of structures. (Bourdieu: 1973, p72)

This work is concerned with the ways in which the idea of higher education commodification is located within social structures and how such structures (re)produce themselves in higher education practices. For Bourdieu, education and particularly higher education, is seen as a significant contributor to the reproduction of power structures and cultural capital distribution, whilst "…concealing…the fact that it fills this function" (Bourdieu: 1973, p72). For Bourdieu, this is significant, in relation the processes that 'translate' economic capital into cultural or 'academic' capital, which itself is then translated into economic capital and so on, reproducing social structures and cultural practices.

In 'The Forms of Capital' (1986), Bourdieu argues that capital is 'accumulated labour' that can exist in incorporated/embodied or materialised/objectified forms. Bourdieu proposes, that his concept of capital is necessary, to "account for the structure and functioning of the social world" (Bourdieu: 1986, p46). Here, capital is positioned as both, a social energy, or force, that is inscribed in social structures, and that which structures cultural practices, limiting and constraining social possibilities,

by reproducing itself. Bourdieu argues, that forms of capital cannot all be reduced to economic capital and he criticises economic theory, for narrowly defining all human exchange, as 'mercantile exchange'. Economic theory, Bourdieu argues, positions forms of human exchange, other than economic exchange, as 'disinterested'. In fact, Bourdieu argues, economic theory is dependent upon the description of a variety of cultural practices, as 'disinterested', to enable the definition of other practices as having the purpose of 'maximising monetary profit'. In other words, the description of the category of practices that constitutes 'interested exchange', as defined by economic theory, requires the definition of other cultural practices as 'disinterested'. As such, economic theory is criticised, in that, it "takes for granted the very foundations of the order it claims to analyse" (Bourdieu: 1986, p47). In contrast to this, it is argued that 'mercantile exchange', is only one form of 'interested exchange'. As such, Bourdieu proposes that there are at least two other forms of capital, 'cultural capital' and 'social capital'. In addition, Bourdieu (1986, 1998) also agues that any form of capital can be represented as 'symbolic capital' and that such representation "…presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity" (1986, p56). In other words the symbolic representation of capital requires, according to Bourdieu, a system of internalised dispositions that reflect and reproduce socially constituted structures.

> More precisely, symbolic capital is the form taken by any species of capital whenever it is perceived through categories of perception that are the product of the embodiment of divisions or of oppositions inscribed in the structure of the distribution of this species of capital (strong/weak, large/small, rich/poor, cultured/uncultured). (Bourdieu: 1986, p47)

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital can be seen to have specific relevance to the idea of the commodification of higher education. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, can exist in three forms, the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalised state. The embodied state is, here, a form of capital that results from work 'on one's self', individuals acquire cultural capital through self-improvement, which incurs costs such as time, effort and perhaps money. Here, cultural capital becomes an integral part of the dispositions and perhaps knowledge (what Foucault might call 'savoir', the "…subject…modified by…the labour performed in order to know…the reciprocal genesis of subject and object", (Foucault: 1991, p69-70) of the person who acquires it, part of their being, their way of living or 'habitus'. In this sense, embodied cultural capital

> …cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange. (Bourdieu: 1986, p48)

For Bourdieu, this form of capital is bound up with an individual in 'biological singularity', in that, its acquisition is determined, to some extent, by the capacity of an individual to acquire it and is specifically bound, to the biological existence of the person who posses it. It is however, for Bourdieu, exactly this that obscures the relationship between this form of cultural capital and the economic and social conditions of its acquisition.

For example, if we consider an excerpt from *The Schwartz Report* (2004), there do seem to be concerns, identified within the text, that it is at least possible, that the recognition of an individual's 'potential to benefit from higher education', may not in all cases be being 'fairly' recognised.

A fair and transparent admissions system is essential for all applicants. As we enter an era in which students may face substantial tuition fees, applicants must become informed consumers. They need to know how to compare institutions and courses and how to interpret a prospectus. All applicants, including those from backgrounds currently under-represented in HE, also need to know how to present their attainments to admissions staff so that their achievements are fairly assessed...Given the fierce competition for the benefits of HE, it is vital that all stakeholders in the applications and admissions process – including schools, colleges, admissions staff, employers and, of course, applicants and their families – believe that the system is unbiased. The system must not only be fair, but must also be seen to be fair. Everyone must feel confident that all applicants with the ability to succeed have a fair chance of gaining admission to higher education.

(AHESG: 2004, p15)

It is interesting that the drive towards 'fair admissions' in higher education is associated, within the text excerpt, with the fact that individuals are being asked to pay tuition fees, which means that, 'applicants must become informed consumers'. What seems to be excluded is the possibility, for applicants, not to be 'consumers'. If all applicants are 'informed consumers' who choose to engage with a 'fair and transparent admissions system' then we can presumably all 'be confident' that the cultural advantages of an economically advantageous background will be appropriately mitigated. What is implied, through its absence, is that an unfair system, would be one in which applicants are not able to act as informed consumers. It could of course be possible that applicants might not be thought of as 'consumers' at all. It is certainly not the way that some of the principled critics of the idea of the commodification of higher education (for example Bertelsen: 2001), discussed in the previous chapter, would wish to describe the nature of higher education practice.

Interesting also, is the association of the need for a 'transparent' system to enable applicants 'to compare institutions and courses and how to interpret a prospectus' and for applicants, to 'know how to present their attainments to admissions staff'. Applicants from 'under-represented groups', are also specifically mentioned as needing to possess these skills and abilities. This is, presumably, because they are the groups that are least likely to have them. From the excerpt above, it would seem that providing transparent information about institutions' courses and their respective admissions procedures would enable any cultural deficit (of applicants) to be bridged. Lastly, it is also interesting that a clear outcome identified in the report is that 'all stakeholders…believe that the system is unbiased' and that 'everyone must feel confident that all applicants with the ability to succeed have a fair chance of gaining admission to higher education'. There seems to be the presumption that it is both possible and good, that 'applicants with the ability to succeed, can be identified through the application of 'fair' admissions systems. This seems very much like an example of 'symbolic capital' described by Bourdieu above where "it is perceived through categories of perception that are the product of the embodiment of divisions or of oppositions inscribed in the structure of the distribution of this species of capital" (Bourdieu: 1986, p47). The recognition of an applicant as having the 'ability to succeed' or as one 'without ability to succeed', is inscribed within the method of 'distribution' (the admissions system). Similarly, 'the benefits of HE', can be conceived of as equivalent to the cultural capital, gained as a consequence of being afforded the opportunity to engage with higher education. The emphasis on consumer confidence and belief in 'the system being unbiased' (within the text), could then be described as the admissions system being

represented as a form of symbolic capital. In this sense, *The Schwartz Report* text could be read as evidencing a strategic attempt to gain symbolic capital for the UK higher education admission system.

In the consideration of 'fair' methods of assessing the potential of applicants to benefit from higher education, Schwartz identifies issues about the reliability and validity of some methods that the reports recommendations are designed to address.

> A wide range of methods of assessment are in use in addition to Level 3 examinations. These range from considering GCSE results, to aptitude tests, to interviews. Only some of the assessment methods used have been demonstrated to predict undergraduate success…the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group is concerned that there is generally no expectation within institutions that the reliability and validity of methods being used should have been established and no processes within institutions to approve the criteria adopted. The Group is also concerned that there is no central and authoritative source of advice for admissions staff about the reliability and validity of different methods. (AHESG: 2004, p26)

The 'concern' described in the text could perhaps be used to illustrate Bourdieu's concept of the translation of one form of capital into another by describing it in relation to the role of interviews in the selection process. Applicants to a higher education course may have acquired embodied cultural capital, by being a member of an economically well off family, that lives in a house full of books and other cultural artefacts, where family members have the time to promote the value and practice of family discussion. The embodied cultural capital (described by Bourdieu) may exist in the form of a familiarity and an ability to engage with others in debate, in relation to a relatively wide range of issues of the day. The value of debate and discussion may be reproduced, in the form of a formal interview procedure, employed by the higher education institution. This may require the demonstration of an ability to competently discuss issues at interview. This procedure may be thought to be a reliable and valid way to ascertain an applicants 'potential to benefit' from the higher education course. The interview process may also have been made 'transparent' to all applicants through the provision of detailed and comprehensive information, made readily available. However, none the less, if the process inherently recognises abilities that are more likely to be possessed by applicants from economically advantageous backgrounds, then the embodied cultural capital may be

> …unrecognised as capital and recognised as legitimate competence…an example of the markets in which economic capital is not fully recognised. (Bourdieu: 1986, p49)

This is interesting as it would seem to suggest that the embodied nature of this form of capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu, could, in this illustration, disguise the economic and social conditions that may be reproduced by explicitly non-economic or 'disinterested' higher education selection processes. Whether this is the case or not is of course an empirical question that will not be addressed within this work. It may to some extent, however, indicate that some descriptions of higher education include models of exchange, in addition to that of 'mercantile exchange', in the narrow sense of the term described by Bourdieu.

The objectified state of cultural capital, described by Bourdieu, is constituted in material objects, cultural goods and artefacts such as books and paintings. These goods can be exchanged and traded, in the same way as other commodities. It could therefore perhaps be argued, that this form of capital can be reduced to economic capital. However, Bourdieu argues that legal ownership of a cultural capital object does not necessarily mean that the 'owner' can 'consume' such an object. In the same way perhaps, that someone who owns a car, yet does not posses the skills to drive, cannot 'consume' (use/drive) the car they own, Bourdieu argues, that owning a cultural object does not necessarily constitute "the precondition for specific appropriation" (1991, p50). In other words, Bourdieu argues that the consumption of a cultural object requires the possession of relevant embodied cultural capital (such as the dispositions, knowledge and understanding of the habitus to which the object relates).

The institutionalised state of cultural capital as academic qualifications, according to Bourdieu, constitutes an objectification that is at the same time embodied in that it is specifically related to a specific individual bearer.

> With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holders a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has relative autonomy…
> (Bourdieu: 1986, p50-51)

In this context recognition by higher education institutions through its degree awarding powers (for example) would to a large extent determine the form, process and type of cultural capital that an individual effectively possesses. Degree awarding powers or the recognition, status and authority granted to institutions to perform the 'social alchemy' necessary to individualise cultural capital in the form of degree qualifications, is itself also a form of institutional cultural capital: what Bourdieu describes as

> …the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition. (Bourdieu: 1986, p51)

If we take an excerpt from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) text, 'Applications for the grant of taught degree-awarding powers, research degree-awarding powers and university title', the mechanisms (or technologies) for establishing such powers are clearly described.

> Section 76 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* and Section 48 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992* empower the Privy Council to specify institutions of higher education as competent to grant awards, in other words to grant them powers to award their own degrees. In considering applications for such powers, the Privy Council seeks advice from the appropriate territorial Minister with higher education responsibilities. In turn, the appropriate Minister seeks advice from the Agency [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education]…

> The [degree awarding powers] criteria are designed to establish that the applicant organisation is a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can

demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards. To this end, the Agency will be judging, through its examination of the evidence provided, and against the criteria, the extent to which an organisation can engender public confidence in its capacity to maintain the academic standards of the degrees it offers in the UK and, where relevant, overseas. While some of the evidence that organisations will provide will be quantitative, some will also be qualitative. All evidence will be subject to peer judgements by senior members of the academic community. (DfES: 2004, p1-2)

Within this example text, the symbolic authority to impose recognition is clearly stated as vested through Acts of Parliament, the Privy Council and Ministers of State. Similarly, the bureaucratic process for gaining degree-awarding powers is identified, namely, that institutions need to submit applications as evidence that they meet explicit criteria. The implied relationship between the stated criteria seems to be, that institutions that are 'self-critical communities' are able to guard the 'academic standards' of their degrees and thereby, secure 'public confidence'. This evidence that criteria are met is then, 'subject to peer judgements by senior members of the academic community'. The reference to the fact that 'judgements' are made by 'peers' seems to some extent to euphemise the process by recruiting the authority of 'the academic community'. This seems to present the idea that such a community exists, and can be identified, as a given, and yet does not (within the document) make explicit what is meant by this. Perhaps, it might be argued that this text serves to misrecognise the mechanism for granting degree-awarding powers, as one that is designed to provide and objective guarantee of the currency of institutional cultural capital.

Bourdieu argues, that the academic qualification makes possible an exchange market for qualification holders. The collective recognition of academic qualifications, in the process of selection in employment markets, determines the form and type of judgements that are made about the cultural capital that an individual possesses. In this way, academic qualifications have currency. Certain jobs require particular academic qualifications; certain types of qualification may have more value than others in both securing a job, and the level of economic return, associated with a job. This, according to Bourdieu, establishes a conversion rate between institutionalised cultural capital (also here described as academic capital) and economic capital. For Bourdieu, there are costs associated with the conversion process between economic and cultural (academic) capital and vice versa, which can be governed by structural changes in scarcity and demand as well as 'qualification inflation'. However, Bourdieu argues that

> …academic investment has no meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed. (Bourdieu: 1986, p51)

If academic capital is functioning in the way that Bourdieu describes, it might be reasonable to expect to see institutional attempts to establish an 'objective guarantee' of the economic value of academic capital (qualifications). It is possible to point to instances within government sponsored texts where there seems to be an explicit attempt to establish the 'truth' of the economic value of higher education (for example, the GLA report (2004) and *The Schwartz Report* (2004) previously cited in chapter one)

The previous sections have attempted to identify the specialised higher education discursive field and to consider some of the kinds of technologies and/or strategies that might be operating within this field. They have also attempted to consider how Bourdieu's conception of the distribution of forms capital, could contribute to the construction of a theoretical framework to analyse the idea of the commodification of higher education. The following sections will attempt to localise the higher education empirical field, by identifying the rationale for the selection of official texts, as the objects of analysis.

The localisation of the higher education field as selected texts
If we are to analyse the processes, technologies and strategies related to the discursive field of higher education, that operate to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of its commodification, we must consider where empirical evidence of this may be found.

One place that such evidence may be found is within 'official' texts, such as government sponsored texts. Statements in such texts seem to have a seal of government approval, that sanction them as 'official truths' (Simola et al: 1998). Statements within government sponsored texts, are produced by individual people but may appear as if they are 'authored' by 'the government', or their authorised representatives. One example of this, is the process for producing governmental reports, further to applications from institutions, to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for degree awarding powers. The bureaucratic processes for producing such reports, are described in the excerpt from the DfES guidance document below.

> The detailed scrutiny [of the application] will culminate in a final report to ACDAP [Advisory Committee on Degree Awarding Powers] by the assessors. The assessors will not make a recommendation on the application, but will offer peer-referenced views on the detail of the organisation's operations in the light of the individual criteria [for degree awarding powers]…
>
> Where the final report raises matters for further consideration or clarification, ACDAP may decide to convene a sub-panel of its members to undertake a short and focused visit to the organisation, prior to formulating its advice…The visit will result in a further report to ACDAP. On occasion, ACDAP may wish to supplement the membership of a sub-panel with additional external expertise.
>
> The applicant organisation will be provided with an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the evidence cited in the assessors' draft final report, prior to the submission of the completed report to ACDAP…The Agency reserves the right to edit the text submitted to the organisation, to the extent necessary to protect the confidentiality of the process and the anonymity of those who have given evidence to the assessors. (DfES: 2004, p6)

This 'appearance of anonymity' (Simola et al: 1998) is, here, legitimated by governmental committees, containing 'experts' and others, who are authorised to speak 'official truths' about higher education. It could be argued that such texts may exhibit 'mythologised authorships', to the extent that the processes of producing such texts are not made explicit to their respective audiences. It can be seen from the above text that there are clear divisions about who is authorised to 'speak', and how. In the production of 'final reports', 'assessors', ' a sub-panel of experts', the 'Advisory

Committee on Degree Awarding Powers' (ACDAP) and the organisation (or institution) making the application for degree awarding powers, are all authorised to 'speak' but in different and specifically regulated ways. For example, assessors are authorised to 'offer peer referenced views', but are explicitly not authorised to 'make recommendations' to the ACDAP. Similarly, organisations, which are the subject of such reports, can only 'check factual accuracy'. Technologies of discourse are clearly operating to regulate the production of knowledge in the form of the 'final report(s)' of this governmental committee (ACDAP). Such governmental texts may provide evidence of these and other kinds of strategies, operating to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education.

The following section will attempt to describe the process of the construction of an 'organisational language' designed to recontextualise official higher education texts, such as those discussed above, for the purposes of analysis, particularly drawing on the work of Dowling.

Texts, constructive description and organisational language

As previously indicated above, the 'object(s)' of the analysis in this work will be a number of texts identified as localised instances of higher education discourse. These texts have been selected to establish a degree of relational coherence between the specialised theoretical field and the empirical field containing all possible instances of higher education discourse. In other words, there is an explicit rationale for the selection of the specific texts chosen for analysis that reflects the construction of the specialised theoretical field and the specific research question. This approach to educational research is largely drawn from Brown and Dowling (1998), which specifically introduces the idea of textual analysis in educational research.

For the purposes of this analysis, the term 'text' will include that which can be physically manifested to provide a locus for the generation of meaning. This could be a written text printed on paper, or distributed through electronic media. However, a text could, potentially, also include a far wider range of objects; images, films, exhibitions, buildings, performances, clothing, sounds, music etc, etc. All of these physical 'objects' can provide a locus for the generation of meaning, have significance, or be 'read'. It is however, the fact that they are read, that transforms these objects, into 'texts'. Following Barthes (1972), a thing becomes a text, as a consequence of the significance that is generated during the act of engagement with it, by a reader. The 'signifier', the thing or physical object, only generates meaning if it is associated in the mind of the reader with a conceptual category or, that, which is, 'signified'. The association of the signified with the signifier generates the 'sign', as something, which embodies meaning. The dynamic parameters of this process include; the construction and positioning of the signifier, the conceptual framework brought to the signifier by the reader, the signified, and the relationship between the two. On the one hand, this may lead us to the conclusion that each reading is unique and that there can be no one authoritative reading. On the other hand, Barthes contends, that culture is reflected in the construction of texts and that such construction is ideological, what he calls 'myth'. The idea that, by uncovering layers of 'myth', we gain access to previously veiled truth would underplay the ideological position of any such reader. One problem with semiological analysis, as Barthes identified, is that a reader of a text, who aims to deconstruct the myths contained within, is doomed to generate further myths in the process.

To avoid producing a reading that would itself construct such myths Dowling (1999) posits a 'specific language of description' (subsequently (Dowling, in press) 'organisational language'), which is a kind of reflexive semiological textual analysis. For Dowling, a language of description

> …constitutes activity as the defining context for social action. That is activity regulates who can say or do what. Activity is produced and reproduced in texts that deploy positioning and distributing strategies in constituting hierarchies of voices and esoteric and public domains of practice. (Dowling; 1999, p4)

This work/text (thesis), which is concerned with the idea of the commodification of higher education, is itself an instance of higher education research activity, equally implicated by this description. Dowling's 'specific language of description', is an attempt to explicitly identify that activities, such as producing educational research, regulate 'who can say or do what', by deploying a range of textual strategies. Dowling's approach seeks to make this textual activity, and the strategies deployed, explicit. It also employs a methodology that seeks to create structural linkages and coherence between an identified, and increasingly specialised, theoretical field and an identified and increasingly localised empirical field. As a consequence, it is argued, ''knowledge is constructed as an artefact rather than a representation'' (Dowling: 1999, p11).

THE ESOTERIC DOMAIN OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE

The practice of higher education provision is richly described. Philosophers, sociologists, economists and many others have produced many texts concerning higher education, for example. Both higher education research and higher education in general, could be described as what Dowling calls 'high discursive saturation practices' where "the principles of the practice are to a substantial extent available within a systematic discourse" (Dowling: 1999, p12). Dowling distinguishes such practices from craft or manual practices which "are dependent upon the immediate physical context of the practice" (Dowling: 1999, p11).

Higher education practice(s) can also be described as constituting an esoteric (as opposed to a 'public') domain or discourse. Higher education discourse is specialised, including terminology and jargon that has specific relevance to the practices that practitioners engage with. However, higher education practitioners can also draw on non-specialist areas of discourse in the construction of their own. This is exemplified within a recent THES article 'You pays yer money…'. This text includes a selection of academics' comments, from a variety of higher education institutions, in response to the question, 'Is higher education being killed by a commercial culture and a consumer mentality?' One senior academic is quoted as follows:

> [In] the early 1980s…US colleges and universities borrowed from business an enthusiasm for total quality management…In the early 1990s, British higher education was penetrated by the language and logic of the market, specifically in the form of new public management.

> Vice-chancellors and council chairs…embraced strategic planning, mission statements, flatter structures, line managers and cost units; their balance sheets were soaked in third-stream income. In this steamy encounter, zero-based budgets trumped Senate votes; the bottom line was tops.

Within this broader discursive shift, students were constructed anew. They are no longer recipients of social benefit but purchasers of an increasingly expensive product. They are choice-conscious, rationally autonomous consumers; they are sharp shoppers on the lookout for the best value for their fees. Higher education is the new Ikea - no, the new eBay…

If we *must* borrow from the marketplace, let us not shortchange our students, any more than a decent shopkeeper would shortchange customers. (THES: 29.9.06)

This text highlights, what might be described as, a 'discursive shift' in the language of higher education senior managers to 'the logic of the market'. This is, on the one hand, a description (from the perspective of the author) of the discourse of one esoteric domain (higher education), drawing on (being penetrated by?) the discourse of another (total quality management). On the other hand, this text is, itself, an example of the esoteric domain of higher education discourse recruiting the public discourse of various kinds of retail industry practice - Ikea, eBay and 'decent shopkeepers'. In doing so, the text recontextualises retail practice to conform to the principles of higher education discourse. As a specialist higher education publication, the THES is unlikely to be read by retail practitioners. If they happen to read it however, the juxtaposition of retail examples with the specialist academic conception of a 'discursive shift' would most likely render the reference from public retail practice to some degree, unrecognisable. Put another way, the public discourse of retail practice is recontextualised by the principles of higher education academic discourse. As such, access to the esoteric domain is 'regulated' through its recontextualisation of the public domain.

This strategy has been identified by Dowling (1999) as a 'pedagogic activity' that facilitates access to privileged content by those who are being 'apprenticed' into an otherwise esoteric practice. This pedagogic activity is not confined to educational practices but includes any activity where information is transmitted from an informed position to someone in an uninformed position.

A pedagogic activity constructs transmitter and acquirer positions and the transmission or regulation of a privileged content such that the principles of evaluation of performance are located with the transmitter (Dowling: 1999, p.2)

Dowling distinguishes between 'transmission texts' and 'regulatory texts' in relation to high discursive saturation practices. Transmission texts are those that "make explicit the systematic nature of the discourse". (Dowling: 1999, p11). In other words if a text's authorial voice initiates a reader into an esoteric domain without making explicit the principles that generate such a domain, then it is not, in Dowling's terms, a transmission text. Dowling describes such texts as a 'regulatory texts', regulating a reader's access to the esoteric domains by "rendering invisible the principles that generate them" (Dowling: 1999, p3). In employing such strategies, texts (strictly speaking my reading of texts) not only differentiate between authorial and audience voices but also, between kinds of author and kinds of audiences, in relation to levels of access to esoteric domains.

The likely and intended audience for this work/text is, broadly, those educational practitioners who might have an interest in (higher) education research and practice. More specifically, potential

readers will include those having interests in the technologies, strategies and/or tactics employed in 'official' or government sponsored texts, related to the idea of the commodification higher education, from either a philosophical or sociological perspective.

However, if this work/text is to meet the criteria for recognition as doctoral standard work it must demonstrate that it constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in this field. As such, the work/text must communicate/transmit something that is ultimately esoteric (and original) to an interested audience who are none the less uninitiated in relation to the 'knowledge construction/artefact' produced by this work/text. If the methodology employed to do this is to avoid the criticism of constituting a mythologising strategy, the 'specific language of description' must be made explicit.

For Dowling, (1999) such a methodology for textual analysis is founded on a 'constructive' epistemology where the requirement for knowledge claims is dependent upon coherence.

1. The text must be bounded as an object rather than as a field for data collection.
2. The referent activity must be declared. It is this referent that constitutes the principal site of theoretical statements.
3. The principal question that is to be addressed to the text is, how does it operate as an instance of its referent? In particular, how does it construct its authorial and reader voices?
4. In addressing this question I look for polarisations and associations.
5. I aim to produce an exhaustive reading of the text.
6. I aim for coherence between the description of the object text and the theorising of the referent activity. (Dowling: 1999)

OFFICIAL HIGHER EDUCATION TEXTS AND TECHNOLOGIES OF 'TRUTH'

The localised empirical field, which will comprise the object of analysis, will be three selected official higher education texts. The rationale for selecting these texts relates to the analysis of technologies of 'truth' (Simola et al, 1998), or more specifically, technologies of subjectivity, government and discourse. This approach is designed to produce a degree of coherence between the localised empirical field (object texts) and the specialised theory employed to construct the analysis.

Chapter four will focus on the analysis of the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review* (2004). This text is concerned with the regulation of practice seems particularly relevant to the analysis of the technologies of self and 'subjectivity'. This text invites higher education providers/practitioners to individualise themselves through a process of subjectification by self-evaluation in relation to constructed (self-generated) aims and 'rational' goals for higher education provision. Providers/practitioners are then required to subject themselves to a process of 'quality review', conducted by 'reviewers', who are described as 'peers'. This process is designed to produce an official description of who is an 'approved' higher education provider.

Chapter five will specifically focus on the analysis of *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper (DfES: 2003). This type of text seeks to persuade the reader of the rational goals of higher education within the UK and seems particularly relevant to the analysis of technologies of government and 'power'. The White Paper describes an official rationale for governmental action and change in the

field of higher education and 'why' the Government is right to implement change in higher education provision.

Chapter six will focus on the analysis of *The Schwartz Report* into fair admissions to higher education (AHESG: September 2004). Governmental 'consultative texts' are particularly relevant to the analysis of the technologies of discourse and 'knowledge'. Here, the construction of 'truth' is legitimated through a series of consultation procedures including identified 'stakeholders', experts, committees and institutional representatives. This text was produced following the circulation of a series of consultative documents structured around questions, concerning the definition of fair admissions to higher education. The final report, aims to establish the 'true' knowledge about higher education admissions to guide the policy and practice of higher education institutions.

Thesis as text

More recently Dowling (2004, 2007, in press) has revised his terminology so that a 'specific language of description' has become an 'organisational language'. Dowling (following Barthes: 1974, 1975) employs the terms 'text-as-work' (a kind of 'text in waiting', a potential object of description not as yet structured by an organisational language) and 'text-as-text' (an object of description structured by an organisational language) to illustrate possible differences in strategic structural relations in a number of examples. Dowling argues that

> …the structural coupling between text-as-work and its audience (or, alternatively the *author* of its reading as a text-as-text) is that which establishes the possibility of the text-as-text. However, the nature of the text-as text will be given by the organisational language-the strongly or weakly institutionalised discourse or practice-that the audience deploys. (Dowling: 2004, p13)

As such, Dowling argues, the text once 'read' is at that time, and in that occurrence, a specific text-as-text. That is, an instance of the particular organisational language, within which, it is constructed as text-as-text. Dowling points to examples, that he argues, constitute a 'conjuring' (a kind of sleight of hand), where textual analysis, using one type of organisational language, is used to make statements about a text, that is itself, constituted by a different organisational language. Dowling concludes, that it may be impossible to 'transmit' (thus avoiding 'conjuring tricks') an organisational language, as a consequence of the possibility of slippage between organisational languages, which an 'author' may be, more or less, aware of. This is no doubt the case with this text. However, there is an attempt to be as explicit as possible in the employment of this specific organisational language and to demonstrate coherence between it, and the selected localised empirical setting ('official' higher education texts). The approach taken in designing the specific methods of analysis is equally applicable to the analysis of this text, as an instance of education research activity.

If this approach is to be coherently and consistently applied there is another text that must be identified as an instance of the organisational language employed within this work (or more consistently, text). The construction of this text is of course itself the product of discursive practice and, as such, could be described as being related to another 'catalogue of possibilities'. We could, for example, consider the 'techniques of the self' employed or how the subject is constituted in relation to this text. In the context of a PhD thesis this text constitutes (or positions) an individual as

an author who as a 'good' subject aspires to define themselves in relation to the 'rationally' legitimised practices of institutionalised doctoral recognition.

> In order to obtain a PhD a candidate must demonstrate that they have produced an original contribution to knowledge in the relevant field and that it is their own work.
> (Dowling: 2004a, p29)

There are ethical ways to behave in the production of a PhD thesis such as avoiding plagiarism, referencing and crediting the work of other 'authors' that is being employed or deployed in the production of new work (text). A PhD candidate, as author of a thesis as text, must subject themselves to these norms and rules but may also exploit them to position a text as legitimate or credible.

At the same time this text 'constitutes' individuals as readers or an audience who through their engagement with the text define themselves, for example, as PhD assessors, authoritative critical readers with expertise in the relevant field or perhaps interested practitioners. In doing so, an audience (reader) is also constituted in relation to norms and rules related to academic discursive practice. An individual may seek to define themselves as, for example, 'good' critical readers by providing a critical commentary on the text. This practice will be governed by explicit or implicit' rules of engagement' dependent upon the extent to which the practice of critical reading is institutionalised. Here, this text would become newly authored as 'text-as-text' in that it would become an instance of the 'organisational language' of the reader. This new organisational language is also likely, in this context, to be institutionalised, at least to some extent.

This text offers itself as an instance of an explicit organisational language (as far as that is possible). It is offered subject to the rules and regulations concerning academic discourse, in the philosophical and sociological fields, related to higher education and the idea of its commodification. As a PhD thesis the 'author' is positioned as a subject who is willing to 'confess' individual knowledge to the particular institute of education that governs the PhD award. Forms of this 'confession' include the production of this text and other related institutionalised practices such as viva voce.

Clearly there are also techniques that govern the production of this text, that constitute strategic moves, in an attempt to gain alliances with those who are identified as its intended audience. These technologies are deployed, in the context of thesis production, as a disciplinary practice, which is bound up in, elaborates, and (re)produces, knowledge/power relationships. As such, this text must be established as 'a contribution to knowledge in a relevant field'. Such fields, are of course themselves bound up in constructed knowledge/power relationships that determine the relative stability of ideas and practices, within each respective field. As Johannesson has argued

> When the metaphor of a field is used, discourse is limited to a space in which groups of people align themselves with certain practices and ideas that have value (symbolic capital) in that field (Johannesson: 1998, p303)

As a PhD thesis, this text is deployed as a means of producing alliances with 'authorities', within an identified discursive field, to establish sufficient 'symbolic capital' to gain doctoral recognition, and the

award of institutionalised cultural or academic capital. In this way, within this text, the rules internal to academic discourse and thesis production are perpetuated and reproduced. In order to be identified as a 'speaking subject' in the context of the production of doctoral thesis, there are a series of 'rituals' that an aspiring PhD student must subject himself or herself to. For example, in some institutional settings, thesis proposals may be submitted, to ascertain their 'viability', to individuals who are institutionally authorised to operate as gatekeepers regulating access to an 'academic community', within a discursive field.

This sketch has attempted to identify that this text can be described as an instance of the organisational language that is being deployed to address the research question identified above. As such, this text does not stand outside the organisational language constructed in relation to the idea of the commodification of higher education, but is rather an instance of it.

Chapter three – The construction of a specialised organisational language

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to set out the specific methodology that will be applied to the analysis of selected texts. As indicated in the previous chapter, the work of Dowling (1999, 2004, 2004a, 2007, in press) will be employed to construct a specific 'organisational language' with which to generate elaborated descriptions of higher education by recontextualising selected 'official' texts concerned with higher education. Such texts will be identified as 'object texts', representing relevant examples, drawn from the discursive field of higher education, that can provide evidence of the (re)production or resistance of the idea of the commodification of higher education.

The methodology described will include the identification of authorial and audience 'voices' within the object texts. To take a well worn example, if someone sits in a university lecture hall in seats that have been designated and differentiated by their position within the hall in relation to the central lectern, as audience seats, then that person will be, in the context of this particular social setting a member of the audience. The physical construction of the hall, as well as a range of other institutional hierarchies, differentially distribute authority and to some extent prefigure the kind of social interaction that may occur. The person who the stands behind the lectern is, as such, identified as the one who is given authority to speak. This, together with the delivery of a lecture in this setting, can be described as constituting a text as an object for analysis. Within written texts, textual author and audience voices are also constructed. The way that such voices are constructed may differentially regulate access to the principles that generate the associated discourse. For example, a physics teacher may, for pedagogic reasons, not introduce the theory of general relativity when attempting to describe basic physical science concepts. However, the relationship between differentiated authorial voices is more complex than a binary opposition between author and audience. For example, a lecturer may invite a student to lead a seminar and undertake an authorial role for pedagogic reasons. Similarly, the modes of differentiation employed by any particular text may be more dynamically related as different textual strategies move in and out of play within a text.

Dowling's approach includes the creation of 'conceptual' or what I shall call discursive spaces, which are constructed from the identification of oppositions and alliances within identified texts. Discursive spaces relating at least two sets of binary variables are constructed to comprehensively encompass all possible modes of operation within the discursive space that has been 'opened up'. For example, Dowling describes modes of authority action by relating two binary variables; oppositions of open or closed authorship and open or closed practice. This provides a means with which to generate recontextualised descriptions from 'object texts' that can identify dynamic position takings or strategies present within such texts. To illustrate how these spaces operate the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review*, as an object text, will be related to Dowling's 'modes of authority action' (2004a, in press). This will also be the object text for chapter four.

Having illustrated Dowling's approach, I will then develop or 'open up' two new discursive spaces that are designed specifically to relate to the central question concerning the (re)production of the idea of the commodification of higher education. The first will constitute an opening up of the discursive space related to Bourdieu's (1986, 1988, 1998) oppositions between different 'species' of capital, for example, between economic and symbolic capital. This discursive space is constructed

as a means of generating descriptions concerning the different strategies related to different modes or 'economies' of capital exchange. I will then describe the opening up of a discursive space that I call modes of discursive objectification. Here the oppositions identified by Kopytoff in discussing 'The Cultural Biography of Things' (1986) between (for example) art objects of singular or unique value and commodities will be employed to describe the construction of textual or discursive objects.

The analysis of each of the selected official higher education texts introduced in chapter two will be structured as follows:

1. The introduction to the location of the text within the higher education field.
2. An overview of the authorial and audience voices constructed in my transaction with the text and reconstructed in the reader's transaction with the text
3. An analysis of how the text is operating to recontextualise higher education practice.
4. The identification and analysis of oppositions and alliances within the text to construct a specialised and localised mode(s) of action.
5. The recontexualisation of oppositions and alliances described in the analysis (items 1-4 above) in relation to modes of discursive objectification.
6. An analysis of the dynamics of the distribution and exclusion of textual objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification, including the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode.

However, I would first like to introduce the method of analysis by relating Dowling's *modes of authority action* to a selected official higher education text to illustrate the method of textual analysis. I will then introduce my own specialised modes of action. Firstly, I will describe *modes of capital exchange* and secondly I will describe *modes of discursive objectification* which will be employed in following chapters to specifically address my research question.

Dowling's modes of authority action

This section will attempt to describe how the application of Dowling's methodology of textual analysis can help to identify how the kind of regulated recontextualisation, exemplified above, can be analysed to construct a means of understanding how such texts are operating. In 'Mustard, Monuments and Media' Dowling (2004a, see also in press) describes and exemplifies a methodology of textual construction that he describes as 'pastiche'. His approach identifies an 'organisational language' as a kind of theoretical description mechanism that is juxtaposed with identified 'object' texts. In doing so, he identifies the socio-cultural terrain as that which is constituted in and by, the strategic formation, maintenance and destabilising of oppositions and alliances. Dowling's departure point in his constructive analysis is an identified object text (or texts) and the relationship between that text and his constructed organisational language. For Dowling, it is the construction of the organisational language that structures his recontextualisation of the object text, which is produced in the form of a third textual construction or 'commentary'. In the consideration of example texts that Dowling describes his organisation language is concerned with the construction of two discursive spaces, one relating to 'modes of interactive social action' and one relating to 'modes of authority action'. I am going to focus on the latter but I will briefly describe the former.

Dowling's examples with respect to *interactive social action* (2004a, 2007, in press) focus on an analysis of texts that constitute subjectivities engaged in discursive action in the context of an alliance of some kind. For example, settings could include two or more people discussing something in a room, or others interacting through written communication of some kind or perhaps through some kind of visual or other exchange. The 'modes of interactive social action' discursive space (See Figure 2 below) includes a closed range of four ideal types conceived and derived from the analysis of selected scenarios (as texts). Each text is 'read' as an example of each ideal type (or mode) delimited by relations between an alliance of similars or dissimilars where the target of discursive action is openness or closure.

Alliance	*Target of discursive action*	
	Openness	*Closure*
Dissimilars	Pastiche	Hegemony
Similars	Exchange of narratives	Equilibration

FIGURE 2: MODES OF INTERACTIVE SOCIAL ACTION (DOWLING: 2004A, 2007, IN PRESS)

The mode of *hegemony* describes interactive social action (evidenced by empirical object texts) where one discourse predominates another. The mode of *equilibration* describes interactive social action where discourses recognised as similar aspire to synthesis or resolution. The mode of *exchange of narratives* describes an interactive social action context where discourses are recognised as similar without further engagement. Lastly, the mode of *pastiche* describes interactive social action where discourses are recognised as dissimilar but where their engagement or juxtaposition does not produce dominance or negation as 'closure'. Rather than the attempt at closure as with *hegemony* or *equilibration*, *pastiche* is a form of social interaction that does no conceptual violence to the text(s) it is elaborated from. Dowling's analysis is focussed here on describing texts as types of interactive social action rather than the types of strategies that may by involved in the instigation of such action.

The discursive space described by Dowling (Figure 3 below) as 'modes of authority action' (2004a, 2007, in press) exemplifies and illustrates each mode in reference to a range of literary, filmic and artistic texts. Here, each ideal type, or mode of authority action, is delimited by relations between open or closed authorship, and open or closed fields practice. Modes of authority action describe strategies that might be employed to establish the authority of one who is, as such, authorised to 'speak'. These strategies could be highly discursive in what Dowling calls 'high discursive saturation' practices or less discursive in more practical fields such as ceramics for example. It is important to note that this discursive space is not designed to categorise empirical texts, rather it is used to map the dynamic relationships between the multiple, competing, predominant or otherwise, authority strategies employed by any given text.

Authorship	Field of practice	
	Open	*Closed*
Closed	Charismatic	Traditional
Open	Liberal	Bureaucratic

FIGURE 3: MODES OF AUTHORITY ACTION (DOWLING: 2004A, 2007, IN PRESS)

Texts can be described as evidencing authority strategies or modes of authority action implicating relations of authors and audiences associated with categories of closed or open authorship. Authority action can also be described as relating to unregulated or regulated, non-institutionalised or institutionalised open or closed practice. This opens up the discursive space to comprise of four ideal-typical categories (or modes) of authority action; 'traditional', 'bureaucratic', 'liberal' and 'charismatic'. It should be noted that these categorisations do not describe texts as being in one state or another but rather describe the dynamic interplay between authority strategies. A move to an alliance of strategies is also a move to an opposition in relation to others. Each object text constitutes a strategically complex utterance where multiple and competing strategies may be deployed. By way of analogy, I can think of the description of weather systems that are mapped in relation to binary variables such as high/low pressure or high/low temperature where each variable is implicated in its opposite.

MODES OF AUTHORITY ACTION AND HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICE

Using the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review* as the object text, we can describe how this text strategically constitutes differing categories of author as it recontextualises higher education practice. Within this discursive space the category of authorship can be open or closed. For example, the identification of 'the Agency' as the primary author (or authority) within the Handbook would indicate a more singular or closed category of authorship. On the other hand the fact that Further Education College's (FECs) are positioned as the author of 'Self Evaluation Documents' in the process of Review, would signify a more open category of authorship. Similarly, the possibility of describing higher education practice, without regulation of the form that such a description can take, would constitute an openness of discursive practice. The regulation of the form of such description would, on the other hand, constitute a move towards closure of practice, a regulation of the practice of describing localised instances of higher education.

The Handbook could be described as an instance of closed discursive practice in that the practices that it constitutes are limited or regulated. The description of higher education provision, within the Handbook, is specifically constructed to include some potential descriptions and to exclude others. For example, only higher education that is delivered by FECs who are directly funded by HEFCE, are included within the context of Review described the Handbook. Higher education that is delivered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is described differently in other QAA texts concerning a different method of 'Institutional Audit'. In addition, the method of quality review that is described within the Handbook, results in 'judgements' on 'academic standards' and the 'quality of learning opportunities'. These 'judgements' are defined in terms of the achievement of stated 'aims' and 'intended learning outcomes' and this constructs a particular conception of what higher education 'is'. Higher education is constituted within the text as that which is described in relation to 'aims' and 'learning outcomes'.

A (higher education) practice not described in this way is, as such, excluded by the Handbook text. Discursive practice is, as such, regulated or closed in relation to higher education 'appropriately' described for the purposes of quality review. A counter example might be a higher education practitioner who engages in an open discussion forum on the internet and describes higher education as an intrinsically valuable activity, the value of which resides in the love invested in it by its participants, or perhaps in relation to its *un*intended outcomes. However, such a description would not be recognised in the context of Academic Review. Only some descriptions of higher education are given official recognition within the Handbook text and, as such, discursive practice is closed representing either 'traditional' or 'bureaucratic' modes of authority action by the QAA.

On the one hand the authority strategy in play would seem to be clearly bureaucratic given the systematising design of the Handbook text. However, the authorship of the Handbook, at the level of the institution, is 'closed' as only the QAA are legitimated (legally contracted by HEFCE and the UK Government) to practice quality reviews or produce official texts such as the Handbook and Final Reports. As such, the mode of authority action evidenced by the Handbook can be described as 'traditional'. As a legally and publicly 'consecrated' body, the QAA have authority to determine what is, and what is not, described as higher education, in the context of the quality assurance procedures they have constructed. The closure of authorship mystifies the actual process of textual production, in that the identity of actual authors (QAA officers etc) as well as consultation, drafting and approval processes are all subsumed within the singularity of the organisational body described as the 'the Agency' or the QAA. The Handbook does make one explicit reference to the consultation of identified stakeholders (FECs, Reviewers etc) as indicated above. However, whilst the text states that it 'takes account of suggestions for improvement' we are not told, within the Handbook, what these suggestions, or processes for implementing suggestions, might have been.

The regulatory and proceduralised practices of higher education quality assurance are legitimated by a traditional mode of authority action. However, the practice described within the Handbook draws on open authorship by requiring higher education providers to describe themselves and their associated practice in equivalent terms, through 'self-evaluation'. The Self Evaluation Document (SED) requires institutions to define their own aims for providing higher education, in the specific subject (as defined by the QAA) under review. Judgements (made by Reviewers) must explicitly refer to the extent to which these self-initiated aims have been met. In one sense, the institution is required to act as the charismatic author of the criteria against which its own success (or otherwise) will be evaluated. The description of the enactment of Review, in the production of the institutional Self Evaluation Documents, constitutes an openness of authorship and a bureaucratic mode of authority action. However, once a specific institution's practice is described in a SED the category of authorship would become closed in a claim for recognition through a traditional mode of authority. It is the requirement for self-recognition in the context of bureaucratic forms of 'self-evaluation' and submission to examination by governmental bodies (in this case the QAA) that regulates the recognition as a higher education institution within the higher education field.

The Handbook subjectifies the category of author in its description of the process of 'self evaluation'. For example, only directly funded further education colleges (FECs) can, in this context, author SEDs. The process described is an invitation to FECs to individualise themselves in accordance with the regulation, or closed discursive practice, of QAA SED production described in the Handbook.

Here, the Handbook's description of 'self' evaluation is presented as a charismatically authored and discursively open practice. However, the specific requirements of SED production are clearly not open but regulated. The text makes it clear that QAA retain the authority to determine if an SED is 'appropriate' or not, as the basis for Review.

The text describes 'self-description' as if the category of authorship is closed to include the specific FEC producing the description as an individualised author. However, the 'slippage' is not so much between open and closed categories of authorship but rather between open and closed discursive practice. The Handbook employs a bureaucratic authority strategy to regulate the practice of FEC self-description

Reviewers are recognised as authors in the production process of the Final Report described within the Handbook. The category of authorship is here limited to Reviewers and the contribution of colleges is confined to commenting on 'matters of factual accuracy' in the draft report. Discursive practice is also closed as the form and content of the Final Report is strongly regulated by the protocols and structures described in the Handbook. To this extent, the Handbook could be described as an instance of 'traditional' authority action. However, the category of author described in the context of Final Report production is limited to Reviewers. The identification of Reviewers as Reviewers is achieved by a bureaucratically objectified description that leaves the specific identification of authorship open. In addition, the anonymisation of individual Reviewers, in the production of the published Final Report reinforces the description of the Handbook as an instance of 'bureaucratic' authority action. On the other hand, the positioning of the QAA or 'the Agency' as singularised (closed) author of both the Handbook and Final Reports can be seen as an attempt to establish a 'traditional' mode of authority. The positioning of the QAA as a singular author mystifies the actual process of discursive action and as a consequence, serves to misrecognise bureaucratic authority as traditional authority action.

If we consider the distribution of authorial or audience voices in relation to the modes of authority action we can provide a snapshot of how the Handbook seems to be operating as a regulatory text. For purposes of simplicity, we can limit the range of authorial and audience voices to those that are explicitly identified as most significant within the Handbook. This would include; *The Agency* (QAA), *Providers* (institutions under review); *Reviewers*; and lastly, *Academic Subject Peers* (including Reviewers and academic subject staff).

Taken in reverse order, Peers are implicitly positioned in relation to a liberal mode of authority. A peer group seems to some extent to intuitively imply an equivalence and openness of status in relation to authority claims and a homogeneous categorisation of subjectivity or authorship. However, it is clear that the notion of 'peer' referred to within the Handbook is in fact regulated and, as such can be associated with a closed discursive practice. For example, the academic subjects (disciplines) within which peers are to be recognised are bureaucratically constituted, by the QAA, and not, as such, open. The effect is that there is potential for a misrecognition of bureaucratic authority for a more liberal authority in the constitution of an academic subject peer audience.

Reviewers are also explicitly identified, within the Handbook, as being drawn from within the academic peer group relevant to the subject of the provision under review. The category of

authorship for Reviewers is in one sense open within a closed discursive practice (Academic Review). The role of Reviewer is to some degree open, although Reviewers do require a 'traditional' recognition from the QAA prior to engagement with the processes of Academic Review described within the Handbook. Reviewers are for example, described as being recruited in relation to the extent to which they meet specific criteria identified within the Handbook. Reviewers are identified as potential authors, drafting sections of the Final (Judgement) Report. However, Reviewers do not have the authority to publish such reports and their input is subject to editorial control both by the Review Coordinator and the Agency. In this sense The Agency retains traditional authority over the process and the outcome of the practices described within the Handbook.

Lastly, if we consider Providers, the Handbook seems to indicate that institutions under review have charismatic authority in determining and defining, the principles, in relation to which, the quality of provision will be judged. This is indicated by the way that each individual institution can 'author' its own academic subject related higher education aims, against which, quality judgements are made. However, the highly bureaucratic framework and procedures (described within the Handbook) with which providers are required to comply with, may indicate that the association of charismatic authority with the production of the SED is also a misrecognition of bureaucratic authority. The distribution of the authorial and audience voices constituted within the Handbook text can be summarised in Figure 4 below.

Charismatic authority	Traditional authority
Institutional Providers	The Agency
As author of the Self Evaluation Document including subject aims	*Authorised to carry out quality reviews by Government*
Explicit reference	*Author of the Handbook*
	Author of Final Judgement Reports
	Explicit references
	Reviewers
	Individually authorised to carry out Academic Reviews on behalf of the Agency
	Authors of Academic Review Judgements
	Explicit references
Liberal authority	**Bureaucratic authority**
Academic Subject Staff Peers	Reviewers
As author/audience in relation to academic subject	*Part authors of Academic Review Judgement Reports*
Implicit reference	*As audience to be apprenticed into Academic Review procedures*
	Explicit references
Reviewer Peers	
As author/audience in relation to academic subject quality assurance - ***Explicit reference***	Institutional Providers
As author/audience in relation to academic subject production - ***Implicit reference***	*As author of the Self Evaluation Document including subject aims*
	As audience to be apprenticed into Academic Review procedures
	Explicit reference

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORIAL/AUDIENCE VOICES IN RELATION TO MODES OF AUTHORITY ACTION

The two areas that seem to provide potential for misrecognition are firstly, the modes of authority that are described here as being associated with Institutional providers, as authors of the SED and secondly those associated with Academic Subject Peers and Reviewer Peers. The production of the SED is a comparatively closed discursive practice, which is potentially misrecognised as the charismatic authority of institutional providers. The description of Reviewers as peers seems likely to misrecognise bureaucratic authority (or even traditional authority) as liberal authority. This is perhaps achieved by eliding the differences in the discursive practice of Academic Subject Peers and that of QAA Reviewers in the process of conducting Academic Reviews. Interestingly, the Handbook explicitly refers to Academic Review as a 'peer review process', but leaves the association with peer review in academic production implicit, perhaps to avoid explicit comparison.

This section has attempted to indicate how Dowling's approach can be applied to a text selected from the higher education field. The following sections will introduce two new modes of analysis that are more directly related to providing descriptions concerning the (re)production or resistance of the idea of the commodification of higher education. The first, *modes of capital exchange*, will be an elaboration from the opposition drawn by Bourdieu (1998) between 'explicit' economic capital exchange and 'euphemistic' symbolic capital exchange. The second, *modes of discursive objectification*, will be an elaboration from the opposition drawn by Kopytoff's (1986) between culturally unique and singular social objects and universally exchangeable commodities.

Bourdieu's economy of capitals

Within Bourdieu's concept of a social 'field' as a 'field of struggles', he describes how the position of individuals with an identified field, as dominant or dominated, is relative to the capital 'resources' available to such individuals. Having more capital, for Bourdieu, positions individuals as dominant in relation to those with less. For example in *Homo Academicus* (1988) Bourdieu describes the relative position of academics, or more specifically university professors.

> As authorities, whose position in social space depends principally on the possession of cultural capital, a subordinate form of capital, university professors are situated rather on the side of the subordinate pole of the field of power and are clearly opposed in this respect to the managers of industry and business. But, as holders of an institutionalised form of cultural capital, which guarantees them a bureaucratic career and a regular income, they are opposed to writers and artists: occupying a temporally dominant position in the field of cultural production. (Bourdieu: 1988, p.36)

As discussed in chapter two, Bourdieu also describes several kinds of capital in 'The Forms of Capital' (1986) where a distinction is made specifically between economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Very broadly economic capital is that which is "immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu: 1986, p.47), cultural capital includes "long-lasting dispositions…cultural goods…[and] educational qualifications" (also described as 'academic capital' (Bourdieu: 1998a). Social capital is "made up of social obligations (conversions)" (Bourdieu: 1986). However, elsewhere in the same article Bourdieu seems to identify social capital as the extent to which individuals can "utilize by proxy the capital [economic or cultural] of a group" (Bourdieu: 1986, p.56). Also, Bourdieu argues that

> economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital and that these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produces their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root. (Bourdieu: 1986, p.54)

Bourdieu (1986), also discusses what he calls symbolic capital in relation to his conception of social capital in its institutionalised form (as title or nobility). However, he also seems to indicate that symbolic capital can be any form of capital "insofar as it is represented, i.e. apprehended symbolically" (Bourdieu: 1986, p.56). Bourdieu distinguishes this form of capital (as well as the others mentioned above) by the nature of the exchange rates or 'conversions' that he argues take place between different forms of capital. If social action is targeted at maintaining or improving an

individual's position within 'the field of struggles' then, for Bourdieu, it is the kinds of strategies that are employed in the conversions of different kinds of capital that, in effect, differentiate them.

> The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and position occupied in social space). (Bourdieu:1986 p.54)

In discussing Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Moore (2004) argues that cultural capital is contrasted with economic capital as 'culture' is disinterested, non-instrumental and 'for its own sake' whereas, 'mercantile exchange' and "economic investment is always a means to an end" (Moore: 2004 p.446). However, Moore argues that

> The mercantile form represents the basic characterising of capital in their most visible aspect, but these are still present in cultural and social capital even though their values of the aesthetic and altruism formally deny their instrumentalism (Moore: 2004, p446)

Nonetheless, Moore argues that economic capital is 'translated' into cultural capital and that it is systematically 'misrecognised', as such, as a consequence of its representation in symbolic forms of capital (Moore: 2004). Moore argues that the 'relative autonomy' of the cultural field, as "institutionally distanced from the economic and political fields" (Moore: 2004 p.449) with its own institutions, traditions etc., facilitates the 'symbolic violence' that such misrecognition constitutes. Interestingly, Moore argues that the seeming autonomy within the cultural field, is correlated with increased reproduction of power relations in that field.

> The more autonomous a field appears, the more effectively it performs its role of consecration and reproduction of relations of power. It works best by doing what it is meant to do by appearing to be doing something else entirely (Moore: 2004, p.449)

By way of an aside, this view seems to contrast with those who argue for greater autonomy of the cultural field of higher education, for example Grenfell and James (2004) employ Bourdieu's conception of 'field' to argue that 'autonomy' is productive in "opening up spaces that run counter to the present orthodoxy " (Moore: 2004, p510). They also argue that an autonomous field can generate its 'own problems' rather than being reliant on, or subject to, those from outside a field and that these are the only conditions where a field can attain the 'universal'. Putting to one side the discussion of 'substantialist' and 'relational' thinking described in this article, Grenfell and James do seem to underplay the potential for the changing nature of field formation in relation to other more or less associated fields. It also seems to be the case that the heteronomy of a field is largely described in pejorative terms, whereas, it seems entirely possible that an 'influence' described as external to a field may also creatively disrupt an existing 'doxa'. Discursive interaction from 'outside' a field can be creative as well as reproductive, where for example the charismatic authority that is being exercised in constructing a 'pastiche' (Dowling: 2004a, in press) is itself a (relatively) coherent aspect of its production.

In *Homo Academicus* (1990), Bourdieu identifies a list of types of capital (as indicators) that he has used to establish the relative position of higher education practitioners within the French university

field. The types of capital include (in addition to those already mentioned above); educational capital; the capital of academic power; the capital of scientific power; the capital of scientific prestige; the capital of intellectual renown and the capital of political or economic power (Bourdieu, 1990 p.40). In describing different kinds of capital Bourdieu is, on the one hand, attempting to identify relational positions of higher education practitioners within social fields. On the other hand, Bourdieu also describes theoretical relations between his conception of the differences in the ways that each species of capital is maintained, accumulated and reproduced in relation to both objective social structures and the 'habitus' of social subjects.

The various types of capital cited can be related to differential strategies associated with maintaining, accumulating, exchanging or deploying such capital. However, the intention here is to open the discursive space, within this text, to provide a coherent and conceptually comprehensive framework within which to 'capture' descriptions of discursive strategies in the higher education field. In this context, the opposition, described by Bourdieu (1998), between economic capital and symbolic capital could describe at least one dimension of the discursive space envisaged. Bourdieu describes this opposition in consideration of (although not exclusively) the exchange of gifts.

> Thus the exchange of gifts (or women, or services, etc.), conceived as a paradigm of the economy of symbolic goods, is opposed to the equivalent exchanges of the economy as long as its basis is not a calculating subject, but rather an agent socially disposed to enter, without intention or calculation, into the game of exchange. (Bourdieu: 1998, p.98)

Bourdieu employs the opposition between economic and symbolic exchanges as a means of analysing the respective similarities and dissimilarities of each. Bourdieu argues that the requirements of the recognition of symbolic capital include the promotion of 'disinterestedness', the avoidance of explicitness and the 'repression or censorship of economic interests' through 'euphemistic' exchanges where the terms, conditions and rate of exchange is left implicit and ambiguous. (Bourdieu:1998)

> …the strategies and practices characteristic of the economy of symbolic goods are always ambiguous, two-sided, and even apparently contradictory (for example, goods have a price and are "priceless"). This duality of mutually exclusive truths, as much in practice as in discourse (euphemism), should not be thought of as duplicity, but rather as denial assuring…the coexistence of opposites". (Bourdieu:1998, p.121)

This points up one problem with 'reading' the position of any particular individual or text, as being associated with any one strategy. Rather, the strategies and practices Bourdieu associates with economic or symbolic capital can be described in the context of a dynamic relation, or indeed, perhaps additionally, as being euphemistically co-located. For example, academic papers may be described as being produced in the pursuit of 'knowledge for its own sake' yet the recognition that results from such academic production potentially rewards both institutions and individuals with status and economic capital.

This section will attempt to open up Bourdieu's economy of capitals to construct a discursive space that can be used to (relationally) describe all possible *modes of capital exchange*. The construction of this space will initially be drawn from the opposition between economic capital and symbolic capital, described by Bourdieu (1986, 1998). Given that Bourdieu is also concerned with the conditions of exchange between different 'forms' of capital, we can consider how such differences might relate to the type of discursive space constructed by Dowling. Bourdieu (1986) argues that the description of self-interested economic (mercantile) exchange in economic theory serves to exclude the description of "a general science of the economy of practices, which would treat mercantile exchange as a particular case of exchange in all its forms" (Bourdieu:1986, p.47). For Bourdieu, the fact that 'cultural' practices are described in opposition to 'economic' practices as 'disinterested' excludes and 'euphemises' the description of the ways in which 'cultural' exchanges occur to reproduce, maintain and accumulate advantage in the struggles that occur in fields of power. In this context, Bourdieu's 'general science of the economy of practices' means that there can be a symbolic economy, a cultural economy in addition to an 'economic' economy. (1986, 1998). Bourdieu's project here is to

> endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another. (Bourdieu:1986, p47)

Explicit exchange, drawing on Bourdieu's description of economic exchange (1998), is where the terms and conditions of exchange, the 'rate' of exchange, the relationship between the capital that is exchanged is explicit, or perhaps calculable. It is also where the 'interestedness' of those engaged with exchange is a transparent feature of subjectivity. Euphemistic exchange, drawing on Bourdieu's description of the exchange of symbolic goods, is that which only implicitly identifies equivalents in exchange, if at all, "in a language of denial" (Bourdieu:1998, p98).

Arguably, all economic capital exchange needs to include agreement concerning the price. The price stands as an abstracted equivalence between whatever is being exchanged as a comparable value. This points up a potential practical relation between minimal and maximal institutionalisation in the construction of an economic exchange market. In any case, we are not here concerned with empirical specifics but with the construction of discursive space. However, the conception of a relatively institutionalised 'technology' that provides 'descriptions of the price of economic goods as equivalent comparable values, may point to a bureaucratic cultural function that is targeted at (though perhaps never achieving) equilibrium.

The London Stock Market, for example, describes from moment to moment equivalences between economic goods as stocks and shares. The price of shares (perhaps as listed in digital displays on the trading floor) is set at any one moment and at that moment is exchanged with the buyer as an equivalent value. At the point of sale the price represents an explicit and precise equivalent value that parties engaged in exchange have agreed to. A very similar thing happens on the betfair.com website where betting odds are traded based upon a technology that describes momentary equivalences in relation to the 'odds' associated with gambling bets placed. 'eBay' would be an example of a more loosely institutionalised technology as an on-line auction house. The economic

exchange of goods, facilitated by the eBay website, seems explicitly interested as 'mercantile exchange', although, there are, in this instance, relatively minimal criteria for participation that regulate the practice of exchange.

It is possible to describe the exchange practices (strategies) associated with the different types of capital that are conceived of by Bourdieu, by producing a discursive space constituted by the product of binary variables identified in relation to each form of capital. However, in doing this Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital will be deformed and fragmented to construct three (additional/elaborated) *modes of capital exchange*. For example, *economic capital exchange* constitutes an *explicit* form of exchange and also represents a homogeneous subjectification of those who conduct such exchange. Economic capital exchange is not associated with a 'singularised' or 'embodied' individual subject. There is no theoretical restriction on the type of subject that can engage in such exchange. However, symbolic (cultural) capital exchange is singularised. For example, titles such as 'Doctor' for those awarded a PhD, are associated with specific individuals who have been recognised as such. Only those individuals who have been subjectified in relation to the criteria for approval are recognised by the award of such titles. This second oppositional variable (between singular and homogeneous subjectification), 'opens up' four possible *modes of capital exchange*. *Human (cultural) capital* (which includes intellectual and other skills and abilities) will here represent cultural capital that is singularised (perhaps embodied) and yet explicitly exchanged. *Institutional (cultural) capital* (which includes the institutional frameworks, and perhaps networks, that enable capital exchange) will here represent cultural capital that is potentially available to all but only exchanged euphemistically. Economic exchange and symbolic exchange remain relatively intact from Bourdieu's (1998) descriptions, save to say that symbolic capital is also described as a form of cultural capital.

Subjectivity	*Exchange*	
	Explicit	*Euphemistic*
Singular	Human (cultural)	Symbolic (cultural)
Homogeneous	Economic	Institutional (cultural)

FIGURE 5: MODES OF CAPITAL EXCHANGE

The construction of *modes of capital exchange* (Figure 5) could be used to describe how texts operate strategically to maintain, establish, develop, deploy and *exchange*, different 'species' of capital (in the Bourdieuian sense). The 'exchange' binary variable in such a space would be constituted in the transactions between reader and text that could be described as more or less explicit or euphemistic in the sense that Bourdieu uses these terms with respect to economic and symbolic capital. Within this discursive space, what Bourdieu might call 'agents', I call textual 'subjectivities'. The constitution of subjectivities (such as author and audience) would be determined in relation to their relative singularity or homogeneity within text. A singular subjectivity would constitute a closed type of subjectification for example, through the identification of a singular author of a given text. This could also apply to the constitution of an organisation or institution as a singular subjectivity, such as the use of the term 'the Agency' to describe the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in a range of texts (www.qaa.ac.uk). A homogeneous subjectivity would constitute a more open type of subjectification for example, 'employers' or 'students'.

I will now attempt to describe each of the four *modes of capital exchange* in relation to higher education practice. Naidoo (2004) argues that

> the type of capital operating in the field of university education is an institutional form of cultural capital that has generally been termed 'academic' capital. (Naidoo: 2004, p.458)

Naidoo specifically describes academic capital as power over the "instruments of reproduction of the university body" (Naidoo, 2004, p.458) however, she further distinguishes academic capital as either one of two types: firstly, 'intellectual' or 'scientific capital', as equivalent to "scientific authority or intellectual renown" and secondly, 'institutionalised cultural capital'. This second form, for Naidoo, is both the recognition of prior educational achievement and the embodiment (and perhaps reproduction) of 'academic' dispositions (habitus).

> Higher education is conceptualised as a sorting machine that selects students according to an implicit *social* classification and reproduces the same students according to an explicit *academic* classification, which in reality is very similar to the implicit *social* classification. (Naidoo: 2004, p.459)

Naidoo's description identifies the higher education selection process, as the 'consecration' of institutionally 'valid criteria for entry', as the legitimate means of identifying 'academic talent'; a 'misrecognition' of the cultural as the 'natural'. The authority (in Dowling's terms) that the university would bring to bear in this description of the (re)production (exchange) of economic/cultural capital would be bureaucratic. Fair access and equal opportunities legislation require that universities can demonstrate that they select 'on merit' and do not discriminate on other 'inappropriate' grounds. For example, *The Schwartz Report* into 'fair access to higher education' describes the identification of 'talent' in opposition to access though economic advantage.

> I believe that we should be trying to build a society in which as many people as possible are free to make choices about how they live and free to achieve their potential. The fairest and most acceptable way to achieve this is through higher education. If we have a fair admissions system, then success will not depend on connections, money or influence but on talent and motivation…The Steering Group does not believe that the higher education admissions system should be responsible for compensating for social disadvantage or shortcomings in other parts of the education system. What it does believe is that universities and colleges have a responsibility to identify the talent and the potential of applicants and to treat all applicants fairly and transparently.
> (AHESG: September 2004, Foreword and Paragraph B6)

In this sense, the category of those who can apply to be selected for a higher education course is open. All those who apply (at least in theory) are in the context of the application process, an alliance of similars, or in other words, a homogeneous grouping, anyone can apply. However, the practice of university selection is closed, its target is closure, in that, the criteria for selection are regulated by the university who are authorised to resolve the problem of 'fair selection'. In this sense the system that constitutes university admissions practice, as the institutional recognition of cultural capital,

employs bureaucratic authority to mystify the process as that which is targeted at equilibration, the equalizing of different successful applications as meritorious. Once 'academic talent' has been legitimately identified the university has achieved closure, and applicants gain recognition as university students, once again equivalent in status, equilibrium has, once more, been established.

Once an applicant has submitted him or herself to the bureaucratic authority of the university and has received recognition as a university student, the student has gained the symbolic capital that the status of such recognition affords. The student has gained entry to the field of higher education and has the associated and differentiated, relational status dependent upon the institutional status of the institution to which he/she is now an apprenticed member. As a student, the target of interactive social action is closure, closure with respect to the hegemonic nature of the discourse associated with tutor-student engagement and closure in relation to the singular identity of the university as a recognised institution for admitting students to higher education programmes and awarding the symbolic capital of personalised qualifications. Whilst there will invariably be *economic capital exchange* in the process of recognition of symbolic capital (such as higher education qualifications) this must, according to Bourdieu, remain an ambiguous aspect of the process. For example, if we consider the speeches made at graduation ceremonies, whilst reference may be made to the required financial commitment a student or their family has made to make an award possible, any reference to 'buying a degree' would be sacrilegious. Rather, any financial aspect (such as tuition fees) may be more likely to be couched in terms of sacrifice or the overcoming of external obstacles to academic success. Awards themselves, at such occasions may tend to be associated with less explicitly calculable meritorious attributes such as diligence, personal development and achievement as much as the recognition of talent.

For example, a newsletter from my own university described the achievement of graduates at its graduation ceremony as follows:

> The ceremonies marked the culmination of years of hard work by each individual…We hope each special day will be one the graduates and their families will remember for the rest of their lives …Inspirational [student]…received her degree in History with Psychology. A mother of two, she juggled family and studies and the emotional difficulties of losing both her parents from cancer within a short space of time. In a message to others, [she]…said: "Don't make excuses, don't use your age and domestic situation as a reason for not getting an education, anything is possible. (University of Hertfordshire: 2005)

In such a context it would seem in gross bad taste to even refer to the fees that such a student might have paid for the course of study from which she graduated. Here mentioning 'the price' is taboo as it could associate the achievement described with calculated (self) interestedness. This might entail explicitly weighing the economic benefits of gaining a qualification as equivalent to the price paid, as opposed to euphemistically comparing personal sacrifice with well deserved reward. As Bourdieu has argued

> The economy of symbolic goods rests on the repression or the censorship of economic interests (in the narrow sense of the term). As a consequence, economic truth, that is, the price, must be actively or passively hidden or left vague. The economy of symbolic goods is

an economy of imprecision and indeterminacy. It is based on a taboo of making things explicit (a taboo which analysis violates by definition, thus exposing itself to making seem calculating and interested practices which are defined against calculations and interest). (Bourdieu: 1998 p.120)

This leaves one discursive space still unpopulated in the *modes of capital exchange*; the kind of capital exchange that implies a singularity of authorship, in the context of explicit exchange. Naidoo's first description of 'academic capital', that of intellectual or scientific capital' as 'scientific authority or intellectual renown' (Naidoo 2004 p.458), may be illustrative in this respect. Scientific authority could be conceived of as both bureaucratic and traditional, where the authority in question is either based on an institutionalised technology (for example, compliance with scientific method in academic journals), or the authority of those whose work constitutes the recognised scientific 'canon'. Similarly, 'intellectual renown' could be conceived of as symbolic capital constituted by the recognition of status in the higher education field. However, the claim for such status must first be made prior to its recognition.

By way of further illustration, we can consider the 'trajectory' of a PhD award in relation to the dynamic 'struggles' to maintain, gain, and accumulate capital within the higher education field. Proposals for PhD level study may be submitted in accordance with institutionalised procedures legitimated by bureaucratic authority. For example, London University Institute of Education website describes the requirements for MPhil/PhD proposal as follows:

> If you are applying for an *MPhil/PhD* you should supply a clear, well-defined research proposal as this is essential to academic staff when considering your acceptability and potential for doctoral level studies. Your research proposal should be about four pages in length (A4 size). It should give the aim and rationale for your research, the expected outcomes, how you hope to make a contribution to the proposed field and should include a short bibliography of the reading you have undertaken in the area of interest. (http://ioewebserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=7319&7319_0=7324, last accessed 24.09.08)

Here the MPhil/PhD proposal provides a means of recognition of cultural capital, supplemented by the usual requirement to possess appropriate symbolic capital in the form of appropriate qualifications. The development of a thesis is also regulated by institutionally authorised forms and processes. The claim to authorised 'originality' and 'contribution to knowledge' is regulated by institutionalised processes. The principles of final evaluation of a submitted thesis may also be to some extent regulated by the awarding institution. This might for example be in the form of institutional guidance for examiners in producing thesis evaluation reports/recommendations.

The recognition of *human (cultural) capital* is simultaneously the recognition of legitimate presence, within the higher education field, as one who can operate as a 'player'. It is, under usual circumstances, only when *institutional (cultural) capital* facilitates the recognition of *human (cultural) capital*, that such capital is consequently consecrated symbolically, through the award of a PhD (or other means of symbolic recognition). It is only when symbolic recognition of one's membership to the higher education club (field) is activated, that the academic 'play' can commence. In other words,

the bureaucratic practices of higher education institutions provide the initial authority or perhaps the cultural framework with which to legitimate the emergence of *human (cultural) capital*. This institutional/cultural 'framework' then facilitates charismatic authority claims for the recognition and exchange of *human (cultural) capital*, for *symbolic capital* and traditional authority.

STRATEGIC MOVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION CAPITAL EXCHANGE

We might then describe a number of possible strategies that might target the maintenance, or accumulation, of different species of capital. A strategy to weaken traditional authority, by making exchange explicit whilst maintaining singularity of authorship, is a move to generate human capital and distinction, with a view to gaining enhanced recognition and future symbolic capital (for example the PhD thesis). A strategy to maintain regulated, closed or euphemistic exchange practices, whilst weakening the singularity of authorship, emphasises and strengthens the institutional mechanisms for establishing cultural capital as a system, rather than any specific cultural content of such capital: for example, governmental quality assurance practices that determine the recognition or otherwise of the degree awarding powers of institutions. The governmental authority to grant 'degree awarding powers' has potentially significant beneficial financial implications for institutions. However, the symbolic capital that is gained by such recognition is primarily couched in terms of 'disinterested' quality assurance procedures that 'establish' the 'academic standards' and 'quality of student learning opportunities'. The 'misrecognition' of 'interest' as 'disinterestedness' attains the moral high ground and legitimates higher education as public service. In Bourdieu's terms, the economic aspects of symbolic capital exchange remain implicit and subject to euphemistic description.

Lastly, a strategy to make explicit the possibilities for exchange and at the same time, homogenise potential authorship (ownership), constitutes a weakening of traditional authority, towards a 'liberalising' move to establish economic capital in the field. In such a context there is no authority to establish the value of an exchange, other than the explicit price someone is willing to pay. Here participation is the only requirement or measure of success. For example, higher education institutions sometimes offer 'adult education' courses that do not lead to any recognised qualification but are offered to people as a 'lifestyle product'. However, even here, the fact that such courses are offered by a recognised higher education institution means that the symbolic capital, or status, of the institution operates to offer partial and informal recognition of this status by association. This may of course be the case with all economic capital goods, in that they are implicitly implicated in the symbolic economy, in the same way that symbolic capital goods are euphemistically implicated in the 'economic' economy. Whenever such a higher education product is offered, its value (recognised capital) can be significantly affected by the status of the 'brand' of the provider.

As has been indicated above, *modes of capital exchange* can be used to describe the relationship between the different strategies employed in the exchange 'species' of capital, including economic capital. This could be used to produce an analysis of the predominance or otherwise of one or more modes of capital exchange in a given text: for example, a predominance of the mode *economic* in relative opposition to *symbolic capital exchange*. However, this would not directly provide evidence of the (re)production of, or resistance to the idea of the commodification of higher education.

Commodification as a mode of discursive objectification

An alternative description of a higher education economy is provided by Marginson (2004) in his paper 'Competition and Markets in Higher Education'. Marginson argues that competition for status is not an essential human motivation but does accept "the ubiquity of the desire for relative advantage" (Marginson: 2004, p.84). He describes fours 'layers' of educational competition, which he has developed from Braudel's (1981) three layers of economic society. Marginson's four education competition layers are firstly, the pre-market work of lived educational practices; secondly, pre-market competition for social status in education; thirdly 'economic market competition' for status goods and fourthly 'a capitalist market', where although the 'goods on sale' are 'status goods', economic revenue is 'the driving force'.

This derivative of the Marxian economic base and superstructure formulation equates 'status goods' with a kind of personalised commodity.

> Like economic capital, with which it is not identical but is closely implicated, status is a social 'good' whose possession has fecund economic, political and cultural potentiality for the possessor. Status in higher education thus functions in the manner of an individualisable commodity benefit, albeit one that can be possessed by whole institutions as well as single persons. (Marginson: 2004 p.178)

Marginson argues that different institutions with different levels of status will engage with different types of, or in his terms, layers of economic or market activity. He argues that 'high status institutions' will compete for 'high value' students who can reproduce the status of the institution. As such, 'elite' institutions will, according to Marginson, take part in a 'status' economy. Low status institutions, according to this description, will face intense revenue competition, as students seek value for money. As such, Marginson argues that those institutions at the lowest end of the status hierarchy will have to engage in an increasingly full capitalist market.

Surprisingly, Marginson makes no reference to the work of Bourdieu in his analysis of higher education 'status goods', but seems to somewhat conflate his conception of them with economic capital to facilitate a Marxian commodity market analysis of higher education. For example, Kopytoff (1986) describes the commodities in opposition to that which is individualisable and singular, rather describing commodities as equivalent or homogeneous at the point of exchange. If 'status goods', such as higher education qualifications, are singular, unique and unexchangeable (in an explicit sense), then Marginson's argument that they are an 'individualisable' commodity benefit may be undermined and the conflation of 'status goods' with commodity goods could be a category error.

In 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' (1986) Kopytoff considers the differential modes of exchange that he describes as existing in different types of society. He also describes 'exchange' to be a universal feature of human social activity. He argues that economies of exchange become increasingly 'commoditised' in relation to the development of the available exchange technology within a given society. He contrasts commodity exchange with various kinds of obligated gift exchange in both 'small-scale' and 'complex societies'.

> To be saleable for money or to be exchangeable for a wide array of other things is to have something in common with a large number of exchangeable things that, taken together, partake of a single universe of comparable values…to be saleable or widely exchangeable is to be "common" – the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique, singular and therefore not exchangeable for anything else. The perfect commodity would be one that is exchangeable with anything and everything else, as the perfectly commoditised world would be one in which everything is exchangeable or for sale. By the same token the perfectly decommoditised world would be one in which everything is singular, unique, and unexchangeable. (Kopytoff: 1986, p.69)

Kopytoff acknowledges that neither 'perfectly commoditised' or 'perfectly decommoditised' worlds exist. However, his relational conception of 'the singular' and 'the commodity' as opposites can perhaps be 'opened up' to more comprehensively describe a range of possible culturally constructed 'things'.

Kopytoff argues that the availability of 'exchange technology', an explicit monetized system, a regulated system for establishing property rights as well as perhaps market trading technologies, operate as the 'drives' for increasing commoditisation. Commoditisation, for Kopytoff, constitutes the homogenisation of value as a price equivalent with a universe of comparable values. He goes on to describe the social 'forces' that are oppositional to commodification.

> The counter forces are culture and the individual, with their drive to discriminate, classify, compare, and sacrilise. (Kopytoff: 1986, p.87)

There is a tension in Kopytoff's description, in that commodities are defined as that which is 'comparable' and yet the drive towards commodification is opposed with the counter forces of 'culture and the individual' which drive to 'compare' (amongst other things). Presumably, the outcome of cultural and individual comparative processes can either be the establishment of commonality or a singularity. Perhaps then 'culture and the individual', in Kopytoff's terms, could operate to increase *or* resist commodification. This may provide insight into how the oppositional variables identified by Kopytoff as 'the commodity', 'the individual' and 'culture', could be reorganised to construct a more productive and conceptually comprehensive discursive space with which to describe cultural practice. Kopytoff describes commodities as 'the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique, singular', as such commodities are for Kopytoff, 'common' or 'homogeneous'. This provides a clear opposition between things or objects that are homogeneous and those that are singular. Kopytoff also describes another opposition; that which is between a world in which 'everything is exchangeable' and one in which everything is 'unexchangeable'. This can be described as a binary variable between the openness and the closure of exchange practice. Interestingly, Kopytoff identifies regulated systems of 'exchange technology' as operating to drive commodification and as such open exchange practice but it may also be the case that regulated systems can operate to close or exclude some forms of exchange practice. Similarly, objects that are 'sacrilised' and 'non-exchangeable' must be recognised as such in relation to social structures and cultural practices that are operating to regulate exchange.

Kopytoff describes some examples of objects whose value is personally or culturally singularised and some of the ways in which related exchange practices are ambiguous, inconsistent and at times contradictory: for example, in relation to personal singularisation, Kopytoff considers the ambiguity relating to a family heirloom in the context of potential exchange.

> What to me is an heirloom is, of course a commodity to the jeweller…to the jeweller, I am confusing two different systems of values: that of the marketplace and that of the closed sphere of personal singularised things both of which happen to converge on the object at hand. (Kopytoff: 1986, p.88)

In relation to processes of cultural singularisation Kopytoff provides the example of the 'Star of India', an object, which might ordinarily be traded as a commodity, on the diamond market, that is sacralised or consecrated by the British monarchy and the state, as a 'crown jewel'. Here, exchange is closed as cultural tradition excludes all possibility of sale for any price. Kopytoff also discusses (using the work of Picasso as an example), how the 'pricelessness' of art is in practice established by the association of an 'immense valuation' as a 'price'. Kopytoff argues that we are habituated into recognising examples of art that are established as national treasures, or perhaps canonical, as more valuable than the price they might be sold for. Here, Kopytoff argues that the recognition of the singularity of a work of art's status is not only defined in relation to a snapshot of its position, in what Bourdieu would call the symbolic economy, but is also a result of the history of its socially mediated relations to economic (and perhaps other) exchange markets. Kopytoff argues that in the same way that individuals are constitutive of the historical construction of multiple identities in complex societies, so likewise, 'things' also have historical biographies.

> It is from these cases that we can learn how the forces of commodification and singularisation are intertwined in ways far more subtle than our ideal modes can show, how one breaks the rules by moving between spheres that are supposed to be insulated from each other, how one converts what is formally unconvertible, how one masks these actions and with whose contrivance, and not least, how the spheres are reorganised and things reshuffled between them in the course of a society's history. (Kopytoff: 1986, p.88)

It is in consideration of the ambiguous and dynamic relationships between the binary variables or oppositions discussed above that I will construct a discursive space that I call *modes of discursive* objectification to attempt to describe the discursive strategies in play within official higher education texts. .

MODES OF DISCURSIVE OBJECTIFICATION

This thesis is concerned with the analysis of texts identified as instances of socio-cultural action within the higher education discursive field and as such, the form of exchange that is relevant is 'discursive exchange'. By this I mean the transaction between reader and text and more specifically the ways that texts strategically construct textual subjectivities (for example author and audience) and textual objectivities. The thesis is specifically concerned with describing the strategies which operate to construct 'higher education' as a *commodified* textual object and those strategies that are employed to resist this.

In addition to constituting subjectivities (for example authors and audiences) texts also constitute the 'object(s)' of which they speak. Texts constitute relative subjectivities and relative 'objectivities'. Texts that describe higher education, (re)construct 'higher education' as a socially produced discursive 'object'. The analysis of *modes of discursive objectification* will attempt to describe how the recontextualisation of higher education practice within selected texts (re)constructs higher education as that which is more or less singularised in the context of more or less open discursive exchange. Here, homogeneous objectification is that which is constituted as equivalent with an open category of comparable other objects. In other words, a mode of objectification that is homogeneous describes (positions) an object as that which can be compared with other objects in some way. A homogeneous category of objectivity is a description of a commonality between objects, whereas a singular objectivity is that which is constituted as unique and non-comparable.

By constructing a discursive space from the binary variables of singularity and homogeneity with those of open and closed discursive exchange, we can attempt to describe the dynamic relationships between the textual strategies identified in my analysis (reading) of official higher education texts. In other words, *modes of discursive objectification* are not used to describe or categorise texts as being one or other type of textual object. Rather, the various modes describe a comprehensive range of discursive strategies that can be employed to construct a textual object. It may of course be the case that a text employs a number of modes of discursive objectification concurrently. It may also be the case that texts may employ modes dynamically, evidencing strategic moves from one (or several) mode(s) to another. The analysis of texts will describe a 'modality' between a defined range of discursive strategies that operate to construct textual objectivities including the *commodified mode*.

In opposition to *commodified* discursive objectification, three other ideal types (or modes) are here described; *iconic/symbolic* objectification, *aesthetic* objectification and *institutional* objectification (see Figure 6 below). Within this construction *commodified* discursive objectification emerges as that which is described as homogeneous, within the context of open discursive exchange (where everything is potentially exchangeable). This is oppositional to *iconic/symbolic* discursive objectification, which describes that which is sacralised or consecrated as singular, unique and non-exchangeable as a consequence of symbolic recognition as beyond price, or perhaps outside price and not for sale. Here, it is possible to think of religious or royal artefacts, art that constitutes national treasure, iconic public buildings, gifts, awards and titles etc. The *aesthetic* mode of discursive objectification describes that which is singular and positioned as openly exchangeable. Whilst consecrated art might achieve iconic status, art that is singular, unique and charismatically authored can be, and usually is, marketed. This could also be applied to the publications and sale of 'non-artistic' texts including academic books, amongst other things.

Lastly *institutional* discursive objectification is conceived of as that which represents 'contentless' regulation; the gallery exhibition plinth, (see Dowling: 2004a, in press) used to (re)contextualise an object as art, would be a good example. The *institutional* mode describes a technology of exchange to categorise, classify and regulate, it is the mechanism that facilitates both iconic/symbolic consecration and commodification. The *institutional* mode describes that which contextualises 'art' as culturally recognised art, and that to which 'art', in opposition (or juxtaposition), is singularised.

Objectification	Discursive exchange	
	Open	*Closed*
Singular	Aesthetic	Iconic/symbolic
Homogeneous	Commodified	Institutional

FIGURE 6: MODES OF DISCURSIVE OBJECTIFICATION

For example, a description of 'the autonomy of universities in academic matters' could be read as constituting an *aesthetic* objectification of higher education practice as it implies that each individual university operates autonomously in an openly discursive environment. On the other hand, it also implies that universities have the individual authority to regulate 'academic matters' which would constitute a closing of discursive exchange and an *iconic/symbolic* objectification. If however, 'the autonomy of universities in academic matters' is read as a homogeneous description that excluded those outside the sector from having a voice in academic matters then it could constitute an *institutional* objectification. This illustration is designed to demonstrate two things. Firstly, that not all textual constructions constitute the commodified mode and secondly, that descriptions of higher education practice can operate in multiple and conflicting modes simultaneously.

Chapters four, five and six will include an analysis of three selected official higher education texts employing the methodology described within this and the previous chapter. This will include the specific analysis of oppositions and alliances drawn from each text followed by the recontextualisation of these oppositions and alliances in relation to *modes of discursive objectification*. The analysis of each text will attempt to describe how the strategic relationships between discursive objectification modes employed operate to reproduce or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education.

Chapter four - Reading the regulation of higher education quality assurance

Introduction

LOCATING THE HANDBOOK FOR ACADEMIC REVIEW WITHIN THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

Since 1997 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has conducted reviews, of individual institutions and subjects, into the standards and quality of higher education within the UK. The QAA is contracted by the Higher Education funding bodies within the UK to carry out this work. The QAA has developed a number of review methods since 1997, for example 'Subject Review', 'Academic Review' and 'Institution Audit', amongst others. For each review method, the QAA have produced a 'Handbook'. This is a 'practical guide' for Reviewers (those contracted by the QAA to conduct reviews) and staff within institutions whose higher education provision is to be reviewed.

These handbooks however, are part of an extensive regulatory framework that, to a significant degree, defines UK higher education. The QAA has produced a range of other documentation, developed in consultation with representatives from higher education institutions. This documentation, collectively referred to as 'The Academic Infrastructure' is designed to provide "reference points that help define clear and specific standards" (www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/qaaintro.asp).

The Academic Infrastructure includes the following documents:
- *The Framework for higher education qualifications*, which establishes the "achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles" (www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/qaaintro.asp).
- Subject benchmark statements, which "set out expectations about the standards of degrees in a range of subject areas" (www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/qaaintro.asp).
- Programme specification guidelines, "A programme specification is a concise description of the intended learning outcomes from a higher education programme, and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated."
  (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicsinfrastructure/programmespec/default.asp.)
- "The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education… is a guideline on good practice for universities and colleges, relating to the management of academic standards and quality."
- *Guidelines for HE Progress Files*. "Progress Files make the outcomes, or results, of learning in higher education more explicit, identify the achievements of learning, and support the concept that learning is a lifetime activity."
  (www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressfiles/default.asp.)

The QAA also "advise Government on applications for the grant of degree awarding powers, university title, or designation as a higher education institution" (www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/qaaintro.asp.)

The QAA's broad ranging regulatory framework, in a sense, significantly 'defines' the scope or territory of UK higher education. The documents, or texts, that the QAA produce seem therefore

likely to provide evidence relevant to an analysis concerning (re)production or resistance of the idea of the commodification of higher education within the UK.

The review Handbooks, amongst other QAA texts, are constituted as guides for Reviewers and institutions being reviewed. These texts have been distributed in printed form to relevant institutions providing higher education and are publicly available on the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA or the Agency) website (qaa.ac.uk).

THE ANALYSIS OF THE HANDBOOK FOR ACADEMIC REVIEW

This chapter will constitute an analysis of a specific Handbook text as a relevant example of an official text concerned with the regulation of the quality of higher education. The specific text selected for analysis is the *Handbook for academic review: England*, (2004) (the Handbook). In describing the higher education discursive field, chapter two described Foucaultian 'technologies of truth', following Simola et al (1998), which included 'technologies of self', 'technologies of government' and 'technologies of discourse'. This model of the power relations within discursive fields has been employed to provide a rationale for the selection of official texts within the higher education field for analysis within this thesis. The analysis of the Handbook provides an example of an official text related to 'technologies of self'. The Handbook describes a process that determines the official approval of higher education providers and as a consequence the identification of the 'good' institutional subject. QAA Academic Review describes 'who' can be a higher education provider.

The Handbook text does not exist in isolation but also refers itself, to a range of other documents also available on the QAA website. These include previous and other concurrent handbooks that describe quality review and institutional audit processes, as well as the other documents collectively referred to as the 'Academic Infrastructure', listed above. The QAA website also includes quality reports for all reviews undertaken by the Agency as well as Agency policy statements, consultation documents, annual report, strategic plan and other reports. For the purposes of this analysis, the boundary of the object text is determined as that of the *Handbook for Academic Review* itself. However, as indicated above, several other QAA documents are explicitly referred to within the Handbook (for example Academic Infrastructure documents). Where this is the case, reference to these documents will be made in the context of the analysis but only with respect to their description within the Handbook. Any further 'blurring' of the boundary of the object text will be highlighted within the analysis.

To summarise, the method of analysis in this chapter will produce a 'constructive description' including:

1. The introduction to the location of the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review* within the higher education field (as discussed above).
2. An overview of the authorial and audience voices constructed in my transaction with the Handbook (reconstructed in the reader's transaction with this text)
3. An analysis of how the Handbook is operating to recontextualise 'higher education' as quality assurance practice.
4. The identification and analysis of oppositions and alliances within the Handbook to construct a specialised and localised mode of action – 'modes of review'.

5. The recontexualisation of oppositions and alliances described in the analysis (items 1-4 above) in relation to modes of discursive objectification.

6. An analysis of the dynamics of the distribution and exclusion of textual objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification, including the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode.

The *modes of review* discursive space will be constructed directly from oppositions and alliances that emerge from my reading of the Handbook. This analysis will constitute an 'elaborated description' of the Handbook in that it will attempt to synthesise my reading of the text as empirical data with the specialised theory (discursive spaces etc) I have related to it and in doing so construct a new description of the text (see Brown and Dowling, 1998). In other words, this mode of action will be used to generate an elaborated description of how the text is operating to recontextualise higher education practice. This discursive space identifies four possible modes or 'ideal types'. The aim is not to definitively locate texts in relation to each discursive space and a text may coherently be described in relation to more than one mode. For example, a text may constitute different authorial and audience relationships in different sections of a text. As Dowling (2004a, in press) has pointed out, 'ideal types' or modes within his 'modes of authority action' can be considered to relate to each other dynamically or as strategic moves between modes. This analysis (as my textual construction) will then be further recontextualised to attempt to produce a description of the extent to which the Handbook is operating to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of its commodification in relation to *modes of discursive objectification*.

Authorial and audience voices within the Handbook
In recontextualising higher education practice, the Handbook constructs authorial and audience 'voices'. For example, the Handbook makes explicit reference to 'the Agency' (the QAA) as the author of the Handbook determining its purpose, its audiences and its intended role in implementing the procedures described. Audiences include 'Reviewers', those who conduct Reviews, and higher education providers, institutions that deliver government funded higher education. The ways in which such 'voices' are constructed within the Handbook create relational and strategic positions that are the focus of this part of the analysis.

The QAA is explicitly identified as the authorial voice within the Handbook. The authorial voice is signified by the use of the term 'the Agency' in numerous instances (ninety one times in fact) throughout the text. For example on page one.

> The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) sought comment as to how the first edition of the *Handbook for academic review, 2000* could be improved and focussed amendments on the needs of FECs [Further Education Colleges], Review Coordinators, specialist reviewers, subject specialist review facilitators, academic staff and students. This second edition of the *Handbook* takes account of the suggestions for improvement (Handbook: p1)

Usefully, in the context of this analysis, the above statement also identifies various types of authorial and audience voices, that the QAA describe as being relevant for providing comment on Handbook improvements. Whilst there are a number of potential authorial and/or audience voices cited within

the Handbook (the UK Government, HEFCE, employers, students, the public) several of these voices are to a significant degree 'non-present', or what Dowling has called 'displaced' (2001). In other words, whilst they are referred to, they are not directly addressed as an audience within the text and are not directly positioned as an authorial voice. Rather, as Dowling suggests

> This is a form of positioning action in which the authorial voice *affiliates* to the addressed audience voice either tacitly or explicitly. (Dowling: 2001, p11)

In this instance the QAA, as the authorial voice, affiliates in differing ways, to different audiences' voices. For example, references to the UK Government and HEFCE can be described as an attempt to legitimise the authority of the QAA to describe (to act as author) the process of Academic Review. Such reference is also employed to establish the QAA's positional authority in relation to the institutions whose higher education provision is to be reviewed. References to the UK Government and HEFCE, as such, operate to establish the 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1998) of the QAA as a body 'authorised' to carry out Reviews of higher education.

References to employers are constructed to position employers as representatives within the process of Review, either as potential peer Reviewers, or as participants in meetings concerning

> the involvement of employers in the evaluation of standards and quality...Meetings with employers enable the reviewers to establish employers' views on the programmes being considered and inform the reviewers' judgements on the curriculum on offer and their perceptions of their employees' (the students) learning experience. These meetings provide an opportunity not only to hear the direct views of those present, but also to establish more generally whether there are effective arrangements for employers' feedback and representation...The agenda should focus particularly on the relevance and usefulness of the curriculum and the knowledge and skills gained by students. The reviewers will be interested in establishing the extent to which the curriculum on offer of direct benefit to the employers' organisation or industry. (Handbook: p45)

In addition, the Handbook also explicitly states, in the section describing the 'Agenda for meeting with employers', that "A meeting with employers is not an essential component of the review method and only takes place if employers constitute an appropriate source of evidence" (Handbook: p45). The notion of 'peer' review that includes representatives from relevant employment sectors is an extension of the notion of 'peer' beyond that which might be associated with academic peer review. However, the section of the Handbook that describes "knowledge and skills of specialist reviewers" (Handbook: p 30) makes it clear that "…in the case of industrially or professionally-based reviewers, familiarity with HE teaching and learning" will need to be demonstrated in order to meet QAA requirements for recognition as a Reviewer. As such, employment sector representatives can only act as Reviewers where they also meet non-employer specific criteria, identified by the QAA. So employers could be an intended audience, if they are training as Reviewers but their identification as such, is not dependent upon them being employers. The criteria described within the Handbook required for recognition as a Reviewer do not require any experience as an employer. Where employers have recognition within the description of the process of Review it is as a 'source of evidence' rather than as a potential 'reader' or audience.

Similarly, whilst the Handbook states that a focus on the students' learning experience' (Handbook: p2) is a key feature of Review, the Handbook does not address students as an audience. Rather, the views of students and mechanisms for obtaining their views are positioned as a key source of evidence in relation to judgements concerning standards and quality. In a sense, the method described within the Handbook is an explicit mechanism for objectifying 'the student learning experience' in order that 'judgements' about the quality of such experience can be made. For example, within the "Agenda for meetings with current and former students" (Handbook: p42) it is made clear that "reviewers always hold meetings with representative groups of current students" (Handbook: p42). These meetings are described as a 'dialogue' and an opportunity to hear the direct views of students. The Handbook explicitly states that these meetings are not limited by the 'indicative' agenda provided. However, the construction of the 'space' for the 'dialogue' between Reviewers and students is highly constrained, by the subjectification of both, through the elaborated descriptions of their respective roles within the Review methodology.

> Meetings with students enable the reviewers to establish student views on the questions being considered, and inform the reviewers' judgements on the quality of the student learning experience…Throughout the meeting, students will be given opportunities to raise points not covered by the reviewers' agenda. The agenda which follows is indicative and the reviewers use it selectively and contextualise it so that questions are relevant and meaningful to the particular group of students. (Handbook: Annex H, p42)

The indicative agenda referred to above within the Handbook has a total of forty two questions categorised into six 'aspects' that correspond to the areas evaluated in the Self Evaluation Document which institutions are required to submit prior to review. Even if students are given the opportunity to raise points not covered in the indicative agenda, the highly prescriptive agenda seems likely to regulate 'dialogue'.

While 'the public' are positioned as an audience for the 'Final Reports', that are published on the QAA website they are not addressed as an audience within the Handbook text itself. However, the public and therefore open nature of the distribution of the Final Report may be significant in establishing the extent to which such practices constitute a commodification of higher education. I will be returning to this point later in the analysis.

One significant change from the 2000 edition of the Handbook is that Academic Review from after 2001 would only take place in Further Education Colleges (FECs) that delivered directly (HEFCE) funded higher education. After this time, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) became subject to a different quality review method – that of Institutional Audit. As a consequence, directly funded FECs are constituted as an important audience within the text. In one sense, FECs can be considered as the prime audience. It is higher education provision within directly funded FECs that is the specific 'object' of the Academic Review process within the Handbook.

Review Coordinators, specialist reviewers and subject specialist review facilitators are all roles that are defined within the Handbook. Review Coordinators and specialist reviewers are appointed by the QAA, whereas subject specialist review facilitators are nominated by institutions under review but are

also required to be trained by the QAA. The requirements for all of these roles are described within the Handbook including levels and types of participation in processes such as meetings, reviewing of 'evidence' and judgements. Review Coordinators and Specialist Reviewers are described in relation to detailed person specification sections in the Handbook. They are collectively referred to as 'reviewers' in the section entitled 'Guidance for review teams' (Annex B, p18-23). This section is the clearest indication that the Handbook is designed as a pedagogic text for a reviewer audience, in addition to the institutions (in this case FECs) providing higher education, who are being reviewed.

The Handbook not only constructs authorial and audience voices in relation to the QAA and 'review teams' respectively but also explicitly subjectifies each type of audience within the text. The context of 'reading as a reviewer' (or other defined role) is not only something engendered in the act of discursive engagement but is a predetermined self-identification, a characterisation that an individual is invited to fulfil in an explicit act of subjectification.

> Specialist reviewers are recruited by the Agency from individuals nominated by colleges or other organisations and individuals who reply to advertisements. Specialist reviewers are recruited and trained to ensure that they are capable of carrying out their duties effectively. (Handbook: Annex C, p28)

However, in consideration of the quotation above, it may be that reviewers themselves may not be the primary or only audience. Perhaps the non-explicit audience constructed in the above Handbook excerpt is institutions to be reviewed, or academic staff within such institutions, who will be asked to engage with Review processes. Where the text states that "Specialist reviewers are recruited and trained to ensure that they are capable of carrying out their duties effectively" (Handbook: p28) it seems clear that the subjectification of 'reviewers' is at least targeted at an audience in addition to 'reviewers' themselves. In other words the recognition and identification of 'Reviewers' as 'Reviewers' by the QAA is positioned as a guarantee of 'effectiveness' for institutions. This 'effectiveness' is 'measured' and evaluated by the QAA in relation to Reviewers' capability to carry out quality assurance procedures designed by the QAA. The QAA maintains its authority to determine the criteria that establishes such 'effectiveness' and retains privileged access to the principles that generate such criteria.

Within the Academic Review Handbook, the QAA, as the primary authorial voice, are constructed as the transmitter of privileged content, i.e. the Academic Review methodology and associated processes transmitted to apprenticed reviewers and institutions to be reviewed. In both cases, the "evaluation of performances are located with the transmitter" (Dowling: 1999, p2). As the intended readers are higher education professionals with specialist esoteric knowledge of higher education, this privileging constitutes a further specialisation within an existing esoteric domain, rather than a specialised practice as distinguished from the public domain. The specialised esoteric domain, in this case, is higher education quality assurance and in particular the specific model of the evaluation of the quality of higher education provision described as QAA Academic Review.

In one sense, the potential readers of this work are equivalent, in that subject reviewers are 'peer' reviewers drawn from within the higher education community. However, the very different roles that are identified between those reviewing and those being reviewed uniquely position each type of

potential audience described in the Handbook. Reading as a Reviewer is not the same as reading as a 'provider': for example, within Annex B 'Aide-memoire for academic review' (p16), two audiences are explicitly identified: firstly, 'Guidance for colleges when preparing self-evaluations' and secondly, 'Guidance for review teams'. Within the 'guidance for colleges' section, despite the statement that the aide-memoire "is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive" (Handbook: p16), colleges are warned that they

> should take care to ensure that their self-evaluation meets the needs of the review and answers the questions the reviewers are likely to pursue. (Handbook: p16)

In other words, colleges should describe themselves and their higher education practice 'as if' they were under the gaze of Reviewers. The technology of self-evaluation deploys a 'panoptic' surveillance strategy to regulate the practice of self-description.

Colleges are also told here that they will

> find it helpful to refer to the prompts and questions in the aide-memoire below. Colleges should also refer to the components of the Academic infrastructure such as the Code of Practice, the FHEQ [Framework for Higher education Qualifications] and relevant subject benchmarking statements, where appropriate" (Handbook: p16)

Here colleges are clearly being given fairly strong advice as to how a self-evaluation document 'should' be constructed in order to comply with the requirements of an Academic Review as described within the Handbook. The text makes it clear that both Review teams and the QAA have to formally agree that a self-evaluation document is 'appropriately' constructed to 'meet the needs' of Review. Where this is judged not to be the case, self-evaluation documents will be returned to the institution for amendment until they comply. Colleges are, as such, positioned as 'apprentice' in relation to the authorial voice of the QAA, in the context of a pedagogic process of instruction into the esoteric practice of quality review of higher education.

At the same time, sections that explicitly identify Reviewers as the targeted audience also implicitly position colleges as an apprenticed audience. For example, in the section 'Guidance for review teams' there is additional implicitly strong 'advice' for colleges. This advice indicates what it is that Reviewers 'should' be able to ascertain or make 'judgements' about if a self-evaluation document, or other 'evidence', is appropriately presented (constructed). For example,

> The reviewers should be able to judge whether intended learning outcomes are clearly stated and are appropriate to the level of the awards meeting the requirements of external reference points. (Handbook: p18)

The formulation 'reviewers *should* be able to judge' is repeated for two other 'aspects' of review, 'Assessment' and 'Achievement'. However, other aspects, such as 'Curriculum', Teaching and Learning' and 'Learning Resources' employ the formulation 'reviewers *will* be able to judge' (emphasis not in original text). This may indicate a differing 'level' of implicit 'advice' to colleges about the way in which statements are made about 'intended learning outcomes, 'Assessment' and

'Achievement' to ensure that Reviewers are 'able' to make 'judgements', whereas, the formulation 'reviewers will be able to judge' provides for less opportunity for authorial input thus objectifying the colleges' provision to a greater extent.

The above examples indicate some of the positioning strategies employed within the Handbook and illustrates some of the relative alliances and oppositions that are constructed in the context of differentiated authorial and audience voices.

The recontextualisation of higher education as quality assurance practice
The Handbook, as object text, is here described as a representation of institutionalised socio-cultural activity constituted by oppositions and alliances in the establishment of strategic positions such as that of author and audience. The activity that the Handbook is concerned with is the practice of higher education. The description of higher education practice within the Handbook is, it is argued here, a recontextualisation of higher education practice. It is argued that the Handbook employs an elaborated language of institutionalised higher education quality assurance practice, to facilitate the categorisation and classification of 'higher education' as legitimate and 'officially approved'. For example, the Handbook explicitly identifies higher education 'subjects' (disciplines), that will be 'reviewed' during the period of 2004 to 2006. The rationale for describing higher education practice, as categorised in relation to specific pre-determined 'subjects', is not made explicit within the text except by reference to subject benchmarking statements as part of 'the Academic Infrastructure'. However, it is clear that the conception of 'the Academic Infrastructure' and the categorisation of higher education practices as constituting different 'subjects' imply the existence of bureaucratic boundaries that serve to classify higher education for the purposes of quality assurance practice. In other words, what higher education 'is', becomes determined by the mechanism that is employed to 'measure' its quality, which is itself a recontextualisation of higher education.

Reference is made, within the Handbook, to the 'statutory responsibility' of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

> to ensure that provision is made for assessing the quality of the education it funds and [HEFCE] has a responsibility for reporting to government on standards and quality (Handbook p.1)

The Handbook also states that the QAA is 'contracted by HEFCE to carry out [quality] review work'. In other words, the QAA is positioned as the agency that enables HEFCE to fulfil (at least part of) its statutory responsibility. The Handbook states that one (of three) main purposes of quality reviews is

> to secure value from public investment through ensuring that all education for which funding is provided is of approved quality…and to enable judgements to inform HEFCE funding decisions. (Handbook p.1)

This indicates at least three things: firstly, that the type of higher education practice that is being described, is that which is, at least partially, dependant upon government funding, secondly, that funding is dependent on the recognition of such higher education practice as officially approved and that such approval has legislative force, thirdly, that funded higher education practice, which

represents 'value', can be determined and measured. The Handbook is, in this sense, designed to both establish that which is 'valuable' in higher education practice and to establish a procedure for the measurement of identified instances, or 'units of review', of such practice. The handbook is, as such, designed to contribute to the achievement of a desired planned outcome.

> The mission of the Agency is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of HE qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE. (Handbook: p1)

The 'judgements' of 'value', defined as 'academic standards' and 'the quality of learning opportunities' within the Handbook, are described as arriving out of the evaluation of the extent to which aims are met and intended learning outcomes are achieved. The procedure described in the Handbook also requires that both 'aims' and 'intended learning outcomes' are explicit and 'appropriate', to facilitate the making of quality review judgements. In other words, both aims and intended learning outcomes must be measurable. The quality review process described in the Handbook only recognises higher education that is itself described as a goal orientated practice with 'clear aims' and explicit 'intended learning outcomes', the achievement of which can be measured. This means that higher education practices that are excluded by this kind of description do not constitute 'higher education', in the context of the Academic Review procedures detailed in the Handbook. It is of course possible that higher education could be recontextualised differently, for example, as a practice whose outcomes are non-determinable or perhaps only determinable in relation to highly localised practices etc.

Given that it is possible to describe aspects of higher education practice that do not have stated aims and learning outcomes, it is clear that the Handbook recontextualises higher education practice in the process of the implementation of the Academic Review process it describes. The Handbook, as such, excludes some potential descriptions of higher education and in doing so, the methodology it describes, to this extent, determines that which is being measured by it.

THE ESOTERIC DOMAIN OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE PRACTICE

Within the Handbook, amongst the 'Qualities required in all reviewers' section is the requirement to "demonstrate commitment to the principles of quality assurance of HE provision" (Handbook: p28) and "In addition, reviewers are expected to have a clear knowledge and understanding of the Agency's academic review process and the Academic Infrastructure" (Handbook: p28). Reviewers are also expected to "have completed successfully the Agency's training programme" (Handbook: p28). Blurring the boundaries of the object text to a degree, previous versions of the Handbook have also described it as a 'key document for those taking part in the training programme (QAA Subject Review Handbook 1998). The Handbook can, as such, be described as a pedagogic text in relation to the apprenticeship of prospective Reviewers into the esoteric practice of Academic Review of higher education quality.

Other potential audiences, such as 'employers' or 'the public', are not placed in a hierarchical relationship with the QAA. Such audiences are not subject to the authority of the QAA and as such, the Handbook is not operating within a regulatory or pedagogic context when addressing such audiences. However, to what extent can the QAA Academic Review Handbook be described as a

transmission text that explicitly facilitates Reviewers and also Colleges' access to the principles that generate discourse within the esoteric domain of higher education quality? The Handbook does describe 'the main purposes of reviews' (Handbook: p1) and the 'features of academic review' (Handbook: p2), for example that 'Academic review is based on self-evaluation'. However, whilst the Handbook requires a demonstrable commitment to the principles of higher education quality assurance it does not explicitly describe the principles upon which the practice itself (for example the emphasis on self-evaluation) is premised. The Handbook does not explain why quality review of higher education is based on self-evaluation; it rather just states that it is. Similarly, notions of 'academic standards' and 'the quality of learning opportunities' are presented as givens. The reader is told what these terms mean in the context of QAA Academic Review but the reader is not given any insight as to the rationale or principles that might have generated the these particular descriptions. They are described in the Handbook as follows:

- reporting on **academic standards** in a subject is concerned with the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes set by the subject provider, in relation to relevant subject benchmarking statements, qualification levels and the overall aims of the provision, the effectiveness of curricular content and assessment arrangements, in relation to the intended learning outcomes, and the achievement of these outcomes by the student;

- reporting on the **quality of learning outcomes** in a subject is concerned with the effectiveness of the teaching, the academic support and the learning resources in promoting student learning, achievement and progression across the various programmes.
  (Handbook: p1-2 - bold type in original)

These two statements are rich with principles that are not made explicit and also rely heavily on the bureaucratic framework within which descriptions of higher education practice is positioned, what the QAA call the Academic Infrastructure. For example, the notion of academic subjects and the differentiated descriptions of these in 'subject benchmarking statements' and the emphasis on 'intended learning outcomes' as an seemingly essential aspect of higher education practice are presented as incontrovertible. There is, at least, no indication that higher education might be described differently. As such, the requirement for Reviewers to commit to the 'principles of quality assurance of HE provision' is rather a commitment to the particular mechanisms, constructions and procedures of quality assurance practice as described within the Handbook. Here the QAA, as author of the procedures described in the Handbook, retain privileged access to the principles to which they require Reviewers to demonstrate commitment. As such, the handbook can be described as a pedagogic text, which regulates readers (in this instance Reviewers') access to the principles that generate the esoteric domain of higher education quality assurance practice.

The Handbook operates to apprentice reviewers and academic staff into the esoteric practice of Academic Review. Higher education itself can of course be described as an esoteric domain but higher education quality assurance can be described as a more specialised practice within the higher education field. The Academic Review Handbook recontextualises higher education practice as higher education quality assurance practice. This is achieved, not necessarily by associating it with descriptions of an activity drawn from the public domain, but by associations that are none the less familiar to a higher education practitioner audience. The esoteric domain of higher education practice

is recontextualised by its location in descriptions of higher education quality assurance practices. This recontextualisation employs references that are familiar to the audience, (reviewers and academic staff), positioned as apprenticed members of 'the academic community', or 'peers', by the text. For example, the very term 'peer review' is recruited from the discourse of academic production to describe higher education quality assurance processes.

The use of the term 'peer review' aligns established practices in academic discourse (peer review of academic journals etc) with the further specialised esoteric practices of higher education quality assurance that reviewers and institutions under review, are being apprenticed in. There are of course further possible questions that can be considered concerning the actual operation of the peer review process itself: for example, the ways in which recognition as 'a peer', with power to regulate access to (academic journal) publication is determined but such considerations are not, for the moment, apposite. The point is rather to illustrate how the term 'peer review' is operating to regulate access to the esoteric domain of higher education quality assurance practice. This also indicates that the Handbook is not intended for a 'public' audience, as the reference to 'peer review' seems likely to resonate primarily with the notion of the 'academic community'. On the other hand, it is worth noting that this particular version Handbook is related only to Reviews in Further Education Colleges (FECs) directly funded by HEFCE, whereas (to blur slightly the object text) the 2001 version included all higher education institutions.

FECs are institutions that do not receive any HEFCE funding for academic research and where the contractual requirement for staff engagement with such research is likely to be, as a consequence, far less explicit if present at all. References to 'peer review' may not resonate as strongly or perhaps in the same way with academic staff audiences in FECs. It may be that academic staff that work in FECs are less likely to recognise themselves and their practice, by association with academic peer review processes.

The following sections will comprise the analysis of oppositions and alliances that I identify in my reading of the Handbook text. The analysis will construct a discursive space that I will call *modes of review* which is designed to provide new perspectives (descriptions) concerning the relative strategic positionings, of subjectivities and objectivities, evidenced within the text.

Modes of review

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The Handbook identifies 'peer review' as a key feature of 'academic review'

> … peer review: teams include current lecturers from HEIs and FECs and, wherever possible, for vocational subjects, reviewers from the relevant employment sector (Annex C provides details of the role and responsibility of reviewers). (Handbook: p2)

Annex C tells us

> There are two types of academic reviewer used by the Agency: specialist reviewers, with current teaching experience in the discipline concerned, or experience of relevant

professional or occupational practice; Review Coordinators, who lead academic reviews and have extensive experience of quality assurance and programme approval of HE programmes, usually gained by working with such procedures in more than one discipline. (Handbook: p30)

From these descriptions we can see that 'reviewers' (those who conduct academic reviews on behalf of the QAA) are positioned as 'peers'. However, it is clear that the category of 'peer' is a little elastic. One sense of the term 'peer', included in the extract above, indicates that individuals who have been recognised as current higher education practitioners carry out the quality review process. However, this does not mean that academic reviews can be carried out by any higher education practitioner ("current lecturers from HEIs and FECs"). Annex C identifies specific 'qualities', 'knowledge' and 'skills' that are 'required'. In addition, Annex C identifies the specific requirements of the process of 'recruitment' and 'training' necessary to the establishment of recognition as a QAA reviewer. This recognition is, then, a differentiation or specialisation from the category of higher education practitioner. It is a recontextualisation of the role of higher education practitioner employed to describe the role of a QAA reviewer.

The identification of 'peers' implies the identification of and membership of, a group of individuals who can be described homogenously in some sense. Amongst a potentially infinite range of such possible groupings is the categorisation by professional, or occupational role. The group "current lecturers from HEIs and FECs…" (Handbook: p2) could, in theory, range from university professors to basic literacy teachers. It could include PhD supervisors or facilitators of adult leisure education. The point is that this 'peer group' is very broad in relation to the type of practice that is potentially recognised as 'inside' the category. However, the recognition of being a QAA reviewer seems contrastingly narrow.

The Handbook tells the reader that there are two types of 'academic reviewer', 'specialist reviewers' and 'Review Coordinators'. With regards to 'specialist reviewers' the reader is introduced to a further distinction of the category of 'peers'. 'Specialist reviewers', as well as being 'current lecturers from HEIs and FECs", are also identified as those "with current teaching experience in the discipline concerned". Here, the 'discipline concerned' is the academic subject (as defined by the QAA in subject benchmarking statements) within which the higher education provision that is being reviewed falls. In other words, 'specialist reviewers' are identified as members of a specialised category of "current lecturers from HECs and FECs" "with current teaching experience" in a particular academic subject. Lecturers who do not currently teach a specialised subject would, as such, not be recognised as specialist reviewers for that subject. They would, presumably, not be recognised as peers (specialist peers?) in this sense and would fall outside this categorisation.

However, there is another category of 'specialist reviewer' peer that does not require being a 'current lecturer' at all. Individuals who are recognised as having "experience of relevant professional or occupational practice" are identified as subject related 'peers'. This notion of 'peer group' draws a relationship between those who teach a specific academic subject within higher education institutions or further education colleges and those whose professional or occupational practice is seen as relevant to that subject. This category of 'reviewer' may be outside the 'lecturer peer group' but inside the 'practice relevant to a specific academic subject peer group'. There could, for example be

a peer group of professional designers or lawyers, or accountants etc. Of this group, some may apply to the QAA to become recognized as 'specialist reviewers'. Such recognition, presumably, establishes their identification as members of a further specialised peer group, determined by the QAA, which includes lecturers in an academic subject seen as relevant to a particular profession.

Returning to the category of academic reviewer, the Handbook describes a second 'type', 'Review Coordinators'. Review Coordinators are not necessarily current lecturers in an identified academic subject. They also do not necessarily have experience of professional practice relevant to an identified academic subject. As such, they seem to fall outside the peer group categories described so far. Perhaps this is why the reader is told that peer review teams "include current lecturers from HECs and FECs" (Handbook: p2). Whilst peer review teams 'include' current lecturers, they are not exclusively comprised of them and also include another category of 'peer' i.e. Review Coordinators.

> Review Coordinators, who lead academic reviews and have extensive experience of quality assurance and programme approval of HE programmes, usually gained by working with such procedures in more than one discipline. (Handbook: p28)

Individuals, identified as 'Review Coordinators', could presumably be managers or consultants who have had "extensive experience of quality assurance" etc. Whilst individuals within this category may have extensive experience of working within higher or further education institutions there seems to be no requirement for current teaching in any particular subject. In fact, the description above seems to indicate a 'usual' requirement to have experience of quality assurance procedures across academic subjects (or disciplines). In this sense, they are outside the notion of peer groups defined in relation to specific academic subjects. If Review Coordinators are 'peers' then the group to which they belong includes all those with similar educational quality assurance experience. The question might be, who else is inside this peer group? Are current lecturers and/or subject related professionals part of the peer group to which Review Coordinators, belong or not? The Handbook states that

> Review Coordinators are also recruited from individuals nominated by colleges, universities or other organisations, and from individuals who reply to advertisements. They may be seconded or independent consultants. It is expected that they possess extensive experience of HE and of the assurance of standards and quality. (Handbook: p30)

The criteria of "extensive experience of HE" etc, describes how such individuals are identified, for example by reference to a Curriculum Vitae or 'CV'. However, it does not specifically identify the sense in which they represent a peer group relevant to the higher education provision being 'reviewed'. Unless, that is, we broaden the category of the peer group to include all other categories that are described in the Handbook. This would mean that current lecturers in HEIs or FECs, in any academic subject and/or professionals practicing in an occupation seen as relevant to any academic subject, as well as any individual with extensive experience of higher education quality assurance, would all be included as peers for the purpose of academic review. This is certainly a rather broad and perhaps a rather meaningless description of a 'peer group', in that it is unclear what it is that is homogenous about the group. Beyond, that is, being described as such within the Handbook.

The notion of 'peer review' alluded to within the Handbook seems to attempt to establish a range of positions from which individuals can, or cannot, be described as 'peers'. However, the description of QAA academic review as 'peer review' creates a (theoretically) clear opposition between individuals that are, potentially, described as 'inside' a peer group and those that are 'outside'.

There is another category of individual that is described in the Handbook that is explicitly excluded from membership of the review team. The role of 'subject review facilitator' is clearly distinguished from that of the 'academic reviewer team'. The relationship between these textual subjectivities constructed within the handbook is illustrated by the following extract.

4   The Review Coordinator is responsible for the organisation and management of the review. The subject provider is primarily responsible for ensuring that the review team is provided with appropriate evidence to allow it to reach its judgements. The facilitator's role is to ensure that the channels of communication between the two work effectively. Discussions between the subject review facilitator and Review Coordinator should ensure that the subject provider is aware of issues being addressed by the reviewers and the evidence needed to clarify them. It would be helpful if colleges would supply Review Coordinators with brief outlines of subject review facilitators' previous experience and current roles.

5   Throughout the course of a review, the subject review facilitator helps the reviewers to come to a clear and accurate understanding of the structures, policies, priorities and procedures of the institution, and the nature of the provision under scrutiny. S/he may wish to bring additional information to the attention of the reviewers and may seek to correct factual inaccuracy. It is for the reviewers, however, to decide how best to use the information provided. The subject review facilitator is not a member of the team and will not make judgments about the provision.

6   The role requires the subject review facilitator to observe objectively, to communicate clearly with the reviewers and the subject provider, to respect the protocols on confidentiality outlined below, and to establish effective relationships with the Review Coordinator and the team, as well as with the subject staff. Subject review facilitators should refrain from acting as advocates for the subject provision under review. However, they may legitimately:
   • assist the institution in understanding issues of concern to reviewers;
   • respond to requests for information and comment;
   • draw the reviewers' attention to matters that may have been overlooked;
   • identify the location of evidence;
   • provide advice on college matters. (Handbook: p48)

This role seems to be a kind of mirror image of the Review Coordinator requiring "extensive knowledge and experience or working in HE in FECs (or HE) at a senior level" (Handbook p48). The role is also explicitly not related to an academic subject peer group as individuals should possess "qualifications and experience in a subject area other than that being reviewed" (Handbook p48). However, the main distinguishing factor in the description of the role seems to be that "The subject review facilitator is not a member of the team and will not make judgments about the provision"

(Handbook p48). The subject review facilitator is therefore outside the reviewer peer group as a consequence particularly of being excluded from making 'judgments'.

Within the context of QAA academic review the distinction or opposition between individuals who are empowered to make 'judgments' and those that are not establishes a hierarchical relationship between them.

Individuals whose practice is being 'reviewed' are in some sense positioned as the 'peers' of those who are making 'judgments' about their practice. However, only reviewer 'peers' are empowered to make such 'judgments'. Peers, who are not reviewers, are excluded from making judgments that establish the status of the higher education practice that is being reviewed.

If we consider the two sets of oppositions that have been described in relation to the notion of 'peer group' membership and those in relation to authority status, we can consider four modes of review as seen in Figure 8 below.

Relation to peer group	Authority relation to peer group	
	Non hierarchical	Hierarchical
Outsider	Facilitation/therapy	Inspection
Insider	Peer exchange	Peer review

FIGURE 8: MODES OF REVIEW

DESCRIBING MODES OF REVIEW

The 'facilitation/therapy mode of review describes the context of individuals outside an established peer group engaging with such a group (and/or individual member of a group) from a non-judgmental, non-hierarchical non-authority status position. The subject review facilitator role described in the Handbook

> requires the subject review facilitator to observe objectively, to communicate clearly with the reviewers and subject provider, to respect the protocols on confidentiality…and to establish effective relationships with the Review Coordinator and the team, as well as with the subject staff. Subject review facilitators should refrain from acting as advocates for the subject provisions under review. (Handbook: p49)

As such facilitators do not make interventions in the context of academic review, they do not make 'judgments' and they are positioned outside the peer group as 'objective' observers.

The mode of 'peer exchange' represents the non-judgmental, engagement of individuals recognised as 'peers'. No individual member of a peer group has authority to make 'judgments' about the members practice. The engagement between peers is one of non-hierarchical exchange, perhaps akin to what Dowling has called 'the myth of the academic community' (Dowling, 2004).

This mode is perhaps alluded to in the Handbook, as a key feature of academic review, described as

a process conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust, the reviewers do not normally expect to find areas for improvement that the college has not identified in the self-evaluation (Handbook: p3)

However, given the hierarchical status of reviewers, the 'mutuality' described is not one of equal exchange amongst peers. The reader of the Handbook may be left wondering what the implications of not acquiescing to 'an atmosphere of mutual trust', or review finding areas for improvement not in the self-evaluation, might be. The mode of 'peer exchange' is also alluded to in Annex C of the Handbook, which describes the role of reviewers.

> 9   The Agency not only tries to ensure that the particular experience of individual
>   reviewers is relevant to the reviews they undertake, but that, over time, each reviewer
>   works in a variety of teams scrutinising programmes in their specialism in a range of
>   colleges. There are significant benefits, both to the individuals and their colleges of
>   becoming a specialist reviewer. Participants evaluate the initial reviewer training as an
>   excellent opportunity for professional development. Current and former reviewers have
>   commented upon the opportunity to learn from review visits and peer reviewers as
>   invaluable to their own practice. They have also identified the sharing of dialogue with
>   peers from other colleges as being of great benefit. (Handbook: p29)

The 'opportunities to learn from peer review visits and peer reviewers' and the 'dialogue with peers', sounds like a non-hierarchical engagement, from which reviewers have benefited. The 'peers' seem to be other reviewers in the first instance and 'non-reviewer peers' from other colleges in the second. However, the 'dialogue' with non-reviewer peers is, at least potentially, hierarchical, in that any such dialogue could contribute to a reviewer judgment. As such, the mode in the latter case may be more appropriately described as 'peer review'. The Handbook indicates that

> 8   The key purpose of acting as a specialist reviewer is to contribute to the maintenance
>   and enhancement of standards in HE by reporting to the Agency on the standards and
>   quality of the academic programmes scrutinised during academic reviews.
>   (Handbook: p29)

In this context the interaction between reviewers and 'peers' (whose practice is being reviewed) is pedagogic, judgmental and hierarchical. Whilst reviewers are described as 'peers' (and as such 'insiders') their pedagogic role in reporting on, and enhancing, standards establishes a hierarchical relation with non-reviewer 'peers'. This is the mode described above as 'peer review'.

The last mode presented by the model above is that of 'outsider' review in the context of a hierarchical relation. Here, those that are not established as peers have the authority to make judgments. This mode is here described as the 'inspection' mode of review. The 'objectivity' of the facilitator is maintained by not being a member of the peer group whose practice is under review. However, in addition to this 'objectivity', the authority to make judgments establishes a hierarchical relation between those being 'inspected' and those 'inspecting'. The role of Review Coordinator could to some extent, be described as demonstrating this mode of review. Review Coordinators are

not required to be 'subject specialists' and are not, as such, members of subject related peer groups. As indicated above, if Review Coordinators are 'peers' it seems rather unclear to which peer group they belong. However, Review Coordinators' major roles are described as "managing reviews and writing reports" (Handbook: p30).

> 18   All academic reviews consist of four main activities:
> - preparation for review;
> - visits to the subject provider;
> - analysis of documentary evidence;
> - report writing.
>
> Each Review Coordinator is responsible for maintaining an overview of the range and balance of these activities, and for helping the specialist reviewers to apportion their time effectively. The achievement of an appropriate balance between the various activities requires planning in advance of, and coordination throughout, the review. Above all, it is essential that it enables the reviewers to develop a robust evidence base on which to make judgments. (Handbook: p31)

On the one hand, Review Coordinators have the authority to write the Final (judgment) Report with editorial responsibilities for reviewer judgment statements. On the other hand, Review Coordinators manage the process and do not themselves, in theory, make judgments. However, there is a clear hierarchy in that the Review Coordinator manages the reviewers who have the authority to make review judgments. As such, Review Coordinators, as described in the Handbook, would seem, at least to some extent, to demonstrate an 'inspection mode' of review.

The following section will attempt to analyse the extent to which the recontextualisation of higher education practice through it description in the handbook, as a discursively constructed textual object, constitutes a commodified mode of discursive objectification.

Modes of discursive objectification and the Handbook
Chapter three described *modes of discursive objectification*, these are again summarised in the table below *(previously listed as Figure 6).*

Objectification	Discursive exchange	
	Open	*Closed*
Singular	Aesthetic	Iconic/symbolic
Homogeneous	Commodified	Institutional

Within the Handbook 'higher education' is described and as such constructed, as a textual 'object'. The Handbook constructs this (higher education) object as a thing, the quality of which, can be determined by Reviewers judgements, relating to 'evidence' gathered in the context of the bureaucratic procedures of Academic Review.

Higher education is not described, within the Handbook, as that which is intrinsically valuable, as its value is explicitly related to the public investment. To this extent, the Handbook positions higher

education as that which is exchangeable for public investment. The ultimate 'authority' in the construction of this 'object' that is referred to within the Handbook is that

> HEFCE has a statutory responsibility to ensure that provision is made for assessing the quality of the education it funds and has a responsibility for reporting to government on standards and quality (Handbook p.1)

Within the Handbook, Academic Review, as the method designed to measure the quality of higher education, is explicitly focussed on 'the students learning experience'. It is concerned with the 'appropriateness' of stated aims and the intended learning outcomes of higher education courses. It is also concerned with the 'effectiveness' of curricular content, assessment arrangements, teaching, academic support and learning resources in providing opportunities for achieving intended learning outcomes. The description of the mechanisms to be employed to measure the quality of higher education, in the context of Academic Review, serves to objectify 'higher education'. The methods used to measure 'higher education' determine the nature of the object measured. Here, the idea of the commodification of higher education can be described by reference to the modes of its objectification within the Handbook, indicated within the discursive space above.

Within the Handbook, 'higher education' could be read as that which is positioned as 'singular'. That is, that which is uniquely, individually or perhaps 'charismatically' authored (in Dowling's sense) by each individual institution, or practitioner, or participant. From an institutional perspective one of the key features of Academic Review is 'self evaluation'. Institutions providing higher education can (indeed have to) set their own aims and intended learning outcomes for higher education courses. The 'aide-memoire for academic review' states that 'it is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive' (Handbook: p16). This seems to indicate a non-regulated and 'open' description of higher education practice. On this reading, 'higher education' is whatever each individual institution describes it as. The Academic Review process is not seeking compliance or conformity but rather a self-critical approach to the evaluation of whatever it is that each institution wishes to describe as higher education. It is interesting to note that at the point in the text where the notion of "the appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes in relation to the overall aims of the provision" (Handbook: p18) is introduced in the 'aide-mémoire', the text switches the overt target audience, from 'Guidance for *Colleges* when preparing self-evaluations', to 'Guidance for *review teams'*. It is at this point that it is made clear that Reviewers will be considering

> the extent to which they [aims and intended learning outcomes] are aligned with external reference points, including the FHEQ [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications]…[and]…are aligned with and informed by, relevant subject benchmarking statements… (Handbook: p18)

On the one hand, the QAA are not instructing institutions to ensure that the way they describe higher education complies with the 'Academic Infrastructure'. On the other hand, the Handbook text, while directly addressing review teams, makes it very clear that Reviewers will be making judgements the result of which will be determined by the extent to which aims and intended learning outcomes are 'aligned with', or 'informed by', pre-determined bureaucratic descriptions of higher education. This

would seem to signify a tension, or at least a dynamic between the guidance given to colleges and the guidance given to Reviewers.

Higher education 'is' (within the context of the Handbook), something that can be described differentially in relation to its associated quality as evidenced in differing instances of its provision. At least in one sense, the notion of measuring ('reviewing', 'making judgements about') the quality of higher education provision implies that it is possible to draw comparisons between different things that can, although different, be comparably described. The Handbook does not for example; offer the review method described as an appropriate way to measure the quality of education in schools or other educational contexts. The 'object' under its gaze is clearly described as that which is directly funded by HEFCE and delivered by FECs.

> This Handbook describes the method and procedures for carrying out the review of directly funded HE provision in FECs in England (Handbook: p1)

The existence and identification of 'higher education' as a comparable thing (or object) that exists within different institutions, is that which facilitates the comparability of various instances of higher education provision in the context of Academic Review. This identification of individual instances of 'higher education' is facilitated, through the descriptions of higher education in the Handbook and elsewhere within the Academic Infrastructure', as well as in judgements in Final Report documents that determine the 'approved' (or otherwise) status of that which it describes. Within the Handbook higher education 'is', for example, that which can be described in terms of aims and intended learning outcomes. Higher education that is not described in this way cannot be 'Reviewed' and is excluded from the description, or identification, of higher education and is not therefore recognised as such. Similarly, higher education that is not described in relation to 'academic subjects' available as subject benchmarking documents within the 'Academic Infrastructure', also cannot gain recognition. However, the descriptions of 'higher education' within the Handbook and the Academic Infrastructure are not positioned as a 'singularisation' or an identification of unique instances of higher education, rather as a homogeneous description of something (higher education) to facilitate its comparable measurement.

Final (judgement) Reports are, however, clearly singularised descriptions of higher education as they represent formal recognition of an individual institution's higher education provision in identified subjects as of 'approved' (or otherwise) status. The form of exchange described in the Handbook in the context of Final Report production is 'closed', regulated and euphemistic. It is closed, in one sense, in that only those who are recognised as 'Reviewers' can make 'judgements', providers are explicitly excluded from the 'judgment meetings' at which judgments are made. In addition, as indicated above, 'providers are only given the opportunity to comment upon 'matters of factual accuracy' and not on Reviewers judgments. As such, the process described in relation to Final Report production is not one of 'open exchange' but rather one in which one type of participant (those who are formally recognised as Reviewers) regulates, or controls exchange. It could perhaps be argued that the exchange is 'explicit', in that the process is openly described within the Handbook, although, as indicated above, the Handbook does not explicitly exchange status for compliance. Rather, the Handbook explicitly states that the purpose of Academic review is to

secure value from public investment through ensuring that all education for which funding is provided is of approved quality…to enable judgements to inform funding decisions. (Handbook: p1)

In this sense, the nature of the exchange described within the Handbook, only euphemistically alludes to status or indeed compliance. For example, the 'rate of exchange' between status and compliance is alluded to in references to the provision of "effective and accessible public information on the quality of HE" (Handbook: p1).

In the context of the Handbook therefore, 'higher education', where it is funded by HEFCE as a governmental body, is not a thing, the exchange of which is entirely open. It is rather positioned as a thing that is regulated and at least partially governed by a euphemistic 'closed' exchange between the (UK) Government and providing institutions. The Handbook describes a process whereby higher education providers are required to define their specific institutional (subject departmental) higher education practice in accordance with a pre-determined and highly structured framework. In addition to the Handbook itself, in which the 'advice' concerning appropriate aims and intended learning outcomes etc., there is explicit reference to other texts collectively described as the 'Academic Infrastructure'. This provides, according to the Handbook, 'nationally agreed reference points' developed "in consultation with providers of HE" (Handbook: p11)

> the reference points are provided to assist reviewers in determining whether provision is meeting the standards expected by the academic community generally, for awards of a particular type and level (Handbook: p.7)

The phrase 'the standards expected by the academic community generally' is interesting. It seems to associate higher education with that which is related to the regulated 'standards' (closed exchange), which are 'expected' (presumably because they are 'nationally agreed') by a homogeneous conception of 'the academic community'. This description identifies higher education as constructed through an 'institutional' mode of discursive objectification.

It is perhaps the 'Academic Infrastructure' itself (described in the Handbook) in this instance, which is singularised and sacrilised through an *iconic/symbolic* mode of discursive objectification. As the 'consecrated' source of 'nationally agreed reference points' that establishes the 'standards' of higher education, the 'Academic Infrastructure' is positioned as the benchmark of symbolic value. It is the canon, in relation to which other higher education practice will be judged, or perhaps recognised.

The Handbook makes explicit reference to one of its main purposes as

> to provide, through the publication of reports, effective and accessible public information on the quality of HE. (Handbook: p.1)

In addition the Handbook describes arrangements for Teaching Quality Information (TQI) (p.12) on a publicly accessible website, where reports on the quality of higher education provision are available in addition to the QAA's own website. The described intention to publish these reports for a public

audience, is described as being designed "to encourage improvements in the quality of education…" (Handbook: p1)

It is possible that this 'main purpose' of the review process, although not further elaborated within the text, alludes to the assumption that 'the quality of education' will be improved by encouraging public choice in relation to higher education providers. Perhaps it might be intended that standardised (homogeneous) information, that is openly available, might create a competitive incentive towards the differentiated public recognition of the quality of higher education provision. Here, potentially at least, the idea of public choice facilitates 'open exchange', through the comparability of 'higher education' provided by different institutions and as such, constructs higher education as a commodified discursive object. However, this relation is only present within the Handbook by implication. It is left ambiguous and non-explicit serving to exclude audiences from access to a possible strategic objectification by maintaining a euphemistic or closed exchange.

However, the product of the quality review process as described in the Handbook is a public report describing the quality of higher education provision in a particular subject at a particular institution. This is a recontextualisation of higher education practice within an individual institution. These reports are produced within a standardised, regularised format, which provides a means of establishing an explicit statement of 'the quality' and 'the value' of identified practice comparable with other higher education available in other institutions. This could be described as a commodifying move opening exchange practice, in the context of a homogenised description of higher education.

There is one explicit reference to 'the academic community' within the text (p7) as indicated above. The text does not make clear what it is constituting as the 'the academic community' or indeed what might be meant by 'the academic community generally'. It certainly seems likely to be a fairly inclusive idea if it is meant to describe all those who are in any way engaged with the practice of higher education. As has been indicated above, if this is the case then it may be difficult to envisage what it is that they have in common. It is possible that the idea of 'the academic community' could potentially allude to open and explicit discursive exchange between academic peers as a form of what Dowling might call 'liberal' authority action. In other words, where no hierarchy of authority is established between the different discursive products of academics. If higher education discursive practices (or perhaps products) are homogeneously described as the open exchange of equally comparable ideas, then this could represent a commodified objectification. Whilst this may seem counterintuitive to some, it is the case that the marketability of higher education discursive products requires a means of establishing their comparability. However, it is also the case that academic discursive exchange can also be regulated by institutional descriptions of higher education. The allusion to 'the academic community' within the Handbook is recruited as the non-present author of the 'expected standards' of 'higher education'. The reference to 'the academic community' within the Handbook is here being used as a proxy for the highly specialised descriptions of higher education published by the QAA, not homogeneous open discursive exchange.

Figure 9 below maps the distribution of the various forms of description of higher education within the Handbook text that constitute the dynamic strategic relations between modes of discursive objectification. Some descriptions are explicitly referred to whilst some are implied or alluded to.

Aesthetic objectification	Iconic/symbolic objectification
The Self-Evaluation Document (SED)	QAA Final Reports
An individual institution's description of its HE practice in the context of Academic Review	Representing individual institutional approval status
(NB presented as an open discursive exchange but actually a highly regulated practice)	*Explicit reference*
Explicit reference	Recognition as an HE provider institution
	By HEFCE and the QAA
	Explicit reference
	QAA Academic Infrastructure
	The definitive (singularised) 'reference point' for UK HE
	Implicit reference
Commodified objectification	**Institutional objectification**
Public information about the 'quality' of HE	QAA Academic Infrastructure
The publication of Final Reports to facilitate informed choice	The reference points in relation to which, descriptions of HE 'should be' aligned
(NB the relationship between raised quality standards and public information however, is implicitly referred to)	*Explicit reference*
Explicit reference	The Self-Evaluation Document (SED)
	The framework within which to describe institutional HE practice in the context of Academic Review
	(NB euphemistically described as 'not prescribed')
	Explicit reference
	The criteria for appointing QAA Reviewers
	HE as a specialised description of the practice of Reviewers
	Implicit reference

FIGURE 9: THE DYNAMIC DISTRIBUTION OF DISCURSIVE OBJECTS IN THE HANDBOOK FOR ACADEMIC REVIEW

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to construct an elaborated description of the QAA Academic Review Handbook as an empirical source relevant to questions concerning the extent to which it can be described as an instance of the (re)production and/or resistance of the idea of the commodification of higher education. The methodology employed has employed discursive spaces concerning modes of review and discursive objectification as mechanisms for generating coherent and comprehensive descriptions of how the text is operating to strategically recontextualise higher education practice. The analysis has attempted to describe how strategic position takings constitute subjectivities and objectivities in dynamic relation to each other constructing a discursively complex utterance. This analysis is also used to describe the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode of discursive objectification.

From this perspective, the Handbook can be described as significantly resisting the commodified mode as a consequence of the closed nature of the regulated exchange it instances in most cases. The significantly bureaucratic nature of the discursive objectification of higher education described within the Handbook text seems to be more coherently described as an instance of 'institutional' objectification, although, it does seem clear that the nature of the exchange, described within the Handbook, is concerned with 'iconic/symbolic' objectification, as singularised instances of that which is published in Final Reports. Descriptions within the Handbook that can be associated with 'aesthetic' objectification, seem limited to allusions to the process of academic production in the use of the term 'peer review'. If academic production constitutes 'aesthetic' objectivities, then the recognition that is established through peer review processes provides an 'iconic/symbolic' objectification of academic products. It is this model that seems to be alluded to within the Handbook, where individual higher education providers are positioned as authors of singularised descriptions of higher education, in the context of open exchange. Here, the Academic Review methodology described within the Handbook would only represent a means of formally recognising each singular instance. However, as has been argued above, the strongly institutionalised structuring of all potential 'individual' descriptions of higher education 'by' providers in self-evaluation documents strongly regulates that which can be described as higher education. As an aside, this may of course also be equally true of peer review process in other contexts.

Lastly, the commodified mode only seems to be (re)produced in relation to the explicit reference to 'value from public investment'. However, the Handbook, as a highly elaborated description of the mechanisms for establishing such value, does not seem to constitute an instance of open exchange and may not therefore, be coherently described as an instance of the commodified objectification of higher education. Similarly, the references to 'public and objective information' (allied with the Teaching Quality Information initiative in the Handbook) do not, in themselves, constitute an open exchange. By way of example, and extending the object text to include previous Review Handbooks, the methodology for describing (or ranking) individual institutions' higher education provision has moved away from the system of numerical 'scoring' out of 24[2] to a textual system. This system results in judgements of 'confidence', 'limited confidence' and 'no confidence' in academic standards, and 'commendable', 'approved' or 'failing' judgements in the quality of learning opportunities. Whilst the QAA may argue that this development is a more appropriate means to describe individual instances of higher education quality, it is also a somewhat less explicit mechanism for ranking the 'value' of higher education. Judgements of 'confidence', 'limited confidence' etc are euphemistic descriptions of value that are less explicitly exchangeable or comparable than numerical values. This could, as such, be described as a move away from a commodified mode of objectification towards a more 'iconic/symbolic' or perhaps 'institutional' mode.

The analysis of the Handbook describing modes of discursive objectification seems to be a productive mechanism for considering the resistance and/or (re)production of the idea of the commodification of higher education. The constructive approach adopted here not only provides a more elaborated description beyond a one dimensional binary opposition (for example, use-value/exchange-value) but also facilitates a description of the dynamic structuring of discursive objectivities as they are (re)produced within texts.

Chapter five - Reading the future of higher education

Introduction

LOCATING THE WHITE PAPER IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

The object text for analysis in this chapter is the UK Government White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES: 2003). The White Paper describes existing 'strengths' of higher education but also identifies 'risks and challenges' that need to be met to avoid decline. It proposes higher education reforms to "renew and expand our higher education system for the next generation" (DfES: 2003, p3). The proposals described within the White Paper are wide-ranging and are planned to be implemented over a four-year period between 2003 and 2007. They include; building on perceived strengths in 'world class research'; encouraging universities to "play a bigger role in creating jobs and prosperity"; rewarding excellent teaching; expanding higher education to meet identified national needs; ensuring that access to higher education is fair; reforming higher education funding to enable universities to have greater control of a variety of funding streams, including the introduction of variable tuition fees. As a White Paper, the text is designed to introduce specific proposals for new legislation and to persuade parliament of the merit of such proposals.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In describing the higher education discursive field, chapter two described Foucaultian 'technologies of truth' following Simola et al (1998) which included 'technologies of self', 'technologies of government' and 'technologies of discourse'. This chapter will focused on the analysis of *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper as an example of a text related to 'technologies of government'. The White Paper describes an official rationale for governmental action and change in the field of higher education. The White Paper describes 'why' the Government is right to implement change in higher education provision. The text employs an elaborated language of governmental practice to construct 'higher education'. It is constructed as that which is required for the achievement of rationally planned national objectives such as economic prosperity and social cohesion.

I argue that one of the significant ways in which, the White Paper operates to construct higher education as 'governmental practice' is to create oppositions and alliances between specific 'authors' and 'audiences' such as the Department of Education and Skills and Higher Education Institutions. In other words, the specific nature of the description of higher education (re)produced within the White Paper, is determined by what is included and what is excluded in the construction of such oppositions and alliances. I will not be arguing that the description of higher education within the White Paper is right or wrong but I will rather seeking to generate a description of 'how' it is operating within the higher education field.

As a consequence of the identification of oppositions and alliances within the White Paper, I will construct a discursive space from oppositions concerning 'modes of higher education participation. I will not seek to establish concrete instances of each mode but will rather be concerned with the dynamic relations between modes. The relational discursive space constructed however, will comprehensively contain all possible variables in consideration of the oppositions used to construct the space. In this instance the oppositions identified within the text will be firstly, 'unregulated' and 'regulated'[3] access to higher education and secondly, categories of participants that are 'open' or

'closed'. I will then recontextualise this analysis and the oppositions and alliances identified as a consequence of it, in relation to the discursive space, previously described in chapter three, that is concerned with modes of discursive objectification. This space is constructed by considering the dynamic relations between two oppositions; singular/homogeneous objectification and open/closed discursive exchange. As one of the modes of discursive objectification described is the 'commodified mode' this space can be employed to describe how and the extent to which, the object text is operating in this mode. In other words, I argue that the analysis of the specific description of higher education within the White Paper can be employed to construct a relatively coherent description of the extent to which the text operates to (re)produce or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education.

To summarise, the method of analysis in this chapter will produce a 'constructive description' including:

1. The introduction to the location of the White Paper within the higher education field
2. An overview of the authorial and audience voices constructed in my transaction with the White Paper (reconstructed in the reader's transaction with this text)
3. An analysis of how the White Paper is operating to recontextualise 'higher education practice' as governmental practice.
4. The identification and analysis of oppositions and alliances within the White Paper to construct a specialised and localised mode of action – *modes of higher education participation*.
5. The recontexualisation of oppositions and alliances described in the analysis (items 1-4 above) in relation to *modes of discursive objectification.*
6. An analysis of the dynamics of the distribution and exclusion of textual objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification, including the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode.

The *modes of higher education participation* discursive space will be constructed directly from oppositions and alliances that emerge from my reading of the White Paper. This mode of action will be used to generate an 'elaborated description' (see Brown and Dowling: 1998) of how the text is operating to recontextualise higher education practice. This will then be further recontextualised to attempt to produce a description of the extent to which the White Paper is operating to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of its commodification in relation to *modes of discursive objectification*.

Authorial and audience voices in the White Paper
The Future of Higher Education White Paper (as object text) is here described as an instance of socio-cultural activity that operates to construct oppositions and alliances including those of author and audience. This could also be read as an individualising practice. The establishment of who is (and who is not) authorised to speak in the production of a description of 'the future of higher education' is, in itself, a construction that determines the shape of the higher education object being (re)produced within the text. The bureaucratic and symbolic context of a UK Government White Paper position this text in relation to other Command Papers, which include established textual forms and governmental practices that serve to claim authority. The fact that such texts are explicitly described as being 'by Command of Her Majesty' provides the ultimate governmental authority from

the (symbolic) head of state. This however, does not position 'Her Majesty' as an authorial voice but rather explicitly affiliates the UK Government with 'Her Majesty' to establish the authority vested in it by the Head of State, to describe matters of state. In this case, a formal description of higher education policy. The UK Government is, however, clearly positioned as the prime authorial voice.

> This White Paper declares our intention to take the tough decisions on higher education, to deal with student finance for the long term, to open up access to our universities, and to allow them to compete with the best. We seek a partnership between students, government, business and the universities to renew and expand our higher education system for the next generation. (DfES: 2003, p3)

Here the use of the words 'our intention' signifies both collective ownership of the description of higher education being presented by the UK Government as well as an ability and willingness to act to bring about change. However, the text also strategically positions the Government as a partner with students, business and the universities, perhaps inviting a reading that sees each partner as being affiliated with the project of reconstructing higher education. This can be read as an attempt to reinforce the Government's explicit and established symbolic and governmental authority by promoting the idea that the proposals being presented will construct a space for those listed as partners in the enterprise to speak.

Whilst the text identifies the DfES as the producer of the White Paper, it is the UK Government that is positioned as the prime authorial voice, the body which is authorised to speak about what higher education 'is', what it 'should' or 'must be'. For example,

> Higher education must expand to meet rising skill needs. (DfES: 2003, p4)

> Higher education should be a choice open to everyone with the potential to benefit – including older people in the workforce who want to update their skills. (DfES: 2003, p17)

The Government is also positioned as the body that has the authority to act to "take the tough decisions on higher education" (DfES: 2003, p3). It must be noted however, that some of these instances, 'we must', 'we need', 'we should', etc are employed to both signify a statement of Government policy and also to attempt to broaden the collective noun to include, and to affiliate the intended audience(s) identified by the text, with the policy being promoted. For example,

> We must take this opportunity to lay the foundations for the reforms, which will transform the future of the sector. (DfES: 2003, p21)

To some extent, the audience for the White Paper is determined by the established textual form of this kind of Command paper. 'The Future of Higher Education' (similarly with other White Papers) indicates on its title page that it is "presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State…" (DfES: 2003). As such Parliament, as a socially and culturally constituted body, is identified as a specific audience by the text. By extension, it is also clear that Members of Parliament are (collectively and individually) also positioned as audience within the text. The White Paper also specifically identifies, in its 'Scope' section at the front of the document, that

It sets out a vision for all Higher Education in England, including in Universities, University Colleges, Colleges of Higher Education, Colleges of Further Education, and other institutions. (DfES: 2003, frontispiece)

The text also describes how the Government is seeking a 'partnership' to implement the proposed reforms.

We [the Government] seek a partnership between students, government, business and the universities to renew and expand our higher education system for the next generation. (DfES: 2003, p3)

Much later in the document the White Paper describes a range of other organisations as key partners to which the proposals are addressed.

…we will hold regional workshops involving universities and colleges, key partners such as HEFCE, the LSC and the Teacher Training Agency, and other bodies such as Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals and the NUS. We shall also invite a wide range of other key partners, such as Connexions personal advisers (DfES: 2003, p94)

The use of the words 'partners' or 'partnership' in the above examples can be read to signify the potential for all those identified as partners to be afforded a voice in determining how higher education is reformed, or perhaps to share in the implementation of proposals. The majority of these 'partners' have social and cultural identities outside their employment within the White Paper, that constitute symbolic authorities. The positioning of these audience voices as partners operates to align these authorities with the description of higher education being promoted within the text. In other words, the invitation for an audience, that is identified as a (potential) partner in the enterprise to reform higher education as described in the White Paper, is, itself, part of the description of higher education being proposed. Here it is less that an audience voice is being identified and more that a specific description of higher education, as that which includes partnerships with the identified groups, is being constructed.

It might be argued that this is not the case where the identified audience actually has a voice. For example, the White Paper proposes that students contribute to an 'Annual Student Survey' on the quality of learning and teaching in higher education. The Government describes their plans to drive up the quality of teaching and enhance student choice by conducting this survey.

Student choice will increasingly work to drive up quality, supported by much better information. A comprehensive survey of student views, as well as published external examiners reports and other information about teaching standards, will be pulled together in an easy-to-use Guide to Universities, overseen by the National Union of Students. (DfES: 2003, p46)

'Students' may be able to act as authors in the context of the planned survey scheme, by providing individual evaluations of the quality of the teaching they have received. This potential authorship however, does not affect the positioning of this category of audience within the text. Such student

responses would in any case be produced in response to descriptions of 'higher education' that include principles that they have not themselves constructed. The description of 'students' within the White Paper is aligned with the idea that student choice will drive up quality in higher education. A subjectivity is constructed called 'students' and they are described as those whose choices operate to raise the quality of higher education. Similarly higher education is constructed as that which can be raised in quality though the operation of student choice. Here the construction of the audience voice (students) is determined by the reciprocal construction of a specific description of higher education. As such, this category of audience is subjectified by the construction of a specific higher education 'object' within the text.

"YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO TELL US WHAT YOU THINK"

The White Paper explicitly identifies a range of audiences in a section entitled 'Your opportunity to tell us what to think'. This section outlines the ways in which identified audiences can get access to the document and describes an opportunity for these audiences to comment on the Government proposals.

> After the launch of the document there will be a period for comment, in which the Government will be engaging in a wide-ranging dialogue with those who provide higher education and those who benefit from it. (DfES: 2003, p93)

It is clear that there are two categories of audience outside the requirements of the formal parliamentary procedures associated with a White Paper. The description of an audience category as 'those who benefit from' higher education positions all those who engage with higher education as benefiting from it. In other words, higher education is described as that which if engaged with, will provide benefit. The audience category oppositions here would be 'those who do not provide higher education' and 'those who do not benefit from it'. There is no category of audience described within the text that constitutes 'those who have engaged with higher education but have not benefited from it'; this category of audience is excluded from (by) the text. This is in fact a central plank of the proposal being promoted to legitimise the reform of tuition fees for higher education described within the White Paper. Higher education is described in the text as something for which it is legitimate to charge fees to those who are identified as having benefited from it. These descriptions of 'higher education' have operated to construct a category of subjectivity (those who benefit from higher education) that is explicitly positioned as an audience by the text.

The White Paper also identifies wider categories of audience for the proposals - 'young people' and 'parents'.

> We have published alongside the strategy document an information leaflet, intended primarily for students, potential students and their families, which summarises the main proposals…We want to reach as many young people as possible. We will make copies of both documents available to schools and colleges, as well as placing the full document and the information leaflet for young people on the Young People's Website (www.dfes.gov.uk/youngpeople)…We want parents to join in the debate too and are encouraging this by using the Parents' Website (www.dfes.gov.uk/parents), where parents will find the full document and the summary version. (DfES: 2003, p94)

This description excludes students who are not young people as an audience. This is perhaps a strange exclusion given the descriptions of higher education expansion, 'widening participation' and 'lifelong learning' in higher education within the text. Similarly, the identification of students' or potential students' families as an audience for the text, seems to exclude other families that do not include students or potential students. Clearly if you are not involved in parliamentary processes or in one of the higher education provider related organisations and are not either a 'young person' or 'parent' you are not positioned as an audience by the White Paper text. 'The Future of Higher Education' White Paper, in describing the various audiences with which the Government explicitly wishes to engage in dialogue with concerning its proposals, constructs higher education in such a way as to exclude a range of audience voices. On this reading, the future of higher education is largely a matter for Government, for higher education providers and for young people, who either are students or are potential students, and their parents. Even business, which is described as being sought as a partner in the Foreword section of the text, is not included in the description of audiences who are invited to engage in dialogue during the 'period for comment'. It is not clear if this is a strategically deployed construction within the text or an inherent contradiction in the proposals for higher education reform being proposed. In either case, it can be described as having strategic significance in the recontextualisation of higher education.

The recontextualisation of higher education as governmental practice
This section will attempt to provide an overview of some of the ways in which the White paper recontextualises higher education practices as governmental practice. The socio-cultural activity that the White Paper is concerned with is the practice of higher education. As indicated above, the construction of authorial and audience voices (for example) within the White Paper is bound up in the construction of higher education as a textual object. I argue that the White Paper employs an elaborated language of governmental and parliamentary practice to construct a description of higher education practice as rationally planned strategic governmental policy. I argue that this text is 'governmental' in that it operates 'to structure the field of action for others' (Simola et al 1998). The text can be read as an instance of disciplining practice that demarcates what is included and what is excluded in the description of higher education practice with the full force and sanction of the State.

The White Paper as such describes intended actions to change, or 'reform' the practice of higher education in the UK. In order to chart the journey to the future (of higher education) the text seeks to establish the current state of play (in 2003). The text first describes higher education 'as it is' from the Government's perspective. In doing this, the text inevitably includes some potential descriptions of higher education and excludes others. Similarly, in describing what higher education 'is' the text either explicitly or implicitly describes what it is not, constructing the oppositions that form the basis of the specific description produced. For example, the chapter entitled 'The need for reform' the White Paper opens with a statement of the values being associated with higher education.

> **Values**
> **1.1** Higher education is a great national asset. Its contribution to the economic and social well-being of the nation is of vital importance.
> **1.2** Its research pushes back the frontiers of human knowledge and is the foundation of human progress. Its teaching educates and skills the nation for a knowledge-dominated age. It gives graduates both personal and intellectual fulfilment. Working with business, it powers

the economy, and its graduates are crucial to the public services. And wide access to higher education makes for a more enlightened and socially just society.

1.3 In a fast-changing and increasingly competitive world, the role of higher education in equipping the labour force with appropriate and relevant skills, in stimulating innovation and supporting productivity and in enriching the quality of life is central. The benefits of an excellent higher education system are far-reaching; the risk of decline is one that we cannot accept. (DfES: 2003, p10)

This excerpt represents a description of higher education recontextualised as governmental practice and will be the main focus of the analysis for this section. The aim here is not to say that the description presented within the White Paper is wrong or that higher education can be described differently, rather, the point is that the inclusions and exclusions of possible descriptions of higher education have strategic significance in recontextualising higher education practice as governmental practice.

If we consider the 'values' excerpt above the use of the word 'asset' (in 1.1) can be read to signify firstly, 'something that is useful and contributes to the success of something' (MSN Encarta 2008). So higher education can be read as being described as useful to the success of 'the nation', 'the economy' and 'social well-being'. Secondly, an asset can be 'a property to which a value can be assigned' (MSN Encarta 2008). So higher education can be read as being described as the property of the nation to which value can be assigned.

In the White Paper excerpt above we are told that higher education is 'of vital importance' and its 'vitalness' and 'importance' are then indicated by a list of attributes that are associated with it. These include a rather modernist claim about how higher education research 'is the foundation of human progress'. We would of course only need to refer to the work of Lyotard (1984) to establish that there are other ways to describe the production of knowledge that this particular 'grand narrative' excludes. It could however be read as aligning with similarly modernist approaches to rational planning to bring about future change inherent in governmental practice.

The Government is positioned by the text as having the authority to use this valuable 'asset' in the interests of the nation as a consequence of the power invested in it through its recognition as the elected Government, subject to approval through established judicial and Parliamentary procures. The White Paper, as a Government policy document, is marketing its proposals in advance of the commencement of formal legislative procedures.

> In 2003–04 the Government will be introducing legislation to underpin the proposals in the Strategy Document. (DfES: 2003, p94)

In addition to the authority of the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to Parliament the text also makes it clear that

> the Government will continue to pay most of the cost involved in studying for a degree (DfES: 2003, p2)

and

> The Government is reversing years of under-investment with an increase in funding for higher education averaging more than 6 per cent – over and above inflation – for the next three years. (DfES: 2003, p5)

In this context the UK Government is describing higher education as something that it has control over and has the authority to fund and determine the future of. This of course implicitly excludes the description of higher education as a socio-cultural practice, the future of which cannot be controlled, or might occur outside the scope of Government funding. It also excludes those aspects of the practice that are not subject (or not wholly subject) to planned changes in legislation. There is as such, a non-explicit presumption underpinning the text that the future of higher education, and its impacts upon the economy and the social well being of the nation, can (and should) be planned.

The alignment between higher education and its role in educating and skilling the nation for a 'knowledge-dominated age' could be read as associating knowledge production with the national economy. For example, the Foreword by Charles Clarke states that

> we have to make better progress in harnessing knowledge to wealth creation.
> (DfES: 2003, p2)

In fact this is identified as the second of three main 'areas where our universities have to improve' (DfES: 2003, p2). The term 'knowledge economy' within the text, both of which relate higher education to the development of a skilled workforce. The term 'knowledge transfer' is related to associations between higher education and business innovation. The term, 'knowledge exchange' is associated, in the text, with a proposal to fund higher education institutions to support the transfer of technologies and knowledge to the business sector. These descriptions align higher education and the production of knowledge with economic production or 'wealth creation'. They also describe knowledge (at least the form of it associated with higher education) as something that can be 'transferred' to, or 'exchanged' with, the business sector. There are of course other principled descriptions of the value of higher education (see chapter one) that would be in opposition to this description. This form of description could also read as euphemistic, in that it avoids other possible more explicit descriptions, such as selling higher education products or services to business.

The 'values' text above also states that higher education 'gives graduates both personal and intellectual fulfillment'. Here, the value described is associated with 'graduates', ie those who have successfully graduated from higher education courses (traditionally limited to those who have been awarded degrees rather than other higher education qualifications). It is, however, unclear how the claim for personal and intellectual fulfillment is established or indeed what such a thing might be. It is at least arguable that some graduates may not feel they have achieved personal and intellectual fulfillment but this possibility seems to be excluded by the text.

Higher education is also described as being valuable because it 'powers the economy' and this seems to allude to a necessary relationship between higher education and national economic activity. Alternatively, this statement could be read as alluding to a benefit that higher education brings to the economy of the UK. The White Paper does reference evidence that

Universities also make a substantial contribution to the strength of the national economy. In 1999–2000 they generated directly and indirectly over £34.8 billion of output and over 562,000 full time equivalent jobs throughout the economy. This is equivalent to 2.7 per cent of the UK workforce in employment. For every 100 jobs within the HEIs themselves, a further 89 were generated through knock-on effects throughout the economy; and for every £1 million of economic output from higher education, a further £1.5 million is generated in other sectors of the economy. (DfES: 2003, p10)

(As an aside, the evidence referred to is from Universities UK, a powerful University representative lobby group with an interest in maximising funding for higher education). However, this does not necessarily mean that a national economy could not run or 'be powered' through other means. The implied causal relationship between higher education and a strong economy is offered, to this degree, as a given, and other descriptions are, as such, excluded.

The White Paper also states, in the 'values' excerpt, that 'wide access to higher education makes for a more enlightened and socially just society'. The text later describes this as a 'fundamental principle'.

The Government's commitment to fair access will not waver. All those who have the potential to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so. This is a fundamental principle which lies at the heart of building a more socially just society, because education is the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage.
(DfES: 2003, p68)

This is in fact the only instance of the term 'fundamental principle' within the text and the terms 'social justice' and 'just society' are only instanced on two occasions each, including those referenced above. It seems that the identification of something as a fundamental principle signifies that no further justification, evidence or discussion of the matter is required. The text does not describe the nature of the relationship between widening access and social justice beyond stating that it is the most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage. It is clearly possible that higher education is not aligned with a principle of social justice, it could for example be accessible only to those who are willing and able to pay for it. It is also possible to describe higher education without reference to a role for providing a route out of poverty and disadvantage but such descriptions are excluded. The text also does not indicate how wider access to higher education necessarily makes for a more 'enlightened' society, or specifically what might be meant by this, as the only instance of this term being used is within the above 'values' excerpt.

The above 'values' excerpt's last point represents a form of values summary that relates to the other values discussed above and indicates that higher education is valuable because it equips the labour force, stimulates innovation (in business) and supports (economic) productivity. As indicated above this description excludes other alternative descriptions that are oppositional to such values. However, higher education is also described as valuable in 'enriching the quality of life', which serves to exclude all descriptions of it doing otherwise and is arguably, so broad as to operate largely as a rhetorical device. Who could argue with proposed action to enhance the quality of life? These higher

education values are offered to the reader as constituting 'benefits that are far-reaching', the kind of benefits that 'we' (the Government or perhaps the nation) cannot risk declining. Here higher education is positioned as something that requires Government action in order to maintain and enhance the associated benefits that are described within the text. Higher education is that which the Government proposes to take action upon, its specific description as such within the White Paper, recontextualises higher education practice as governmental practice.

The expansion of higher education participation

The White Paper identifies the expansion of higher education provision as the first of three challenges for universities. The Foreword by Charles Clarke describes the perceived relationship between expansion and the need to widen participation in higher education.

> Firstly, the expansion of higher education has not yet extended to the talented and best from all backgrounds. In Britain today too many of those born into less advantaged families still see a university place as being beyond their reach, whatever their ability. (DfES: 2003, p2)

In constructing the case for the proposal to expand the provision of higher education, the White Paper puts forward two main arguments. Firstly, that the nation needs to expand higher education provision to compete successfully in a global economy, to enhance national productivity by raising the skills levels of the workforce. It is proposed that this expanded provision should not represent 'more of the same' or be based on traditional models of higher education provision, such as the three-year honours degree. Rather, it should be specifically (re)designed to meet the needs of those people that are currently 'under-represented' in higher education, including those who are in work. Secondly, it is argued that higher education is a very significant determinant in relation to individual opportunity including opportunities for employment, higher earning and promotion. This second point is underpinned by descriptions of how enhanced access to higher education (based on entitlement through merit) produces more cohesive communities and engaged citizens. In addition, 'fair access' to higher education is described as a fundamental principle of social justice that the Government will not waver from (see above excerpt, DfES: 2003, p68). Higher education expansion to widen and change patterns of participation is then, a key cross cutting theme that runs through the strategy the White Paper is proposing.

The following sections will attempt to identify the oppositions instanced in the White Paper related to higher education participation to construct a comprehensive discursive space. This space will then be employed to construct descriptions of the dynamic relations between the modes of higher education participation operating within the text.

THE 'ECONOMIC' AND 'INDIVIDUAL' CASE FOR EXPANDING HIGHER EDUCATION

The economic benefits related to the expansion of higher education are described in chapter five of the White Paper, entitled 'expanding higher education to meet our needs'.

> **5.1** Society is changing. Our economy is becoming ever more knowledge-based – we are increasingly making our living through selling high-value services, rather than physical goods. These trends demand a more highly-skilled workforce…
>
> **5.3** A comprehensive review of the academic literature suggests that there is compelling

evidence that education increases productivity, and moreover that higher education is the most important phase of education for economic growth in developed countries, with increases in HE found to be positively and significantly related to per capita income growth. The review also found that education is highly likely to give rise to further indirect effects on growth, by stimulating more effective use of resources, and more physical capital investment and technology adoption.

5.4 Higher education qualifications are more than a signal to the labour market – they bring real skills benefits which employers are prepared to pay a significant premium for.
(DfES: 2003, p58)

In addition, the individual benefits are also described.

5.5 For the individual, the economic benefits of higher education are well-documented – quite apart from the opportunity for personal and intellectual fulfilment. Graduates and those who have 'sub-degree' qualifications earn, on average, around 50 per cent more than non-graduates. Graduates are half as likely to be unemployed, and as a group they have enjoyed double the number of job promotions over the last five years, compared to non-graduates. Higher education also brings social benefits – there is strong evidence that suggests that graduates are likely to be more engaged citizens. For instance, one Home Office report found a strong positive correlation between the cohesiveness of local communities and participation in higher education.

5.6 Even though the number of graduates has risen significantly over the last twenty years, the gap between graduate and average earnings hasn't narrowed at all. If anything, it has increased. And the returns to HE are higher in the UK than in any other OECD country – in fact, the OECD's report describes the UK as being "in a group of its own". So there are real jobs available and no reason to believe that higher education will lose its value as more young people are educated to higher levels – especially if the main part of the increase comes in new and employer-responsive types of degree. (DfES: 2003, p59)

The distinction between 'economic' and 'individual' benefits establishes a clear opposition within the text. Economic benefits are positioned as those that serve the interests of the national economy in terms of increased economic production, growth and so on. The use of the term 'we', in the above excerpt, is used to signify the nation as a collective whole (or at least those in it who are 'making a living') rather than 'we the Government' as a singularised entity. The text also positions 'a highly skilled workforce' as a resource available to the national economy that is of potential collective benefit. The reference to 'higher education qualifications' is interesting, in that an opposition is drawn between qualifications being described as 'a signal to the labour market' and where they 'bring real skills benefits', for which we are told employers are willing to pay. This implies that a price for these benefits can be explicitly determined in order for employers to be able to pay for them, presumably through the operation of the employment market. This seems to indicate that where qualifications are only a 'signal' they may not bring 'real' benefits and as a consequence may not be allocated a price. The perceived 'reality' of a benefit seems here to be determined by the allocation of a price and the willingness of a purchaser to consume. Similarly, the characterisation of the 'knowledge-based' economy is related to the proposition that "we are increasingly making our living through selling high-value services, rather than physical goods" (DfES: 2003, p58). This creates a clear opposition

between such services and physical goods but also positions 'us' as selling one or the other. By implication higher education is also positioned as a high value service that is sold, as it is presumably not a physical product or good.

In the White Paper excerpt above (5.5 and 5.6) the 'individual' economic benefits of higher education expansion are distinguished from those relating to 'personal and intellectual fulfillment' and the text does not offer a means of allocating a measure of value of the latter. However, the individual economic benefits are described in relation to a range of quantifiable measures including favourable graduate earnings, employment prospects ('real' jobs) and promotions. The individual economic benefits of higher education are also presented as not being subject to a decrease in value as a consequence of higher participation. This description signifies that higher education provides individual benefits but that these benefits are non-rivalrous. In other words, one person's consumption does not diminish another's ability to benefit. The text refers to evidence that wage differentials for graduates have been maintained despite previous expansion in participation. This excerpt does not explicitly relate this description of higher education benefits to the resources required to provide it. This constructs a non-explicit opposition, in that, whilst the economic benefits are consistently quantified, this is not directly related to the costs or who should meet them. However, we are provided with a partial answer in the form of the alliance between the continued non-rivalrousness of higher education and the provision of 'employer responsive types of degrees'. The text states that 'employers are prepared to pay a significant premium for' such qualifications. As such, the text may by implication be signifying that employers are willing to meet the costs of higher education expansion, if the qualifications provided are ' employer responsive' enough.

As indicated above, 'personal and intellectual fulfilment' is described as an 'individual' benefit available to those who engage with higher education. Personal and intellectual fulfilment would seem to be an individualised categorisation although the text does not seek to employ this benefit to legitimise higher education expansion on any principled grounds.

It is possible for someone to 'benefit' from a higher education experience in terms of personal and intellectual fulfilment, without necessarily completing a course and achieving a qualification. In addition, non-certificated courses equivalent to higher-level qualifications, with no completion requirement may be of great benefit to those who participate in them. However, potential participants who might benefit in these ways are excluded by the text.

Social benefits of higher education

The White Paper states that "higher education also brings social benefits" (DfES: 2003, p59), this statement is confusingly included under the heading of 'individual' benefits. Whilst it is conceivable that living in an educated society might bring benefits to individuals, the White Paper does not make it explicit what 'individual' social benefits might be. Rather, the text refers to

> evidence that suggests that graduates are likely to be more engaged citizens…[and]…a strong positive correlation between the cohesiveness of local communities and participation in higher education. (DfES: 2003, p59)

We could just as well ask are 'engaged citizens' more likely to be 'graduates'? It may be that being a more engaged citizen is a benefit to an individual who is one, but the text does not make explicit what kind of benefit this might be. It is of course also entirely possible that an individual might not perceive being 'an engaged citizen' as a benefit at all. Similarly, the individual benefit of contributing to the cohesiveness of local communities is not made explicit. These social benefits seem to be mis-described as 'individual' within the text. As indicated above, this may be as a consequence of a closing of the discursive space for collective benefits that are not also economic in nature. However, there is no explicit description of the principles that might legitimise expanding higher education to achieve these benefits. The descriptions of 'more engaged citizens' and 'cohesive local communities' seem to be operating as principles in their own right in that they are positioned as a good thing for which no further explanation is required. The non-explicit principle underpinning such descriptions could perhaps be that participative democracy is a collective and individual good in itself but this would require a reading beyond the boundaries of the White Paper text.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FAIR ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Secretary of State's Foreword to the White Paper introduces the idea that

> the expansion of higher education has not yet extended to the talented and best from all backgrounds. (DfES: 2003, p2)

Chapter three of the White Paper, 'the need for reform', goes on to provide a principled rationale for widening and expanding higher education participation.

> Universities are a vital gateway to opportunity and fulfilment for young people, so it is crucial that they continue to make real and sustained improvements in **access** *[bold in the original text].* The social class gap among those entering higher education is unacceptably wide. Those from the top three social classes are almost three times as likely to enter higher education as those from the bottom three…This state of affairs cannot be tolerated in a civilised society. It wastes our national talent; and it is inherently socially unjust.
> (DfES: 2003, p17)

Similarly, chapter six, 'fair access', aligns the provision of higher education with social justice principles.

> Education must be a force for opportunity and social justice, not for the entrenchment of privilege. We must make certain that the opportunities that higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background. This is not just about preventing active discrimination; it is about working actively to make sure that potential is recognised and fostered wherever it is found.
> (DfES: 2003, p67)

It is clear, if we consider these references, that the text is constructing an alliance between principles of social justice, described in terms of meritocratic entitlement to higher education, and the case for expanding and widening access and participation in higher education. The proposal seems here to be predicated upon the idea that those who represent 'the talented and the best', or those who are

recognised as having 'the potential to benefit' should have the opportunity to access higher education, irrespective of their social background. Furthermore, according to the text where this is not the case society can be described as 'uncivilised and unjust'. It could of course be argued that it might be the processes associated with recognising 'the talented and the best' that have led to a lack of higher education participation by those from 'less advantaged families', rather than the lack of available places. It may also be the case that 'the talented and the best' might not represent the same category as 'all those who have the potential to benefit'. The recognition of 'the talented and the best' could very easily be read as an elitist model of participation, despite its association with the phrase 'from all backgrounds'. The recognition of 'the potential to benefit' however, seems to be a more inclusive and open model of participation. It is also a little unclear from the excerpt above if the issue of 'wasted talent' is one of moral duty to employ the talents of the nation frugally or more of economic expediency, or perhaps both.

The White Paper, as a precursor to legislation, explicitly proposes the introduction of regulation to reform higher education participation toward its expansion. Indeed, in proposing higher education reform the text also describes the rationale for change. The case for the introduction of regulation is related to both collective and individual economic benefits as well as a more or less explicitly principled rationale. However, as a consequence the text also constructs an implicit opposition in the form of higher education that is unregulated. Similarly, descriptions of categories of higher education participants within the text can either be 'closed' by including some and excluding others (for example 'the talented and best'), or open.

The following section will describe a relational discursive space that is constructed from the open/closed categories of participants and unregulated/regulated access binary variables. This analysis will attempt to describe the dynamic relations instanced within the text in the construction of 'higher education participation' as a discursive object.

Modes of higher education participation

The terms 'elite', 'mass' and 'universal' have a discursive history in relation to higher education participation that should be acknowledged. Martin Trow used these terms in 1973 to describe the 'democratisation' of higher education participation from elite, though mass, to universal systems in the United States. More recently Peter Scott (1995, 2005) has also used these terms to discuss mass higher education in the context of the UK. He sums up Trow's definitions as follows:

> In a nutshell he argued that higher education systems that enrolled up to 15 per cent of the age group were best described as elite systems; systems that enrolled between 15 and 40 per cent of the age group were mass systems; and those that enrolled more than 40 per cent were universal systems. (Scott: 2005, p2)

Scott argues that Trow's description of a neat linear progression (from elite to universal) is not representative of the UK higher education system. He argues that Trow's conception is bound up in the particular circumstances of the development of the US State of California's higher education system and that the UK system has been particularly resistant to adopting a 'mass' ethos irrespective of the rising participation figures. He also argues that the linear distinctions between the categories of elite, mass and universal are no longer useful as a consequence of the inherent and evolving

diversity of institutional and governmental structures related to higher education participation. However, Scott does think that the term 'mass higher education' has a useful function in higher education discourse as long as it is acknowledged that it does not demarcate a precise empirical boundary but describes the relationships between changing conceptions of higher education practice.

> I continue to believe that 'mass higher education' is still a potent term – but today it has different meanings. It has to be interpreted in the context of 'markets' rather than of 'planning' – not necessarily 'markets' in a private-sector sense but in the sense of much more flexible structures and open environments. (Scott: 2005, p11)

However, within the discursive space I will construct below I will reject the term 'elite' and retain the terms 'mass' and 'universal'. I will replace the term 'elite' with 'selected'. The rationale for this will be explained below. Whilst my use of the terms 'mass' and 'universal' is deployed in the context of their previous use as discussed above, the way that I shall be employing them is not defined or restricted by these previous definitions. Rather, each term will be described specifically in relation to the oppositions that I have identified as emerging from the White Paper text. It is also important to note that these *modes of higher education participation* are not conceived as constituting concrete empirical distinctions. Rather, they constitute conceptual categories that are designed to be useful in the production of descriptions of the dynamic relations between the various ways that 'higher education participation' is strategically positioned within the text.

OPPOSITIONS AND ALLIANCES CONCERNING 'HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION'
Where access to higher education is 'regulated' the authority to determine the principles governing such access is institutionalised. For example, higher education institutions, as qualification awarding bodies, have the statutory authority to determine the principles that regulate access to higher education. The White Paper as an instance of governmental action describes the mechanisms by which it proposes to bring about rationally planned change or 'reform' to such regulation. These mechanisms include changes to institutional funding arrangements, legal requirements to conform to governmental regulatory bodies and financial incentives to develop and promote 'best practice'. The principles that legitimise such governmental action are more or less explicitly or euphemistically described within the text. This can be contrasted with descriptions of higher education access as 'unregulated' which require no institutionalised authority claim to exclude access to potential participants. However, unregulated access to higher education might not imply unrestricted access, as it is possible, in theory, for access to higher education to be available through an open market. In such a case unregulated access might still be restricted to those who can pay.

The descriptions of potential higher education participants can also be more or less 'closed'. The closing of the category of participants here refers to descriptions that are aligned with individualising practices. By this I mean those practices that distinguish and singularise in relation to a broader collective category. The White Paper refers to ways in which "universities can best ensure that they choose the most talented applicants" (DfES: 2003, p72). The categorisation of 'the most talented' applicants is a discursive move to close the category of higher education participants. To take another example, the description of "the brightest and best young people" (DfES: 2003, p14) would be an individualising categorisation in relation to the category of 'young people'. 'Young people' are

described in association with their relative participation in higher education as a collective group within the White Paper and this represents a more open categorisation. Where the text describes ways in which institutions might identify and recognise 'the brightest and the best' such practices would be individualising. However, the category of 'young people' is of course itself individualised in relation to the broader category of 'all people', defined no doubt by the official description of when we stop being 'young'. The text however, does not make this explicit.

The discursive space described above (Figure 10 below) is constructed by relating two sets of oppositions or binary variables - unregulated/regulated[4] access to higher education and closed/open categorisations of participants. Four possible modes of action emerge from this space - *selective*, *mass*, *universal* and what I call *bespoke* participation. The *selective* mode is here used to describe higher education participation where access is formally regulated and related to a closed categorisation of participants. The term *selective* is preferred to the term 'elite' as it is possible for a category of participants to be closed, where access is regulated, without the selected group of participants being 'elite' as it is usually understood. For example, the process of selecting children with special needs (a closed category) for a special needs school could be regulated but the selected group seems unlikely to be described as 'elite'. The *mass* mode describes higher education participation where access is also regulated but where descriptions are related to a more open categorisation of participants. The *universal* mode describes the open categorisation of participants in the context of unregulated access and lastly, the *bespoke* mode describes the unregulated access of a closed categorisation of participants. The modes described above are summarised in Figure 10 below.

Category of participants	*Form of access*	
	Unregulated	*Regulated*
Closed	Bespoke	Selective
Open	Universal	Mass

FIGURE 10: MODES OF HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

The following section will attempt to relate each mode to descriptions of higher education participation within the White Paper.

Modes of participation and the White Paper

THE *SELECTIVE* MODE OF PARTICIPATION

The White Paper makes explicit reference to the move away from an elite system to one of higher participation.

> Our system has successfully transformed itself from an elite system – in which, in 1962, only around 6 per cent those under 21 participated – to one where in England around 43 per cent of those aged between 18 and 30 go to university. Despite the rise in the numbers participating in higher education, the average salary premium has not declined over time and remains the highest in the OECD. It is not the case that 'more means worse'. (DfES: 2003, p12)

Here, a previously elite system is contrasted with one that has significantly higher participation rates, and the measure used to legitimise this change is economic and collective (average salary premium) as opposed to any principled position. In fact, where principles are referred to in the text in relation to elite systems the comparison is pejorative and explicitly excluded by the text. For example, the text (previously quoted above, DfES: 2003, p67) specifically refers to education as *not* being 'for the entrenchment of privilege'.

Other references within the text (partially quoted above) refer explicitly to the need to provide higher education opportunities for those who are 'the most talented', for example,

> UUK [Universities UK] published a report earlier this month ("Fair Enough") which explores how universities can best ensure that they choose the most talented applicants, using a wide range of information and looking beyond raw qualifications. (DfES: 2003, p72)

As mentioned above, the White Paper does not make it clear if there is a difference between the identification of 'the most talented' and recognising those with the 'potential to benefit' from higher education. The text states that

> All those who have the potential to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so. This is a fundamental principle which lies at the heart of building a more socially just society, because education is the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage. (DfES: 2003, p68)

It is however, possible that an applicant is recognised as having the potential to benefit from higher education but might not be recognised as 'the talented and the best' (DfES: 2003, p2), 'the brightest and best' (DfES: 2003, p33), or 'the most talented' (DfES: 2003, p72). This could be read as implicitly identifying three categories of potential participant in higher education.

1. those identified as being the 'talented and best', 'brightest and best' or 'most talented'
2. those who are recognised as having the 'potential to benefit'
3. those whose 'non-recognition' as either 1 or 2 is as a consequence of being identified as such, perhaps through an examination system.

We might add a fourth category.
4. those whose 'non-recognition' as either 1 or 2 is as a consequence of non-participation in either the examination or application processes.

The first category identifies a smaller group distinguished from a larger group (for example all those who apply to access a higher education programme) as a consequence of their recognition as being 'more talented' or 'better' than others who are identified as being 'less talented'. This description excludes the possibility that all members of the larger group are recognised as 'the talented and best' as it implies a normative categorisation. Everyone cannot be identified as being 'the talented and the best'. This is a description of a strongly individualised and exclusive group, a closed categorisation of participants. However, the text makes clear that 'the talented and the best' should be selected from all, not just from privileged, backgrounds. The selection of an exclusive group is legitimised by

providing the opportunity to be selected to all. The opportunity to be selected, in accordance with university admission procedures and requirements, is providing regulated access to higher education. The text describes efforts that are being (or should be) made to ensure that the selection processes are 'fair'. Fairness can here be read as equality of opportunity, underpinned by principles of social justice, placed in opposition to the idea of 'the entrenchment of privilege'. In this example, the site of the principled legitimation of elite selection is associated with opportunity for those from 'all backgrounds'. Here, the selection of an elite group is 'fair', if it is based on the identification of 'talent', not background. The recognition of talent is governed by higher education institutions, which are authorised to do so, by the Government. The alignment of regulated access with principles of fairness or equality of opportunity is deployed to legitimise the closing of the category of higher education participants.

THE *MASS* MODE OF PARTICIPATION

The second category of participants also distinguishes one group, those who are recognised as having the potential to benefit from higher education, from another (those who are not). However, this second category could (at least in theory) include all potential participants, as we might all have the potential to benefit from higher education. The categorisation of higher education participants as "all those who have the potential to benefit" (DfES: 2003, p22, 67,68), places the emphasis on identifying those who posses such potential from an inclusive, and to this degree, more open standpoint. Whereas the categorisation of participants as 'the talented and the best' leaves the category of participant background open, 'potential to benefit' leaves the categorisation of the participant open. However, the authority to identify individuals as having, or as not having, such potential, remains with higher education institutions. Access to higher education remains regulated, despite the open categorisation of participants. To this extent, references within the text to opportunities for 'all those who have the potential to benefit from higher education' can be described as instances of 'mass' participation mode.

However, it could be argued that the processes that are employed to identify 'the talented and best' might be very similar, if not the same, as those used to identify those with the 'potential to benefit'.

> There is no simple means of achieving wider access. Success in opening up higher education to all who have the potential to benefit from it depends on building aspirations and attainment throughout all stages of education. Higher education institutions need to be supported in their efforts to reach out to students from non-traditional backgrounds, and provide them with the right pastoral and teaching support; young people and their families need to be encouraged to raise their aspirations and achieve more of their potential in examinations prior to entry to higher education; and finally, there must be an effective and fair system of student support that takes into account the different circumstances of an increasingly varied student population. (DfES: 2003, p68)

The emphasis in this excerpt seems to be that those who have the potential to benefit from higher education need to raise their aspirations and attainment so that they can be recognised as having such potential. For their part, higher education institutions are described as needing support to 'reach out to students from non-traditional backgrounds'. The potential to benefit is to be demonstrated through 'examinations prior to entry', which is the traditional means of gaining entry to higher

education courses. The individualising practices (examinations etc) that are associated within the text as a means of identifying those with the potential to benefit may be the same as those described in association with identifying an elite, such as the talented and best. The processes associated with recognising an applicant as having the potential to benefit are as individualising as those associated with identifying an elite.

This indicates that the text may be operating to elide the opposition between elite and mass modes of higher education participation. This serves on the one hand to reinforce the maintenance of the authority of higher education institutions to regulate access whilst signaling an opening up of the category of potential participant. It is possible that different categorisations of participants are constructed for different audiences. The selection of 'the talented and best' aligns the Government proposals to expand higher education with audiences who might favour the retention of more elitist approaches to regulating access, whereas, the selection of those with 'potential to benefit' might favour more egalitarian approaches. The text operates to elide the differences in categorisation and to obfuscate the similarities of selection practices employed for both. In doing this the descriptions of proposals to reform higher education participation have a higher potential for establishing alliances with a wider range of audience, which is after all the overarching purpose of a White Paper.

THE *UNIVERSAL* MODE OF PARTICIPATION

The categorisation of participants as 'the talented and best from all backgrounds' or as 'all those who have the potential to benefit', both imply the regulation of access to higher education. Unregulated modes transfer the authority to regulate access from institutions to participants. If access to higher education were unregulated, participants who are identified as *not* being the 'talented and best' or as *not* having 'the potential to benefit' would not necessarily be excluded. It is not being explicitly proposed by the text that universities exclude those who are not recognised through admissions processes, although this must clearly be the result. The clear emphasis in the White Paper (as the above UUK reference exemplifies, DfES: 2003, p72) is instead, the development of a 'fair' admissions process to identify 'the most talented applicants' and/or those who have the 'potential to benefit'. The exclusion of categories of potential participants not identified as being in either group is implicitly legitimised by the fact that the processes of selection are (or should be) 'fair'. These 'non-recognised' participants correspond to the third category of potential applicants (discussed above) and are effectively excluded from the text, although their exclusion is not made explicit. The association of principles of fairness with the regulation of access to higher education operates to populate the discursive space that descriptions of excluded groups might occupy.

The only instance of such unregulated access for an open category of participants is negatively presented by the text as a cautionary tale.

> But we must make sure that institutions are not exploiting their most vulnerable students
> by making up the numbers with students who cannot cope. (DfES: 2003, p75)

'Vulnerable students' are mentioned six times in the text. Four instances describe extra funds to be made available for such students and one instance describes the need for effective support mechanisms to retain them. This means that in four out of six instances the identification as 'vulnerable' is associated with not having enough money to study and one identifies effective support

for them. Presumably, if it is appropriate to provide effective support for these 'vulnerable students' they are recognised as having 'potential to benefit' from it. In five out of six instances there is no association between being a vulnerable student and not having the potential to benefit. However, the excerpt above explicitly relates 'vulnerable students' with 'students who cannot cope'. The excerpt follows a section concerning extra funds that it is proposed will be available for under-represented groups and the reference to 'not exploiting…by making up the numbers' can be read as a warning to higher education institutions not to provide access to those 'who cannot cope'.

The Open University could provide an example of the universal mode of participation as it has an 'open entry philosophy' (http://www.open.ac.uk/about/ou/p3.shtml - last accessed 10.3.08) that does not regulate access to its higher education provision. However, the Open University is only referred to within the White Paper in association with the flexibility of delivery afforded by its "on-line services for its courses" (DfES: 2003, p64). The White Paper does not propose to introduce unregulated access to higher education for all and as such, effectively excludes the universal mode of participation in the description of the future of higher education.

The exclusion of instances of the universal mode of participation could be read as being in tension with the way that the White Paper positions the individual economic benefits of higher education. The White Paper describes these benefits in the context of 'the case for expanding higher education'. The open and unregulated opportunity to purchase higher education and thereby gain access to the associated benefits would constitute a universal mode of participation. Indeed the White paper does make an explicit link between individual benefits and payment for them.

> As we are asking new students to pay for the benefits they get from higher education, to build sustainable funding freedoms for the future, we believe that it is also right that those who have already benefited from higher education should be able to contribute.
> (DfES: 2003, p76)

The White Paper also describes the establishment of a 'market rate'.

> They may charge overseas students, part-time students, and post graduate students market rates for fees. (DfES: 2003, p77)

If access to higher education was determined solely on the basis of being able to pay for it, it could constitute a form of universal participation in the sense that access would otherwise be unregulated. However, the White Paper excludes an explicit association of payment for higher education with universal access, to support expansion whilst retaining regulatory authority.

THE *BESPOKE* MODE OF PARTICIPATION

Descriptions of the *selective* mode of higher education participation in the White Paper are individualised in the context of institutional mechanisms to recognise 'the talented and best'. The *mass* mode of participation regulates access but opens the category of participants. Access to higher education is unregulated in *universal* and *bespoke* modes, transferring authority for access from institutions to participants. The *bespoke* mode however, includes descriptions that also close the category of participant. An example of this mode could be where the category of participant is closed

to the extent that the authority to determine access to higher education lies with an individual participant. For example, the White Paper describes how higher education can be reconstructed as personalised development.

> Lifelong learning therefore implies a fundamental shift from the 'once in a lifetime' approach to higher education to one of educational progression linked to a process of continuous personal and professional development. (DfES: 2003, p16)

This excerpt, however, falls short of describing unregulated access to higher education to facilitate personal and professional development.

Another example of a closed category of potential participants is 'employers'. If access is unregulated then 'employers' (in this example) could determine the extent (and perhaps the form) of access to higher education. In other words, they could participate as much or as little as they wished and presumably in a manner they wished. The transfer of the authority to determine access to higher education also operates to individualise (close) the category of participant in doing so. In our example 'employers' would be described as a closed category of participant that is constructed in relation to unregulated access to higher education. For example, 'employers' could be described as a category of participant that are able to purchase unregulated higher education in the form of tailored training courses from private training providers. The term 'employers' becomes recontextualised in the context of descriptions of higher education participation.

The White Paper includes 51 references to 'employer(s)' several of which refer to the need for higher education institutions to collaborate effectively with employers: for example,

> Establishing close relationships between employers in particular industrial sectors and the relevant faculties in institutions is critical to preparing new entrants to the workforce and to continuous professional development…helping employers to act as intelligent customers of universities so that courses that have the needs of employers at heart are developed and successfully marketed. (DfES: 2003, p42)

> The Government's Skills Strategy, to be published this year, will set out our proposals for raising the skills of the workforce at all levels, and ensuring that the education and training system responds effectively to demand from employers. (DfES: 2003, p58)

However, although these descriptions propose that higher education courses are responsive to 'the needs of employers' or 'demand from employers', they do not necessarily signify unregulated access. The description of employers as 'intelligent customers' could be read as a transference of authority for determining access but it is unclear if employer customers would still need to demonstrate potential to benefit. Whilst there may be implicit indications that the White Paper is signifying a direction of change towards the bespoke mode of participation it is not explicitly evidenced in the text.

The following section will attempt to analyse how the oppositions and alliances described above are operating to constitute modes of discursive objectification.

Modes of discursive objectification and the White Paper

Chapter three described *modes of discursive objectification*. These are summarised again in the table below *(previously listed as Figure 6)*.

Objectification	Discursive exchange	
	Open	*Closed*
Singular	Aesthetic	Iconic/symbolic
Homogeneous	Commodified	Institutional

The analysis so far has attempted to demonstrate how the White Paper is operating to recontextualise higher education practice as governmental practice. In describing 'the future of higher education' the White Paper constructs oppositions and alliances that are positioned in dynamic relation to each other. In addition, I have attempted to illustrate this by focussing on the analysis of modes of higher education participation.

The following sections will attempt to construct a description of how the White Paper is operating to (re)produce the idea of the commodification of higher education. Evidence that the White Paper is operating to do this will be provided by considering the relative presence of the commodified mode of discursive objectification in the construction of higher education as a textual object. I will consider the distribution of the main higher education reforms described in the text in relation to modes of discursive objectification.

THE RECOGNITION OF OFFICIAL TITLE AND STATUS

The White Paper text itself constitutes an iconic/symbolic objectification as a specific (singular) Command Paper legitimated through the symbolic authority of the Government and the Head of State. It is a singularised description of higher education, exchanged euphemistically with its intended audiences. The traditionally recognised form of Command Papers (of which the White Paper is a specific example) would seem to constitute an institutional objectification. Command Papers regulate discursive exchange and provide a homogeneous framework that operates to euphemistically structure individual governmental texts.

The White Paper also describes the creation of a range of other officially recognised bodies. These include: a 'Teaching Quality Academy' (later to become the Higher Education Academy); 'Foundation Degree Forward' – "a network of Universities which are leading the development of foundation degrees" (DfES: 2003, p57); 'Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning'; a new Arts and Humanities Research Council; and an 'Access Regulator' "to promote wider access and to ensure that admissions procedures are fair, professional and transparent" (DfES: 2003, p8). These textual constructions can be described as constituting an iconic/symbolic objectification. In each case the description of these singularised textual entities constitutes a recontextualisation of higher education practice legitimised through the (proposed) exchange of symbolic capital.

The White Paper describes proposals to introduce changes to the criteria for awarding 'University title' to institutions that only award taught degrees, as opposed to the requirement to also demonstrate strength in research.

We propose to change the system, so that the University title is awarded on the basis of taught degree awarding powers, student numbers, and the range of subjects offered. This will send an important signal about the importance of teaching, and about the benefits for some institutions of focusing their efforts on teaching well. (DfES: 2003, p55)

These proposals require an institution to submit to 'closed' bureaucratic procedures in order for recognition as a 'University' to be conferred. This constitutes an individualisation of those institutions that apply; in exchange for the symbolic capital that the legal status associated with University title confers. The White Paper later emphasises that the Government controls the award of University title and provides a somewhat euphemistic rationale for retaining such powers.

It is essential to retain external control over both degree-awarding powers and university title, because the Government has a responsibility to make sure that standards are met before degrees can be awarded or an institution can become a university. (DfES: 2003, p79)

It could of course be possible that 'standards' might also be met by allowing institutions to self-determine what such standard should be, rather than a government having this responsibility. In any case, it is clear that the determination of the 'standards' that Government require institutions to conform to, is not open. In retaining the power to change the criteria for awarding University title, the White Paper closes the discursive exchange and constitutes an iconic/symbolic objectification of higher education.

Bureaucratic systems and frameworks

The White Paper also describes proposals to recognise 'outstanding teachers' and 'excellent researchers'. The symbolic recognition of individual teachers and researchers would constitute a euphemistic exchange as the principles upon which such recognition is bestowed are institutionally (governmentally) regulated. However, the reward for 'outstanding teachers' is constituted within a 'National Teaching Fellowship Scheme" and the scheme, as opposed to each instance of individual recognition, constitutes an institutional objectification. Similarly, the proposals for "better pay for excellent researchers" are described as resulting from an overall increase in funds available to higher education institutions. The White Paper states that the Government will

develop and reward talented researchers, with rigorous new standards for government funded research postgraduate places. (DfES: 2003,p6)

It is a little unclear what kind of a 'reward' the development of 'rigorous new standards' constitutes and as such, this can be read as a euphemistic and homogenising (institutional) objectification of higher education. The description of proposals to review the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) also constitutes an institutional objectification.

HEFCE (together with the equivalent bodies in the devolved administrations) is undertaking a review of research assessment which will investigate different approaches to the definition and evaluation of research quality, drawing on the lessons of both the recent RAE and other models of research assessment. (DfES: 2003, p30)

These types of bureaucratic systems can be read as homogenising strategies that constitute institutional objectification. To take another example, the White Paper describes proposals to introduce a requirement for higher education institutions wishing to charge variable tuition fees to produce an approved 'Access Agreement'. It is proposed that these agreements will describe how institutions will use a proportion of the additional fee income to encourage the participation of under-represented groups in higher education. It is also proposed that Access Agreements be approved by the 'Access Regulator' and in addition that they

> …will be monitored, and the Regulator will have the power to withdraw approval for variable fees, or impose financial penalties, if the Agreements are not fulfilled. (DfES: 2003, p75)

The text also states that the Access Regulator "will develop a framework for Access Agreements for each institution" (DfES: 2003, p68). This signifies that while the role of Access Regulator constitutes an iconic/symbolic objectification, the framework of the Access Agreements constitute an institutional objectification. Individual Access Agreements produced by higher educational institutions could be read as instances of aesthetic objectification to the extent that they constitute singular and explicit descriptions of higher education practice. However, given that the Access Agreement 'framework' will regulate the approval of such documents, the form of discursive exchange is not open and (once approved), individual institutions' Access Agreements would constitute iconic/symbolic objectification.

As discussed above, the White Paper describes proposals to expand higher education to provide access to a wider range of participants. One of the ways the text proposes to achieve this is by further developing systems for describing higher education through credit.

> Credit systems, which make it possible to break off and start again without having to repeat learning, will become increasingly important as the routes into and through higher education become more varied…Many institutions have internal credit systems, and there are a number of consortia with shared ones…HEFCE will work with partners in the sector – from 2003 onwards – to build upon the best current practice, and to scale this up so that there is widespread and consistent use of credit across higher education. (DfES: 2003, p64)

Credit systems provide a bureaucratic means of establishing the equivalence of individual instances of higher education so that comparisons can be made. They provide the metric that can establish the relative value of individual higher education courses, qualifications, modules, units etc. Such systems are homogenising but the principles that determine the operation of such systems are institutional and closed.

Engaged citizens and cohesive communities

As discussed previously, the White Paper describes the social benefits of higher education and refers to Home Office evidence that access to higher education generates more 'engaged citizens' and 'cohesive communities' (DfES: 2003, p59). Here the text operates to recontextualise higher education as governmental practice. If social cohesion is a legitimate target of governmental action, then publicly funded higher education can be reconstructed as a means to achieving it. 'Higher education' described as that which generates engaged citizens and cohesive communities represents a homogenising move in the context of closed discursive practice. The text does not

make explicit what an 'engaged' citizen or a 'cohesive' community is and as such, the discourse remains closed. Such descriptions can then constitute an institutional (governmental) objectification of higher education. The description of the social benefits of higher education is couched in terms of its individual benefits and is cited within the case for higher education expansion. Collective non-economic benefits are associated with individual and national economic benefits by physical location within the text. This construction operates to de-emphasise the homogeneous and euphemistic from of the description, by juxtapositioning it with its opposite.

Institutional autonomy and diversity of mission

The White Paper devotes a whole chapter to describing arrangements for higher education institution's 'freedom and funding'.

> …higher education institutions need real freedom – including the freedom to raise their own funding, independent of government – if they are to flourish. They are already free and autonomous institutions, with the power to determine their academic and operational future; lead, manage, and appoint their own staff; determine their estates strategies; and manage their resources as they see fit (DfES: 2003, p77)

This chapter of the text describes proposals to allow institutions to introduce variable tuition fees, enhance endowment schemes, and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and to support the development of institutional leadership. In doing so the White Paper describes higher education as that which is constructed autonomously by individual institutions. This constitutes a singularised construction in the context of open discursive exchange, or what I have called aesthetic discursive objectification. Similarly, earlier in the text the White Paper describes and supports the construction of diverse missions by individual higher education institutions, although, references to recognition through funding systems, would seem to imply a concurrent iconic/symbolic and institutional construction.

> Government will continue to be the principal funder of higher education, but we need to move to a funding regime which enables each institution to choose its mission and the funding streams necessary to support it, and to make sure that our system recognises and celebrates different missions properly. (DfES: 2003, p20)

Here the White Paper is, on the one hand, seemingly constructing higher education as that which is autonomously determined by higher education institutions. On the other hand, this institutional autonomy is only available where an institution 'chooses' its mission in such a way that 'our system recognises and celebrates different missions properly'. In other words, the choices of institutional mission will need to conform to governmental funding systems in order to be recognised, which would mean that the discursive exchange is not open. If the discursive exchange were closed, then this would constitute an iconic/symbolic objectification rather than the aesthetic construction that is being presented by the text.

Exchange and economic benefit

The White Paper proposes the expansion of 'knowledge exchanges' where universities and business work collaboratively to consider ways in which both higher education and industry sectors can work

together for their mutual benefit.

> Knowledge Exchanges will be skilled in meeting business needs, and will be able both to serve needs from within their own consortium, and to signpost businesses to other Higher Education institutions which may better meet a particular need. (DfES: 2003, p39)

A specific example of the kind of work knowledge exchanges will be expected to undertake is also provided, focusing on the work of the London Higher Education Consortium (LHEC).

> The central purposes of the consortium are to enhance London's national and international reputation as a place for study and research, and develop the city's competitiveness and innovation. To achieve these goals, the LHEC champions collaboration between educational institutions and businesses. It supports academic research and contract work for business, and encourages senior business managers to serve on institutional governing bodies and to provide inputs into course design and development. (DfES: 2003, p40)

This could perhaps be read as a commodified objectification of higher education in that it explicitly describes higher education (in the form of academic research and contract work) as that which can be openly exchanged with business. However, the White Paper falls short of describing this activity as being exchanged for money as a homogeneous comparable textual object. Rather, the text describes the exemplar knowledge exchange as having a central purpose 'to enhance London's national and international reputation'. The establishment of 'reputation' would constitute a singularising move that would also close the discursive exchange. As such, it would constitute an iconic/symbolic objectification. Similarly, the encouragement for 'senior business managers to serve on institutional governing bodies' hardly seems like the construction of higher education as that which is openly exchanged.

The description of the individual and national economic benefits of higher education, presented as 'the case for expansion' of higher education (described above), is explicitly related to the exchange and production of economic capital. It is an attempt at an explicit description of the costs and benefits of higher education as viewed from a governmental perspective. The White Paper makes explicit reference to research from Universities UK that describes the specific economic contribution of higher education to the national economy. Similarly the White Paper describes the earnings and employment benefits an individual can (on average) expect to gain as a consequence of participating in higher education.

Such descriptions could be read as commodified objectification of higher education. It is also the case that such descriptions rely on 'strong correlation' of, for example, higher earnings with higher education, where correlation may not in fact demonstrate causality. However, this analysis is concerned with textual construction rather than causality. On the other hand, it may be the case that such descriptions are only partially explicit, or open. The White Paper does not attempt to describe the economic value of higher education in relation to an explicit 'market price'. It rather attempts to rationalise the proposal to increase public funding and to introduce variable tuition fees payable by those who participate in higher education. The text aligns the increase in public funding to the economic value of higher education as described by a lobby group of providers of higher education.

In addition, the text refers to "a comprehensive review of academic literature [that] suggests there is compelling evidence that education increases productivity" (DfES: 2003, p58), although, the reference in the White Paper also openly describes the limitations of the paper cited.

> *The Returns to Education: A Review of the Macro-Economic Literature;* Barbara Sianesi and John Van Reenen, (March 2002: Institute for Fiscal Studies Working Paper 2002/05.) – It should be noted, though, that there are both data limitations and methodological problems in isolating the contribution of any particular factor empirically. (DfES: 2003, p58)

The acknowledged limitations of the review may somewhat undermine the 'compelling' nature of the evidence referred to by the White Paper. The reference itself however, is a recontextualisation of higher education that constitutes an aesthetic objectification.

The reference to the Home Office, Universities UK, and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), as sources of evidence to support the description of the economic value of higher education, can also be read as iconic/symbolic objectification. Each body is reconstituted by the White Paper as an authoritative source of evidence to support the proposition presented. In the context of the discursive exchange instanced by the White Paper the authority of these singular bodies is euphemistically constituted to endorse a seemingly explicit description of the economic value of higher education.

INTELLIGENT CUSTOMERS

The White Paper proposes introducing an annual student survey to capture and publicise student views about the teaching quality of the higher education institution they have studied at. At the same time it is proposed that summaries of external examiner reports are also published. Both would be available on a publicly accessible website. The White Paper describes this as a means to enable 'students' to become 'intelligent customers' of higher education provision.

> To become intelligent customers of an increasingly diverse provision, and to meet their own increasing diverse needs, students need accessible information. (DfES: 2003, p47)

At the same time the White Paper also proposes that 'employers' also need help from sector skills councils in becoming 'intelligent customers' of higher education institutions.

> Sector skills councils also have a key role in bringing together universities and employers, and in helping employers to act as intelligent customers of universities so that courses that have the needs of employers at heart are developed and successfully marketed.
> (DfES: 2003, p42)

Sector skills councils are described by the text as "bodies with responsibility for ensuring that the skills needs of their industry 'sector' are met" (DfES: 2003, p105). As such, they are positioned as the voice of employers in specific industry sectors. In both these instances higher education is described as that which is available to 'customers' (students or employers) to meet their needs. This would seem to clearly construct higher education as a commodified objectification, in that the discursive exchange that is described is open in the sense that it is publicly accessible. In addition, students

and 'sector skills councils' are allocated an authorial voice in constructing the descriptions of 'higher education' that are publicly exchanged.

It could be argued however, that the construction of the national student survey itself, might constitute an *institutional* objectification as it provides a closed framework within which individual student views are institutionalised. Similarly, sector skills councils are governmental bodies which act to define the needs of specific industry sectors by institutionalising information gathered from individual employers. What is clear however is that the White Paper is operating to explicitly construct a *commodified* objectification of higher education, even where this is in the context of institutional or governmental mechanisms. Both students and employers are presented as consumers of higher education. On the one hand, the homogeneous description of the quality of higher education teaching in individual institutions is positioned as a *commodified* objectification that is recontextualised through bureaucratic mechanisms. On the other hand, higher education is presented as that which can (and should) be (re)constructed in relation to the needs of employers as recontextualised by sector skills councils. Neither instances represent entirely open discursive exchange but they do constitute a (re)production of the idea of the commodification of higher education.

THE RELATIVE OPENNESS OF INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC VALUE

Here I am going to broaden the boundary of the object text a little and include a brief overview of the survey, referred to in the White Paper, providing evidence of the individual economic benefits of higher education. I think it is appropriate to do so, as I aim to establish that the White Papers description of evidence to support the description of explicit economic benefits, is at least partially closed and/or euphemistic. The evidence cited is "Taylor Nelson Sofres Omnibus Survey, 2002" (DfES: 2003, p59). However, the reference provided is to the results of the survey, rather than a document describing any analysis of these results[5]. So the description of higher education leading to an average of 50% more earnings, or of participants being 'half as likely to be unemployed' and having 'double the number of job promotions', is not explicitly available within the reference text provided. The survey referred to is clearly singularised through the identification of the authors – 'Taylor Nelson Sofres'. However, the lack of access to the interpretation of the results referenced could be read as a form of *institutional* objectification of higher education. Where the survey results relate to higher education, they stand as a homogenised 'description' drawn from individual responses to a set of 25 questions. Only 6 of these questions are explicitly related to higher education.

- Question 2a asks '*Please can you tell me which of the descriptions here applies to you?*' and one response category offered is '*I am a student at university or similar higher education institute*'.
- Question 2b asks '*Which of the following education levels are your children or grandchildren in?*' and one possible response category is '*University*'.
- Question 21 asks '*Currently around 40% of people aged 18 - 30 are in higher education. By 2010 the Government aims to widen access to universities and has set a target to raise this to 50%. Do you agree or disagree with this aim?* 67% of respondents agreed.
- Question 22a asks '*Why do you agree with this aim of widening access to higher education?* Response categories include; '*Helps children to get a better job/Get on in life/better standard*

of living' (9%); 'People need education to get jobs' (5%); 'High unemployment/better chance of getting a job' (4%); 'Country needs skilled/ educated people/ shortage' (3%).
NB: The highest percentage response to this question was 37% for *'Benefits to individual students'*

- Question 22b asks *'Why do you disagree with this aim of widening access to higher education?* Response categories include; *'Degrees would be devalued/mean nothing' (6%); 'Should be for the best people/elite/based on ability' (3%); 'Too many people with degrees' (9%); 'Not enough graduate jobs to go around' (7%).*

- Question 23 asks for responses to the idea of *'Students contribution to higher education'. Responses included; 'Students should pay all of their living costs but should get government help with their tuition fees' (35%); 'Students should pay something towards both their tuition fees and living costs' (30%); 'Students should pay all of their tuition fees but should get government help with living costs' (9%); 'Students should pay all their own tuition fees and all their own living costs' (2%).*

The other questions in the survey are concerned with gathering opinion about general standards in education, spending priorities, basic skills and so on. The survey was not actually commissioned to find out if participation in higher education brought individual economic benefits, as the DfES description of it makes clear.

> In November 2001 the Department for Education and Skills commissioned RSGB Omnibus, a Division of Taylor Nelson Sofres, to ask the publics view of the education service nationally. The main purpose of the survey was to help inform the Departments communication strategy (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013879/index.shtml - last accessed 20.3.08)

Not only is the survey not primarily about higher education; where it is, it samples opinions about higher education and does not provide evidence of actual earnings, employment and promotions resulting from higher education. A reader of the White Paper cannot access the analysis of the survey results that provides evidence of the descriptions of individual economic benefits. In this instance, the reference provided does not describe any limitations or possible methodological problems in reaching the conclusions it is used to support. It seems clear however, that the way that the survey has been used to 'inform the Departments communication strategy', is to add weight to the description of the individual economic benefits of higher education in the White Paper, as 'well documented' and as such authoritative. The strategy is to claim authority for a very explicit description of individual economic benefits by reference to a survey from an established market research organisation. This strategy is employed even though the survey in question was not designed, and is arguably inadequate, to do so.

The White Paper also does not refer to this survey anywhere else in the text despite the results seemingly being of direct relevance to the acceptability of policies to widen participation and introduce variable tuition fees. As such, the evidence described by the White Paper, for the individual economic benefits of higher education, seems rather less explicit than it is presented to be. This reference could then perhaps be described as a more 'institutional' as opposed to a 'commodified' objectification of higher education. Access to the discursive exchange that might support the

conclusions stated is closed. On the other hand, the textual object that is constructed (justifiable or not) does, on the face of it, constitute an explicit description of economic value. This is a homogenising move as higher education is constructed as that which has economic (comparable as opposed to singular) value. As such, the White Paper seems to be attempting to construct a commodified objectification of higher education, by openly exchanging information about the economic value of higher education. However, the principles upon which this particular textual construction is based are not in fact made available to the audience. The White Paper can then be said to be operating to regulate access to these principles, as a pedagogic text. This would mean that the objectification of higher education aligned with descriptions of economic benefit would be more appropriately described as institutional as opposed to commodified.

The dynamic and strategic distribution of textual objects within the White Paper is summarised in Figure 11 below.

Aesthetic discursive objectification	*Iconic/symbolic discursive objectification*
Autonomy of individual Higher Education Institution mission	The White Paper As an instance of a Command Paper Governmental Agencies HEFCE, QAA, Teaching Quality Academy, Foundation Degree Forward, Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning, Art and Humanities Review Council, The Access Regulator Individual Universities
Commodified discursive objectification	*Institutional discursive objectification*
Intelligent customers Students and employers Knowledge Exchanges The national economic benefits of Higher Education The individual economic benefits of Higher Education	Criteria for awarding University title National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Research Assessment Exercise Access Agreement Framework Credit systems The social benefits of Higher Education

FIGURE 11: THE DYNAMIC DISTRIBUTION OF DISCURSIVE OBJECTS IN THE WHITE PAPER

Conclusion

The analysis of the White Paper would seem to suggest that the text operates to recontextualise higher education as governmental practice. In doing so it employs a comprehensive range of modes of discursive objectification, including the commodified mode. The text (re)produces the idea of the commodification of higher education, indeed the text seems to explicitly seek to do this.

The text explicitly constructs audience voices as 'partners' in the delivery of the future of higher education. Indeed the inclusion of the identified partners comprises part of the construction of higher education as a textual object. For example, higher education is constructed as that which should operate in partnership with 'employers'. The Government is positioned as the prime authorial voice with a 'responsibility' to plan, structure and regulate higher education including the identification of the principles and values upon which governmental action is operated. 'Fair access' to higher education is highlighted as a fundamental principle within the text. This is primarily described in relation to the identification of better ways in which higher education institutions can identify those who represent 'the talented and best' or those with 'potential to benefit' from higher education. The mechanisms for recognising potential participants as talented or as having potential remains highly institutionalised and regulated in opposition to an open higher education market or commodified mode.

The White Paper also constructs a variety of iconic/symbolic agencies with a range of governmental regulatory powers. Each of these agencies is also associated with specific bureaucratic systems that serve to both constitute some agencies (university title, degree awarding powers etc) and to regulate the practice of those same agencies. The seemingly open opportunity for higher education institutions to define their institutional mission (and as such their singular identity) is highly regulated by bureaucratic systems that are designed to measure the quality of outputs and allocate public resources accordingly.

Both students and employers are described as potential 'intelligent customers' of higher education. However, the analysis would seem to indicate that these descriptions fall short of open discursive exchange. The former is reliant on a bureaucratically administered survey of student opinion of teaching quality in individual institutions. The latter is a recontextualisation of employer needs by organisations (sector skills councils) that are licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (DfES). Even the references to 'knowledge exchanges', which sound like they could constitute an open and homogeneous description turn out rather to be concerned with euphemistic reputation and status.

The case for the expansion of higher education explicitly attempts to describe higher education in relation to its national and individual economic value. The White Paper does this to attempt to present a cost/benefit description to rationalise the allocation of public funding to higher education and the introduction of variable tuition fees for individual students. This is perhaps the most explicit indication of the text operating to (re)produce of the idea of the commodification of higher education. However, the case for the national economic value of higher education that is presented seems far from 'compelling'. The evidence presented is either a description of the higher education sector's economic value by a lobby group (UUK) from the sector, or is explicitly identified as limited and methodologically problematic. Similarly, the evidence for the claims concerning the individual economic benefits associated with higher education participation are certainly not explicitly available and may even be misrepresentative. In either case, the point is that the discursive exchange as constructed in the text is (at least partially) not open and to this degree that which is described may not constitute a commodified objectification. On the other hand, it could of course be argued that the text does construct higher education as a commodified object even if the way that it operates to do this is itself not explicit.

The broad purpose of White Papers is to announce planned legislation and to persuade those who can affect the processes of parliamentary approval and implementation of the merit of such proposals. In explicitly describing higher education in terms of its economic value, the text employs the idea of its commodification to persuade the intended audience(s) that the level of public investment and individual financial contribution is value for money. Given the unconvincing nature of the evidence to support this idea however, it would seem to represent a form of textual slight of hand. Whilst seeming to explicitly relate higher education to economic value, the White Paper is busy constructing highly bureaucratic systems and agencies designed to maintain regulatory authority and governmental power over the future of higher education.

Chapter six – Reading fairness in admissions to higher education

Introduction

LOCATING THE SCHWARTZ REPORT WITHIN THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

The object text for analysis in this chapter is the *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice* produced by Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (AHESG) chaired by Stephen Schwartz and known as *The Schwartz Report*. The text was published in 2004 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

In 2003 the UK Government commissioned a review into the methods that higher education institutions use to assess the merit of the applications that they receive following the "public debate about the criteria that universities and colleges should apply in deciding which applicants to admit" (AHESG: September 2003, p5). For example, the Times Higher Education Supplement reported one speaker from a conference concerning admissions to higher education entitled 'Fair enough?' as saying

> It is arguable that applying the same entry requirements for all students amounts to indirect discrimination because treating all people the same would significantly disadvantage an identifiable group for no good reason. In such circumstances, different treatment is justified or may even be required precisely because its purpose is to assist a disadvantaged group. (THES: 31.1.2003)

The then Secretary of State Charles Clark, asked Stephen Schwartz, Vice Chancellor of Brunel University, to lead the Steering Group (AHESG) of the Admissions to Higher Education Review which was specifically commissioned to 'reinforce public confidence' in the fairness of higher education admission systems. The appointed AHESG membership, in addition to the chair, included; one Vice Chancellor and one Rector and Chief Executive of UK Universities; the Head of Admissions at the University of Cambridge; the Chairman of TESCO; the Chairman of the Sutton Trust; the Chief Executive of UCAS; the Chief Executive of HEFCE; one Headteacher of a Secondary Public School; one Headteacher of a Comprehensive Secondary State School; and one Principal of a Further Education College.

The terms of reference for the Steering Group were as follows:

> To report to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the options which English institutions providing Higher Education should consider adopting in assessing the merit of applicants and their achievement and potential for different types of courses.
> To report on practical implementation of such options using evidence-based good practice.
> To report on the high-level principles underpinning such approaches which institutions would be expected to adopt.
>
> The Group should consider in particular:
> a)   the need to reinforce public confidence in the fairness and transparency of admissions arrangements;

b) the diversity in the missions of providers of Higher Education, and of their students;

c) maintaining the autonomy of institutions in academic matters including the systems and processes by which applicants are admitted.

The report to the Secretary of State should be submitted by May 2004 following a period of consultation with universities and the wider public.

(AHESG: September 2003, Appendix 4)

The Schwartz Report (AHESG: September 2004) was produced following a two-phase consultation process. The first phase described 'key issues relating to fair admissions to higher education' (AHESG: September 2003). The second phase included the production of draft recommendations concerning the principles of fair admissions to higher education in a document entitled *Fair admissions to higher education: draft recommendations for consultation* (AHESG: April 2004). The final report (and the object text for analysis in this chapter) was published in September 2004 and it stated that,

> It is our intention that this report acts both as a catalyst for action, and as a practical guide to fair admissions to which institutions can refer in reviewing and developing their admissions policies and processes. (AHESG: September 2004, p2)

The final report is, I argue, the product of the operation of 'technologies of discourse' in the (re)production of 'true knowledge' about higher education practice. The following section will describe the location of the object text within the specialised theoretical discursive field constructed by this thesis and provide an overview of the method of analysis that will be employed in this chapter.

The analysis of the Schwartz Report

In describing the higher education discursive field, chapter two described Foucaultian 'technologies of truth' following Simola et al (1998) which included 'technologies of self', 'technologies of government' and 'technologies of discourse'. This chapter will focus on the analysis of *The Schwartz Report* as an example of 'technologies of discourse'. The process of appointing an official steering group to consult and then report on good practice is an example of a technology employed to constitute 'what' is the 'true knowledge' about fair higher education admissions. As an example of a technology of discourse, *The Schwartz Report* operates to describe what is and what is not written (or spoken) about fair higher education admissions. It also describes who is authorised to speak and who is not, about fair higher education admissions and how those who are authorised should speak. I argue that one of the significant ways in which *The Schwartz Report* operates to construct higher education as 'fair admissions practice' is to create oppositions and alliances between specific 'authors' and 'audiences' such as the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group and Higher Education Institutions.

In other words, the specific nature of the description of higher education, (re)produced within *The Schwartz Report*, is determined by what is included and what is excluded in the construction of such oppositions and alliances. The activity that the object text is concerned with is the practice of higher education and the description of this practice is, I argue, a recontextualisation of it as 'fair admissions practice'. This not to say that all higher education practice is somehow subsumed within admissions practice but rather to say that the language of higher education practice is re-described by *The*

Schwartz Report in relation to the principles of admissions practice. *The Schwartz Report* employs an elaborated language of fair admissions practice to construct 'higher education' as that which should be described in relation to 'high-level principles' underpinning fair admissions including; transparency; selecting for merit, potential and diversity; reliability, validity and relevance; minimising barriers; professionalism (AHESG: September 2004). I will not be arguing that the description of higher education within *The Schwartz Report* is right or wrong but I will rather seeking to generate a description of 'how' it is operating within the higher education field.

As a consequence of the identification of oppositions and alliances within *The Schwartz Report*, I will construct a discursive space from oppositions concerning 'modes of assessing merit and potential'. *The Schwartz Report*'s terms of reference are centrally concerned with providing guidance about fair ways to assess the merit of applicants to higher education institutions. The oppositions and alliances instanced within the text construct a specific recontextualisation of higher education practice as fair admissions practice. The various modes of assessing merit I will describe will not seek to establish concrete instances of each mode but will rather be concerned with the dynamic relations between modes. The relational discursive space constructed, however, will comprehensively contain all possible variables in consideration of the oppositions used to construct the space. In this instance the oppositions identified within the text will be 'validity/non-validity' and 'reliability/non-reliability' which are described within the object text.

I will then recontextualise this analysis and the oppositions and alliances identified as a consequence of it, in relation to the discursive space, previously described in chapter three, that is concerned with modes of discursive objectification. This space is constructed by considering the dynamic relations between two oppositions; singular/homogeneous objectification and open/closed discursive exchange. As one of the modes of discursive objectification described is the 'commodified mode' this space can be employed to describe how and the extent to which, the object text is operating in this mode. In other words, I argue that the analysis of the specific description of higher education within *The Schwartz Report* can be employed to construct a relatively coherent description of the extent to which the text operates to (re)produce or resist the idea of the commodification of higher education.

To summarise, the method of analysis in this chapter will produce a 'constructive description' including:

1. The introduction to the location of *The Schwartz Report* within the higher education field (as discussed above).
2. An overview of the authorial and audience voices constructed in my transaction with *The Schwartz Report* (reconstructed in the reader's transaction with this text)
3. An analysis of how *The Schwartz Report* is operating to recontextualise 'higher education' as fair admissions practice.
4. The identification and analysis of oppositions and alliances within *The Schwartz Report* to construct a specialised and localised mode of action – 'modes of assessing merit'.
5. The recontexualisation of oppositions and alliances described in the analysis (items 1-4 above) in relation to modes of discursive objectification.

6. An analysis of the dynamics of the distribution and exclusion of textual objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification, including the extent to which the text is operating in the commodified mode.

Authorial and audience voices in *The Schwartz Report*

The primary authorial voice indicated within *The Schwartz Report* is the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (AHESG). The appointment, by the UK Government (DfES), of non-government members to this group enables the text to be described as being the product of 'an independent review' of fair admissions practices in the higher education sector. However, while the term 'independent' here can be read as signifying that appointees are not directly representative of the UK Government, it is clear that the steering group does not, on the whole, represent 'uninterested' parties. All members of the group (with the exception of the Chairman of Tesco) have a fairly direct interest in higher education, hence their description as 'stakeholders'. Three members represent the university sector as providers of higher education and three members represent institutions that have an interest in preparing applicants for higher education. The Sutton Trust has an interest in providing support for disadvantaged groups accessing higher education and two members represent either funding higher education or administering the process of admissions. The Chairman of Tesco is a representative of business that may have an interest in graduate recruitment and higher-level training.

The rationale for the appointment of these particular individuals is not made explicit within the text but it can be described as constituting what is known as a group of 'the great and the good'. They all hold senior positions in their individual organisations and can, it must be presumed, bring expertise to the review in hand. Whilst they each bring a specific perspective they have been charged with producing a report that describes best practice for the sector as a whole. The Steering Group operates as a collective entity that has a single authorial voice. Individual voices of members of the Steering Group are not made available within the text. On the one hand, the Steering Group's authority is underpinned by its seniority and relative diversity, on the other hand, this diversity is homogenised in the processes of textual production as the Steering Group is constituted by the text as a single author.

The one exception to this is the Foreword by the chair of Steering Group, Stephen Schwartz. As is usual practice for such reports, the chair describes the general context of the review and lends personal support for the project that has been undertaken. As the leading member of the Steering Group, the chair constitutes an individual with which the report can be associated without at the same time establishing individual authorship.

These technologies largely exclude the description of the DfES, or the Government, as authors of the report, as the Foreword by Stephen Schwartz makes clear.

> I was asked by Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, to lead an independent review of the options that English higher education institutions should consider when assessing the merit of applicants for their courses, and to report on the high-level principles underlying these options. I was supported in this review by a Steering Group

representing a range of stakeholders. Our review began in June 2003, and this is our final report. (AHESG: September 2004, p2)

The fact that the process is described as an 'independent review' establishes an authorial distance between the government, who have commissioned the review and the Steering Group. It is of course the case that the chair and all committee members were appointed by the DfES, including the Chief Executive of HEFCE, who fund the four higher education institutions represented. It is also the case that the DfES determined the specific terms of reference of the review. These are clearly described within *The Schwartz Report* text and to this degree at least, the DfES can be described as a partial author. The DfES and in particular the Secretary of State, are also explicitly identified as the prime audience of the final report as the commissioning body in the terms of reference above.

The terms of reference also identify that the report should result from consultation with 'universities and the wider public'. This broad description was unpacked on the consultation response form (for both phase one and two), which stated that

> This consultation is primarily aimed at:
> Institutions Offering Higher Education
> Schools & Colleges
> Young People
> Organisations Working with/Advising Young People
> Students' Unions
> Employers' Organisations (AHESG: September 2003a, p1)

The Schwartz Report overview of consultation responses (p66-67) indicates that over a third of responses for both phases came from higher education institutions. It is clear then that the consultation process described with the text includes the identification of the organisations above as audiences for the consultation texts. However, given that *The Schwartz Report* text is described as 'recommendations for good practice', it seems also to be clear that the practice being described is that of those involved in making decisions about admitting applicants to higher education. In the terms of reference and elsewhere in the text, it is made clear that higher education institutions have autonomy in making such decisions.

> The Steering Group wishes to affirm its belief in the autonomy of institutions over admissions policies and decisions. (AHESG: September 2004, p6)

It would seem reasonable to conclude that while the audience for the consultation phases of the review included a range of organisations and to a degree 'the wider public', the primary audience for the final Schwartz Report text (aside from the Secretary of State) is universities and other institutions providing higher education.

The recontextualisation of higher education as fair admissions practice
This section will focus primarily on the 'problems' in higher education admissions described by the text and the 'high-level principles' produced as solutions to these problems.

The Schwartz Report describes university and college admissions systems and practices as generally fair and including many aspects of good practice but also identifies a range of issues and problems that the Report seeks to address. The Report seeks to address these issues by describing the 'high-level principles' for fair admissions, guidelines for how these principles can be implemented by higher education institutions and wider recommendations for other stakeholders. The problems and solutions described within the text construct a range of oppositions and alliances that I argue operate to recontextualise higher education. The text describes the problems with higher education admissions as follows;

> The Steering Group has identified the following problems to which it believes solutions are needed as we move towards the goal of admissions processes which are both fair and seen to be fair:
> There are differing interpretations of merit and fairness;
> It can be difficult for applicants to know how they will be assessed;
> The information used in assessing applicants may not be equally reliable and consistent;
> Some courses have high drop-out rates, which may be related to admissions processes;
> For courses that are over-subscribed, it can be difficult for admissions staff to select from a growing pool of highly-qualified applicants;
> Some applicants face a burden of additional assessment;
> There is uneven awareness of and response to the increasing diversity of applicants, qualifications and pathways into higher education;
> Most offers depend on predicted grades, not confirmed examination results;
> The legislation applicable to admissions is complex and there is uneven understanding of what it means for admissions policies and processes. (AHESG: September 2004, p21/22)

In relation to the problem of 'differing interpretations of merit and fairness', the text describes an opposition between merit that is established through the achievement of the highest exams marks alone and a more individualised and holistic assessment of achievement and potential. The latter description of merit includes considerations of the type of school an applicant might have attended, obstacles that an applicant might have overcome and the positive contribution an applicant might make to the 'diversity of the student community'. The Report also states that equal examination results do not necessarily equate to equal potential, citing evidence that state school entrants with equal examination grades do better than independent school entrants. However, the Report doesn't make a recommendation to resolve this opposition but rather recommends that each higher education institution makes explicit how it describes merit: in other words, to make explicit where each institution's description of merit sits on the continuum between reliance on examination results alone and individual, holistic assessment of achievement and potential based on a wide range of indicators. In describing 'merit and fairness' in this way the text positions 'fairness' as explicitness. The text recontextualises higher education practice as that which requires explicitness in relation to the specific description of merit applied in the process of admitting students.

This 'problem' is also related to the issue, described in the text, of it being difficult for applicants to know how they will be assessed in the process of admission to higher education.

Transparency is important to enable all applicants to make the right choices…students will be placed more obviously in the role of consumers. (AHESG: September 2004, p25)

In fact the text states that

Transparency produces informed consumers *[bold in the original text as a heading]*
Transparency about admissions policies, criteria and processes has the additional benefit of aiding self-selection by applicants. (AHESG: September 2004, p25)

This establishes a non-explicit opposition with what might be 'opaque' admission procedures and 'uninformed' consumers but also describes higher education as that which places students in the role of consumers (informed or otherwise). This constructs an opposition between students as consumers (of higher education) and students not conceived of as consumers at all but this opposition is not made explicit. The explicit emphasis within the text upon 'informed' (and therefore also uninformed) consumers invites acquiescence to the description of students as consumers. Here the text operates to construct higher education as that which students consume and invites the reading that 'fair' consumption requires consumers to be informed.

This is further emphasised in an earlier section of the text when it describes higher education as a valuable commodity.

A fair and transparent admissions system is essential for all applicants. Higher education is a valuable commodity: it can affect salary, job security and power to influence society. The number of people in England who seek an HE qualification has grown enormously, with over 934,000 full-time undergraduate students and an additional 521,000 studying part-time. Overall, the benefits of HE are strong. But they also vary considerably from course to course and between institutions, in terms of both the learning experience and graduate outcomes. The sector is diverse and choice of course and institution matters. In this context, it is vital that all stakeholders in the admissions process – applicants, parents, schools, colleges, teaching and admissions staff – believe the system is fair. (AHESG: September 2004, p4)

Here higher education is constructed as a commodity that brings specific benefits to those who gain access to it. In this description, the higher education commodity market includes products of differing value in terms of the benefits they can bring. The proposition described by *The Schwartz Report* is that the currency that enables a consumer to gain access to the higher education products of the highest value (in terms of 'salary, job security and power') is merit, rather than money for example. Merit is not explicitly opposed to money within the text as the means to gain access to high value higher education products but it is clear that the reference to higher education as a commodity aligns it with the practices of financial exchange. The recommendation that the determination of merit be transparent and explicit to applicants is similar to Bourdieu's description of economic exchange (Bourdieu,1986) as based on an explicit price. The text would appear to be operating to construct merit as an explicit currency that can operate in a similar fashion to the way that money operates to establish market price and value in the exchange of traditional commodities. However, by the same token the variable and institutionally specific descriptions of merit, highlighted by the text, might also be described as 'euphemistic' (as opposed to explicit), drawing on Bourdieu's description of the

exchange of symbolic goods (Bourdieu: 1998) as discussed in chapter three. Admissions processes are in this context a means through which the amount of admission 'currency' (merit) an applicant possesses is established and this will be contingent upon the specific way in which it is measured by each individual institution.

There is also a clear opposition here between 'self-selection' and selection by something other than 'self', 'institutional selection' perhaps. 'Transparency about admissions' is described as having the benefits of lessening 'wasted choices', lowering 'drop-out rates' and preventing applicants 'wrongly discounting themselves' from courses (AHESG: September 2004, p25). In this description 'transparency' is positioned as a mechanism through which applicants can recognise themselves as having or not having 'merit' in relation to specific higher education courses. Self-selection requires the willingness of the applicant to subjectify themselves in relation to specific descriptions of merit (as a knowledge regime) through self-examination.

The Schwartz Report describes problems concerning the reliability of the information used in assessing applicants. Issues identified include examination results not always being a reliable indicator of future success, the variable reliability of personal statements and the lack of consensus concerning the reliability and validity of different methods of assessment (AHESG: September 2004, p26). Here a clear opposition is constructed between types of information that are 'reliable and valid' and types that are not. There is also an opposition between forms of information derived from externally regulated examination results and those that are derived from personal statements. However, the issue described in relation to personal statements is not that they are self-generated as such but rather that the provenance of the information may be questionable (perhaps as a consequence of not being regulated).

Similarly, the problems of high drop-out rates for some courses are described as relating to the need for the review of the reliability of assessment methods employed during the admissions process and the level of support for 'widening participation' learners. It is also stated that it is unfair to admit applicants that are unlikely to succeed as a means of meeting institutional recruitment targets. Here presumably, low drop-out rates would be related to reliable assessment methods and an appropriate level of support for 'widening participation' learners. A distinction is being made between widening participation applicants and other applicants in terms of the level of support provided which is different from describing the varying reliability of assessment methods. Similarly, a distinction can be drawn between 'applicants' and 'learners', both of which are mentioned in the text, where the latter represents an applicant that has been admitted to a course of study. The text implies that 'support' for widening participation applicants in something that might occur once a 'learner' has been admitted to a higher education course. However, it is not clears within the text if such support, if available during the admissions process, would merely require the use of reliable and valid methods of assessing the merit of applicants or would be supplementary to this.

The text describes the problem of over-subscribed courses selecting from a "growing pool of highly qualified applicants" (AHESG: September 2004, p27). The similarity of the levels of the qualifications of applicants is described as leading to an unpredictability of outcomes in the admissions process and the perception of unfairness. The lack of transparency in the process is also described as exacerbating the problem. Here the text is describing some higher education institutions as having a

problem in selecting from a category of applicants who all have 'merit' and the potential to benefit from an oversubscribed course. The problem described is not one of identifying which applicants have merit but rather one of identifying which applicants have *more* merit in relation to other applicants who also have a high level of merit. Higher education is as such, constructed as a potentially scarce good, for which it is fair to provide access to, on a competitive basis, related to the amount of merit that an applicant possesses.

Linked with the above is the 'burden of additional assessment', where for example, institutions require applicants to sit additional tests and conduct interviews to determine the merit of applications to higher education. The text describes issues relating to the additional financial burden such activities can have on applicants which could provide an uneven ground for some applicants to compete. The text does not describe the opposition here with the potential benefits that might be associated with additional assessment. It is possible, for example, that applicants might gain insight into the requirements of the course they are applying to inform their choice of course. However, the text positions this issue in relation to the principle of 'minimising barriers' that are 'irrelevant to the assessment' of applicants.

The text identifies a problem with the 'uneven awareness of and response to the diversity of applicants and qualifications'. Issues described include the uneven recognition and awareness of non-A level qualifications and the explicit exclusion of these qualifications by some institutions, as well as the lack of a national system of credit to enable to equivalent recognition of qualifications. The phrase 'uneven awareness and response' points up an opposition between institutions that are aware of and recognise non-A level qualifications and those that do not, which enables the unevenness described, to be mapped. The 'problem' here is described in terms of 'awareness and response' rather than, for example, fairness and merit. In relation to the 'response' of those making decisions concerning the admissions of students, lack of awareness of non-A level qualifications is also described as "not…a legitimate reason for not considering an applicant" (AHESG: September 2004, p28). This establishes an opposition between legitimate reasons for non-selection and non-legitimate reasons. However, that *The Schwartz Report* states that

> The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group believes in the autonomy of institutions over admissions policies and decisions. Fairness does not mean that governments should choose students. Preserving academic freedom requires that academic institutions retain three basic rights in relation to teaching: the right to choose who will teach, what will be taught and to whom. This means that the specific applicants that a university or college accepts should be a matter for each institution and no one else. Moreover, it should be clearly recognised that it is perfectly legitimate for admissions staff to seek out the most academically excellent students. Admissions must, however, be fair to applicants, and in developing its recommendations, the Steering Group has paid particular attention to the interests of applicants. (AHESG: September 2004, p30)

This means that individual higher education institutions determine the legitimacy of reasons for non-consideration of an applicant with non-A level qualifications. In other words, if an institution decides to exclude applicants with non-A level qualifications, where the institution is aware of such

qualifications, this can be legitimate and fair according to the description of fair admissions in *The Schwartz Report*.

This of course does not necessarily mean that it might not be equally fair for the Government to choose students, even if this is not a position supported by the text. *The Schwartz Report* bases its 'belief' in the autonomy of institutions in making decisions concerning the admission of students on the value of 'academic freedom', in particular, the right of each higher education institution to choose whom it will teach. The text weighs this right against what sounds like a duty to ('admissions must') be fair to applicants. By seeking to define fair admissions the text identifies, by exclusion, admissions practices that are not fair.

> After considering the issues, evidence and arguments summarised in the earlier parts of this report, the Steering Group has reached the opinion that fair admissions system is one that provides equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background.
> (AHESG: September 2004, p30)

In other words, admissions practices that do not provide 'equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background' are not fair. Given the full range of possibilities that are implied by the text, it would seem at least conceivable that institutional autonomy could result in unfair admissions practice. By the same token, it seems possible that Government responsibility for admissions decisions could result in fair admissions practice. Indeed the problems described in the text that relate to the lack of a national credit system could be related to Government level action. However, the text makes it clear that the principle of institutional autonomy is not debatable. It constitutes an example of a technology of discourse that excludes statements that might question institutional autonomy. The internal rules of the discourse (for example, the terms of reference of the Steering Group) operate to reproduce the 'true knowledge' about higher education admissions and at the same time exclude questions concerning the legitimacy of institutional autonomy.

The text also identifies that the admissions system is mostly based on predicted, rather than confirmed examination results, which the text describes as less reliable given that only 50% turn out to be accurate. As such the text identifies this practice as unfair and recommends introducing a system of post-qualification applications (PQA). Once again it is the reliability of the admissions system in identifying merit, as the currency of admissions, that the text is concerned with. In this instance the text operates to align fairness with reliability and unfairness with unreliability. The text supports this position by reference to anecdotal evidence.

> There is anecdotal evidence that some students currently might not choose to apply at all, or may restrict their choice of course because they do not think their marks will be good enough. (AHESG: September 2004, p29)

This excerpt identifies a potential barrier for some applicants who might be less confident of their merit when unable to make applications based on results rather than predictions and this is positioned as the source of the unfairness described. Another way of saying this might be that those who are less used to being described as having merit are likely to be less adept at using it, or following Bourdieu, they lack the cultural capital to mobilise their human assets.

Lastly the text identifies the problem that "not all admissions staff are clear that improving access to HE for disadvantaged or under-represented groups is a legitimate aim for institutions" (AHESG: September 2004, p29). The text includes implicit opposition concerning institutional aims that are legitimate or non-legitimate as well as oppositions between aims that seek academic excellence as opposed to providing opportunity for disadvantaged or under-represented groups. There is also a potential opposition between legitimacy of claims for access to higher education as determined by the law and legitimacy as determined by institutional autonomy. However, these oppositions are resolved within the text by relating them to matters of the professionalism in admissions. This strategy largely avoids discussion concerning the legitimacy of individual institutional aims beyond compliance with disability and discrimination, human rights and European Union legislation. Rather, the issue, as described by the text, can be resolved by institutions raising the awareness of their admissions staff through appropriate training.

If the text had described the problem as institutions not describing improving access as a legitimate aim the text would have been operating outside its terms of reference by questioning institutional autonomy to decide such matters. The internal rules of discourse (the terms of reference) are operating to determine what can and what cannot be said. In this instance the internal rules of the discourse have regulated the description of the problems with fair admissions to higher education. If this is the case then it seems likely that the descriptions of the high-level principles, positioned as the solution to these problems, are also regulated by the internal rules of the discourse and systems of exclusion.

HIGH-LEVEL PRINCIPLES

The Schwartz Report describes five high-level principles that it recommends that higher education institutions consider to address the problems in admissions identified by the Report.

> **Transparency**
> Principle 1: A fair admissions system should be transparent
> **Selecting for merit, potential and diversity**
> Principle 2: A fair admissions system should enable institutions to select students who are able to complete the course as judged by their achievements and their potential
> **Reliability, validity and relevance**
> Principle 3: A fair admissions system should strive to use assessment methods that are reliable and valid
> **Minimising barriers**
> Principle 4: A fair admissions system should seek to minimise barriers for applicants
> **Professionalism**
> Principle 5: A fair admissions system should be professional in every respect and underpinned by appropriate institutional structures and processes
> (AHESG: September 2004, *NB these principles have been extracted from the following pages of the text* - p33-42)

In relation to the principle of 'transparency' the text recommends that institutions should provide clear information concerning the criteria and methods used by an institutions in assessing merit and potential including the extent to which wider contextual factors are included. In relation to 'selecting

for merit, potential and diversity' two key tenets are described: "Ability to complete the course is an essential criterion for admission to HE; Applicants should be assessed as individuals." (AHESG: September 2004, p35). In relation to the principle of 'reliability, validity and relevance' the text acknowledges that both quantitative and qualitative methods of establishing merit and potential can be relevant to admissions processes.

In describing the principle of 'minimising barriers' the text identifies a range of potential barriers that are 'irrelevant to admissions requirements'. The text describes such barriers as including those in the areas of; "Means of assessment; the varying resources and support available to applicants; Disability; The type of an applicant's qualifications." (AHESG: September 2004, p41). The principle of 'professionalism' in admissions is described by the text as requiring clear institutional responsibilities in managing admissions, appropriate resources to be allocated and admissions staff to be appropriately trained.

The relationship described by the text between 'problems' and 'high-level principles' operates to construct the discursive space within which higher education practice is recontextualised as fair admissions to higher education practice. In other words, higher education is recontextualised as a specific textual object formed in the context of the oppositions and alliances instanced within the text. This specific higher education discursive object is constructed in the space between these oppositions and alliances. Appendix 9 'Problems, Principles and Recommendations' of the text presents an illustration of the discursive framework within which, fair admissions to higher education is constructed. The table relates 'problems' in higher education admissions (as discussed above) to the specific 'principles' of fair admissions described within the text. The table has been reproduced below (Figure 12) without the 'recommendations' column which provides section references to the main text.

Problem	Principles
Differing interpretations of merit and fairness	Transparency Selecting for merit, potential and diversity
Can be difficult for applicants to know how they will be assessed	Transparency Professionalism
Information used in assessing applicants may not be equally reliable and consistent	Selecting for merit, potential and diversity Reliability, validity and relevance
Some courses have high drop-out rates	Transparency Selecting for merit, potential and diversity Reliability, validity and relevance Professionalism
For over-subscribed courses, it can be difficult for admissions staff to select from a growing pool of highly-qualified applicants	Transparency Selecting for merit, potential and diversity Reliability, validity and relevance Minimising the barriers
Some applicants face a burden of additional assessment	Minimising the barriers
Uneven awareness of and response to the diversity of applicants, qualifications and pathways	Professionalism
Most offers depend on predicted not actual grades	
Relevant legislation is complex and there is uneven understanding of it	Transparency Selecting for merit, potential and diversity Reliability, validity and relevance Minimising the barriers Professionalism

FIGURE 12: PROBLEMS, PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
(AHESG: SEPTEMBER 2004, P86)

The 'problem' that 'most offers depend on predicted not actual grades', is not related (within the text) to any 'principle'. This is because the principles of fair admissions described by the text are to guide the practice of higher education institutions, whereas the issues of predicted grades is identified as a systemic problem that individual institutions cannot resolve. This does highlight the way in which the principles are constructed. Principles do not relate to the practice of higher education admissions outside the context of individual higher education institutions. Practice that is more generally described is not related to 'principles' of fair admissions but rather to 'recommendations'.

This is in contrast with the other problems described. For example, the problem of 'differing interpretations of merit and fairness' is related to the principles of 'transparency' and 'selecting for merit, potential and diversity'. In other words, in this instance 'differing interpretations' is described as the problem to which 'transparency', in relation to the description of merit a specific institution employs in making decisions about who to admit to its courses, is the solution. It would of course have been possible to oppose 'differing interpretations' with 'a consistent interpretation' of merit but

this would have been contrary to the terms of reference of the Steering Group to maintain institutional autonomy in determining academic matters. Despite the emphasis on assessing merit within the text, there is no definition of it, beyond the identification of possible ways of assessing it. The closest the text gets to a definition of merit is in describing 'ability to complete the course' as an essential criterion for admission to higher education. However, whilst the text may be identifying this 'tenet' as essential (necessary) it is clearly not sufficient otherwise the text would include a recommendation that all applicants who met this minimum threshold should be admitted to the course they applied for.

If we consider another example from the Appendix 9 table the text is more definitive. The 'problem' that 'information used in assessing applicants may not be equally reliable and consistent' is related to the 'principles' of 'selecting for merit, potential and diversity' and 'reliability, validity and relevance'. In particular, the problem of a lack of reliability and consistency is related to principles of reliability and validity. Reliability and validity are defined by the text as follows:

> In this context, the Steering Group defines 'reliable' as meaning that two people applying the same method would reach the same conclusion about the same person, and 'valid' as meaning that the method predicts what it is supposed to predict.
> (AHESG: September 2004, p 40, note 70)

Reliability and validity are defined by the text in such a way as to clearly encompass the opposite of each term, 'non-reliability' and 'non-validity'. In order to gain further insight into how the text is operating, these oppositions will be used to construct a discursive space to describe *modes of assessing merit and potential* that are instanced within the text.

Modes of assessing merit and potential

OPPOSITIONS AND ALLIANCES CONCERNING 'MODES OF ASSESSING MERIT AND POTENTIAL'

The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group terms of reference were to report on the options that higher education institutions should consider when assessing the merit of applicants. *The Schwartz Report* employs the term 'merit'[6] to describe the extent to which an applicant to higher education has the ability to complete the higher education course they are applying to. At the same time, it is the currency, which applicants may have in variable amounts, that is measured by higher education institutions, to select one applicant over another. The text also describes merit as that which will be defined differently by individual higher education institutions depending upon the relative emphasis on various ways of assessing merit such as examination results and more holistic information about individual applicants.

As we have seen, the definition of validity described by the text is that a method of predicting merit and potential, predicts what it is supposed to predict. The definition of reliability is that two people applying the same method of assessing merit would reach the same conclusion about the same application. The oppositions that I will relate to these terms are, firstly, non-validity, which would describe a method that does not predict merit and potential; and secondly, non-reliability, which would describe a method that would not result in the same assessment of merit and potential of an

applicant if applied by two different assessors. The reliable/non-reliable opposition concerns the reproducibility of admissions practices. Reliable practices would operate to individualise applicants in relation to a reproducible means of describing merit and potential to benefit from higher education. A non-reliable method would, on the contrary, not be reproducible and would operate to constitute a unique or personal description of an applicant's merit and potential to benefit. This provides two binary variables, valid/non-valid and reliable/non-reliable, that can be employed to construct a relational discursive space within which all possible variables concerning the modes of assessing merit can be described.[7]

MODES OF ASSESSING MERIT AND POTENTIAL AND THE SCHWARTZ REPORT

This section will describe each of four 'modes of assessing merit and potential' with specific reference to *The Schwartz Report* text. This will include *nepotistic*, *reproductive*, *impartial* and *endorsed* modes. These are summarised in Figure 13 below.

Reliability	Validity	
	Valid	*Non-valid*
Non-reliable	Endorsed	Nepotistic
Reliable	Impartial	Reproductive

FIGURE 13: MODES OF ASSESSING MERIT AND POTENTIAL

A mode of assessing merit and potential that was described as valid but non-reliable would constitute that which operated to predict what it is supposed to predict but is not reproducible when applied by another assessor. For example, references or personal statements are described within the text as being of value in assessing 'contextual factors' that may affect the judgment about an applicant's overall merit and potential. In other words, the text is positioning references and personal statements as a valid means of assessing an applicant's merit and potential. However, the text also describes a range of problems with this method.

> There is wide variation in the support provided to applicants in preparing their personal statements for application forms. Although guidance is provided by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), it is not always clear to applicants that information about contextual factors could be relevant. Levels of understanding of what is required vary significantly among staff who advise applicants or write references. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some staff and parents advise to the extent that the personal statement cannot be seen as the applicant's own work. At the other extreme, mature applicants not enrolled at a school or college may rely entirely on their own judgment.
> (AHESG: September 2004, p26)

and

> there are variations in the extent to which personal statements and references include information about, for example, disruptions to schooling, socio-economic context, home responsibilities or other challenges applicants might have had to overcome. The extent to which personal statements and references help admissions staff assess suitability for a subject also varies. (AHESG: September 2004, p47)

The recommendation of *The Schwartz Report* to address the issue of the non-reliability of references and personal statements is that application forms should be redesigned to "elicit relevant information more consistently" (AHESG: September 2004, 47). Recommendations include introducing systems that would structure references and personal statements in relation to specified prompts. In other words, greater reliability would be provided by homogenising the range of statements made by those producing references and personal statements by guiding them to use statements that are pre-prepared. *The Schwartz Report* proposes a move from a more singular (and therefore less reliable) mode to a more homogeneous mode to establish fairness in this method of assessing merit. This would constitute a move from the *endorsed mode* to *impartial mode* in the relational space I have constructed.

A mode of assessing merit and potential that was both non-reliable and non-valid would be diametrically opposed to fair admissions as described by *The Schwartz Report*, as it is to the *impartial mode* in the relational space above. A method of assessing merit and potential that was described as not predicting what it was supposed to predict would represent a means of selecting applicants on the basis of something other then merit (as described by the text). As a non-reliable method it would also constitute a singular instance of selection that could not be reproduced. For example, if an admissions tutor for a higher education programme selected an individual applicant on the basis that he knew the applicant's family and wished for one reason or another to treat this specific application with undue favour, then it would constitute the *nepotistic mode*. For example, the text states that

> Admissions criteria should not include factors irrelevant to the assessment of merit. For example, this means that institutions should not give preference to the relatives of graduates or benefactors. (AHESG: September 2004, p38)

If however, such non-valid practice became systemic (therefore not singular) it would by definition be reproducible and as such reliable. For example, the text states that:

> Applicants should be assessed as individuals: it is not appropriate to treat one applicant automatically more or less favourably by virtue of his or her background or school/college. (AHESG: September 2004, p35)

In other words, the text is describing the use of background or school/college as the means of assessing merit as non-valid. This practice could, however, be a reliable way of making decisions about who to admit, as the practice of privileging applicants from a particular type of background, or a particular school or type of school, is reproducible.

The mode of assessing merit I have described as *reproductive* describes a reliable means of assessing merit that is non-valid (as in the above example). Methods of assessment operating in the reproductive mode are those that reproduce that which they purport to measure in the process of misrecognising merit and potential. Where individual higher education institutions exclude 'wider contextual factors', contrary to the recommendation of the text, and focus on examination results alone, then it is possible that those applicants with the most merit and potential will not be selected. As the text states,

> The type of school attended affects the predictive validity of examination grades…The evidence…suggests that equal examination grades do not necessarily represent equal potential. (AHESG: September 2004, p22)

In such an instance, the applicants that would be selected would be those with the highest examination grades on the basis that this aspect alone is a valid indicator of merit and potential. If however the school type was not taken into account then the validity of the assessment method would be in question and could constitute a misrecognition of applicants' examination grades as merit and potential. Such a method would however be reliable as another admissions tutor employing the same method would be likely to reproduce the same result. In this example, the description of merit and potential as excluding wider contextual factors (such as type of school), would determine the method of its assessment, which would operate to reproduce the description of merit and potential in the individualisation of admitted applicants.

Another potential example of reliable yet non-valid assessment of merit and potential is where an institution does not recognise certain kinds of qualifications within the admissions process. The text identifies the non-recognition of some qualifying courses as a problem that needs to be addressed.

> while the Steering Group considers that curriculum development is outside its remit, it does note that some institutions effectively exclude learners with vocational and Access qualifications from many of their courses. (AHESG: September 2004, p27)

However, the issue of validity here is positioned as a matter for individual institutional autonomy although the text does provide recommended guidelines for the implementation of the identified principles of fair admissions. For example, the principle of 'the minimising of barriers' recommends that:

> Admissions processes should seek to minimise any barriers that are irrelevant to admissions requirements. This guideline applies to barriers potentially arising from:
> • Means of assessment;
> • The varying resources and support available to applicants;
> • Disability;
> • The type of an applicant's qualifications. (AHESG: September 2004, p41)

Similarly, the text makes clear that

> The Steering Group does not consider lack of familiarity with an applicant's qualifications to be a legitimate reason for not considering that applicant. (AHESG: September 2004, p28)

In fact the text recommends that admissions staff are appropriately trained in accordance with the principle of 'professionalism' in admissions.

> Training for those assessing applications is likely to include information about external issues, such as the full range of UK Level 3 qualifications, progression routes, equal opportunities, and relevant legislation. (AHESG: September 2004, p42)

However, the positioning of the recognition, or otherwise, of non-A level qualifications as a matter of the professionalism of admissions staff is a strategy that enables non-recognition of these equivalent qualifications to be described as valid. There is a clear tension in the text here, as it modulates between the non-recognition of some qualification as a problem for fair admissions and the requirement that institutional autonomy be maintained. As I have argued previously, the text does allude to the possibility that autonomous institutions can operate unfairly in their admissions practice but cannot resolve the issue described, as a consequence of the internal rules of discourse, determined by the terms of reference of its production. The tension between descriptions of practice in the impartial and reproductive modes is mirrored in the relationship between validity of specific methods of assessing merit and potential that present barriers for some applicants and the 'trump card' of institutional autonomy.

Modes of discursive objectification and the Schwartz Report

Chapter three described *modes of discursive objectification*, these are summarised again in the table below *(previously listed as Figure 6).*

Objectification	*Discursive exchange*	
	Open	*Closed*
Singular	Aesthetic	Iconic/symbolic
Homogeneous	Commodified	Institutional

This section will relate the oppositions and alliances that have been identified in the analysis of *The Schwartz Report* to the discursive space concerning modes of discursive objectification described in chapter three. This space is constructed by relating two binary variables, singular/homogeneous objectification and explicit/euphemistic discursive exchange. *Singular objectification* describes discursive objects that are unique and non-comparable, whereas *homogeneous objectification* describes them as comparable with other textual objects. *Open discursive exchange* describes the construction of discursive objects that is not regulated where the process of discursive formation is open. *Closed discursive exchange* describes discursive formation that is regulated.

By relating each binary variable to the other, I have constructed a discursive space that contains all possible variables in the description of four modes of discursive objectification. The *aesthetic mode* describes the construction of discursive objects that are singular or unique and where discursive exchange is open or unregulated. The *iconic/symbolic mode* describes the construction of discursive objects that are also singular but where discursive exchange is closed or regulated. The *institutional mode* describes the construction of discursive objects that are homogeneous, comparable or reproducible where discursive exchange is regulated. Lastly, the commodified mode describes the construction of discursive objects that are homogeneous and comparable with other textual objects and where discursive exchange is open.

ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE OBJECTIFICATION IN THE SCHWARTZ REPORT

Instances of aesthetic objectification include the production of *The Schwartz Report* itself that is explicitly described as resulting from the work of the Admissions in Higher Education Steering Group which positions it as a singular and unique textual object. The Report describes itself as the product of an 'independent review', where the independence of the group signifies an open discursive

exchange. However, the text also describes the terms of reference provided to the Steering Group by the DfES and establishes that the Steering Group were all appointed by the DfES. This identifies at least a degree of regulation in the formation of the Steering Group and its subsequent activities that establishes a dynamic between the description of the Report as an instance of *aesthetic* and/or *iconic/symbolic* and/or *institutional* objectification.

The Steering Group itself constitutes an iconic/symbolic objectification, as a consequence of the authority bestowed upon the Group by the DfES, to both conduct the review into higher education admissions and to produce the subsequent Report. The Steering Group is appointed by the DfES as the body that has the authority to produce statements about fair admissions to higher education. The process of appointment is regulated and controlled by the DfES. In other words, the independence and discursive openness associated with the processes of the production of *The Schwartz Report* are in dynamic tension with its explicit regulation.

The recommendation within the text for individual higher education institutions to produce and publicise their particular definition and approach to assessing merit and potential can also be read as an instance of aesthetic objectification. The Report does not seek to regulate the way that individual institutions describe merit as the text describes this as a matter of institutional academic autonomy. The description of merit by each individual institution is a singular and unique instance of open discursive exchange. However, this is dependent upon the regulated autonomy of individual higher education institutions constituting an iconic/symbolic objectification.

Maintaining the autonomy of higher education institutions is clearly described within the terms of reference for the Steering Group provided by the DfES, as such it is an instance of closed discursive exchange. The description of 'higher education institutions' is a homogeneous categorisation, which signifies institutional objectification. This provides a good illustration of the dynamic nature of discursive objectification described by the modal relationships between identified instances within the text. The aesthetic objectification of individual descriptions of merit is dependent upon the iconic/symbolic objectification of the autonomy of individual institutions, which is predicated upon an institutional objectification of the general principle of such autonomy.

The description of the role of personal statements and individual holistic information in the assessment of merit can also be read as an instance of aesthetic objectification. Personal statements and individual information are, by definition, singular in construction and explicitly opposed to formal examination grades as a means of assessing merit. The description of the problems with personal statements and holistic information in terms of reliability recommends the introduction of a more systematised approach to gathering such information. This textual construction is an attempt to describe the practice of personal statements and holistic assessment in such as way as to move it towards a more institutional mode. Similarly, the description of the assessment of merit based on individual examination grades is an iconic/symbolic objectification as it is singular and regulated. This is of course also predicated on the institutional objectification of the examinations system.

Other institutional objectifications include the recommendations to: revise the UCAS application form to provide clearer prompts and guidance for those completing personal statements and references;

develop a national system for the recognition of credit to establish the equivalence of qualifications; develop a post qualifications admissions (PQA) system to avoid the uncertainty surrounding predicted grades; and the 'outline model of institutional admissions policy' as a means to embed the principles of fair admissions described in the text in individual institutional practices. Each of these examples provides a regulated institutionalised framework that operates to structure other descriptions of higher education. A characteristic of institutional objectification is that it is normally associated with the iconic/symbolic objectification of an identified authoritative body to operationalise the structures described.

Instances of the commodified mode include the explicit description of higher education as a valuable commodity and the description of the need for applicants to higher education courses to become informed consumers. The description of higher education as a valuable commodity also indicates that the financial and other benefits that are associated with higher education "vary considerably from course to course and between institutions" (AHESG: September 2004, p4). There is an implicit relationship here with the status and market position of individual higher education institutions and courses. This could construct a dynamic between the commodified description of higher education and the iconic/symbolic description of individual institutions.

The description of the 'informed consumer' of higher education within the text is associated with the principle of transparency, which recommends that institutions make explicit their individual definitions of merit and the processes by which applicants' merit will be assessed. However, whilst on the one hand the text positions merit as a kind of common currency to secure admission to higher education, the principle of transparency, as described in the text, does not require, or recommend, a homogeneous means of measuring it. This is as a consequence of the unassailability of the principle of institutional autonomy in academic matters, including the means by which merit is ascertained in making decisions about admitting applicants to courses.

The Schwartz Report constructs higher education as a commodified discursive object in terms of the financial and other benefits that are associated with its consumption but the currency (merit) that provides access to it is not common or homogeneous and is regulated by differing interpretations of it by individual institutions. This means that despite *The Schwartz Report* describing higher education as a commodity, its relative value is not open to homogeneous or comparable description in terms of the merit required to consume it. The 'price' required to consume higher education (in terms of merit) is not explicit and as a consequence discursive exchange is not open. While individual institutions regulate descriptions of merit, higher education cannot be fully objectified as a commodity.

The distribution of the 'high-level principles' in relation to modes of discursive objectification also demonstrates dynamic relationships. The principle of 'transparency' relates to the aesthetic, the institutional and the commodified modes. In the aesthetic mode transparency can be read as the open description of individual institutions interpretation of merit and admissions practices. In the institutional mode transparency is associated with standards of professionalism in admissions. In the commodified mode, it is the explicit information that 'produces informed consumers' of higher education. The principle of 'selecting for merit, potential and diversity' can be read as constituting an aesthetic objectification as individual institutions are invited by the text to produce unique interpretations of it. On the other hand, once constructed, this is a practice regulated by institutions,

which would then constitute an iconic/symbolic objectification. This principle can also be read as constituting an institutional objectification where it is described in relation to the establishment of professional standards in admissions. The principle of 'validity, reliability and relevance' is distributed in a fragmented fashion. For example, 'Validity' traverses both iconic/symbolic and institutional modes. In the iconic/symbolic mode, validity is positioned as a matter for individual institutions to determine, in relation to each institution's definition of merit. In the institutional mode, determining validity is a matter related to the principle of the 'professionalism' of admissions systems. Similarly, the principle of 'minimising barriers' is related to the relevance of admissions criteria, which is also related, by the text, to systems for establishing professionalism in admissions and as such, constitutes an institutional objectification. 'Reliability' traverses both the institutional and the commodified modes. In the institutional mode reliability is also positioned as matter of standards of professionalism in admissions. In the commodified mode, it is potentially that which operates to establish the common currency of merit, although this implicit description is in opposition to institutional autonomy. This demonstrates further the tension in the principle of 'validity, reliability and relevance' as validity and reliability are operating across different modes.

The Schwartz Report operates to construct a variety of discursive objects. The above analysis describes these objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification including aesthetic, iconic/symbolic, institutional and commodified modes. The analysis also describes how some textual objects are constructed in dynamic tension by operating across different modes. Similarly, the analysis describes how in some instances *The Schwartz Report* operates to reposition established higher education textual objects to promote change in higher education practice: for example, the description of a more institutionalised mode of personal statement production in the recommendation to provide prompts in a revised UCAS application form. In other instances the text operates to reproduce established descriptions of higher education: for example, the reinforcement of the principle that higher education institutions must have autonomy in academic decisions, including admissions. Figure 14 below provides an illustration of the dynamic distribution of textual objects in relation to modes of discursive objectification.

Aesthetic discursive objectification	Iconic/symbolic discursive objectification
The Schwartz Report As the product of an 'independent' review	The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group - As an appointed governmental group
Individual HEI descriptions of 'merit and potential'	The autonomy of HEIs in academic matters
Personal statements and individual holistic information in applications to HE	Formal examination grades
Transparency Making explicit individual HEI's interpretation of merit	Validity As determined by individual HEI interpretations of merit
Selecting for merit, potential and diversity The individual interpretation of merit by HEIs	Selecting for merit, potential and diversityThe regulation of the interpretation of merit by HEIs
Commodified discursive objectification	**Institutional discursive objectification**
HE as a 'valuable commodity'	National credit systems
The 'informed consumer' of higher education	Outline model of institutional admissions policy
Merit - As the currency of admission to HE	Post qualification admissions (PQA)
	Revised UCAS application forms To include prompts for the production of personal statements
Transparency To produce 'informed consumers' of HE	Transparency As a professional standard in admissions
	Selecting for merit, potential and diversity As a professional standard in admissions
	Validity - As a professional standard in admissions
Reliability As the establishment of the common currency of merit	Reliability - As a professional standard in admissions
Implicit reference in tension with institutional autonomy	Minimising barriers and relevance (of assessment methods) As professional standards in admissions
	Professionalism Common standards in admission practice

Figure 14: The dynamic distribution of discursive objects in the Schwartz Report

Conclusion

In relation to the modes of assessing merit described above, *The Schwartz Report* itself can be described as operating in 'reproductive' mode. The fact that the Steering Group's terms of reference determine that institutional autonomy is not debatable means that institutional descriptions of merit cannot be coherently challenged on the basis of their validity, only upon their reliability. Reliability is positioned as primarily a matter of professionalism in admissions whereas validity is primarily a matter of institutional autonomy.

This description is also reflected in the modulation of the principles of validity and reliability in relation to modes of discursive objectification. The modulation of descriptions of validity enables *The Schwartz Report* to recommend that the validity of individual interpretations of merit by higher education institutions be reviewed as a matter of professionalism in admissions, whilst at the same time, maintaining the iconic/symbolic status of the autonomy of higher education institutions in academic matters including the validity of individual interpretations of merit in admission decisions. Similarly, the reliability of methods of assessing merit in admissions cannot provide a means of operating as a common currency, or metric, by which merit can be measured, as merit is not described homogeneously. The measure of merit is variable and unique to each institution's interpretation.

The iconic/symbolic status of institutional autonomy in all academic matters relating to the provision of higher education creates a tension within the text where higher education is described as a valuable commodity. Higher education is described as individual, singular and unique and also as comparable and homogeneous. The construction of institutionalised or bureaucratic systems and standards can, on the one hand, be read as a strategy to promote a homogeneous ground from which, or with which, individual interpretations of merit can be ascertained. However, the description of such systems and standards in relation to the principle of professionalism, acknowledges that in order to be operationalised they need endorsement by individual higher education institutions.

All five of the high-level principles of admissions, described by the text, can be read as operating in the institutional mode, as professional standards. This indicates that the text is primarily seeking to regularise admissions practice. However, while professional standards in admissions practice remain within the remit of individual higher education institutions to determine, the force of regulation is limited by the iconic/symbolic status of these institutions. *The Schwartz Report* explicitly describes higher education as a valuable commodity and yet the text operates to both reinforce the autonomy of institutions and promote professional standards and practices, albeit that they have limited regulatory force. It can be concluded therefore that, on this reading, *The Schwartz Report* explicitly reproduces the idea of the commodification of higher education but primarily operates to maintain the iconic/symbolic authority of institutions and to promote institutionalised, as opposed to commodified, admissions practices.

Chapter seven - Conclusion

Breaking the spell of the educational principle

This thesis set out to investigate a specific area of philosophical and sociological discourse that includes descriptions of the commodification of higher education. This area of discourse has been located in relation to a range of antecedent theoretical descriptions concerning the nature, value and purpose of higher education. I have argued that some of these descriptions have adopted oppositional or allied positions concerning the idea of the commodification of higher education, in relation to implicit or explicit educational principles. I have also argued that such descriptions are concerned with establishing the extent to which higher education represents the realisation of an educational principle of one kind or another. As such, they operate to reproduce the principles with which descriptions of higher education are allied or opposed. The description of commodification as the partial or flawed realisation of such principles can also be used to provide a rationale for change in higher education practice.

For example, in an article entitled 'UK urged not to follow US lead', Robert Reich ('former senior advisor to Bill Clinton') is described as warning the UK that:

> …the core role of universities as centres of free inquiry is being "corrupted" as market forces take hold of higher education…Higher education in America is being transformed from a public good to a private commodity, and the very nature and meaning of higher education is narrowing dangerously. (THES: 12.3.04)

Here the nature and meaning of higher education is associated with 'free inquiry' as a public good which is contrasted with its description as a dangerously narrow commodity. The statement implies that higher education *is* or has been a public good, a state from which it is now being 'corrupted'. However, as Brighouse has argued (discussed in chapter one), some level of commodification is "unavoidable and unobjectionable" (Brighouse: 2000, p48) in that for one thing money changes hands in the process of delivering teaching. The statement also implies that higher education *should* be a public good and *should not* be a commodity, which in turn implies some form of moral principle. Again, Brighouse (2000) concludes that he can identify nothing inherent in the kind of 'good' that education might be, that would preclude it being distributed through market mechanisms. However, Brighouse is able to reach this conclusion because he positions egalitarian liberal social justice as the trump moral principle. In other words, for Brighouse where market forms of distribution are compatible with the principle of egalitarian liberal social justice they can be justified. This approach shifts the principle being used to legitimise one or other description of higher education to another level (that of society) but does serve to undermine the idea that higher education itself (as cultural practice) must be underpinned by particular principles.

The above statement from Reich also implies that it is possible to ascertain 'the nature and meaning of higher education' and that this includes a 'core role' in sustaining 'free inquiry'. Once again an educational principle is in play that seems to require 'free enquiry' to be an inherent aspect of something that is described as higher education. At the heart of such statements lies the conception of "the person as a self reflective and self realising moral agent" (Hunter: 1994, p2), (as discussed in chapter one) reconstituted as an educational principle of free enquiry. The commodification of higher

education is positioned in pejorative opposition to such educational principles as a 'corrupted' realisation of them. However, if higher education is thought of as a historically contingent social activity or cultural practice, then the description or construction of higher education principles can themselves be thought of as historically contingent. Thinking of higher education in this way means that the idea of the commodification of higher education can be described without recourse to positioning it in relation to the realisation, or otherwise, of any principled perspective concerning higher education's 'nature or purpose'.

More recently, in a report entitled *HE as a Global Community*, Rajani Naidoo describes the need for further research to "protect developing countries from the most corrosive forms of commodification" (THES: 9.3.07). The report argues that

> Commercial forces worldwide have propelled universities to function less as institutions, with social, cultural and indeed intellectual objectives, and more as producers of commodities that can be sold in the international marketplace. (THES 9.3.07)

Naidoo associates 'appropriate' higher education with 'social, cultural and intellectual objectives', which is contrasted with higher education that is corroded by commodification. It is interesting that 'commercial forces' are positioned in opposition to social, cultural and intellectual objectives. If for example, Kopytoff (1986) is right and exchange is a universal feature of human social activity (as discussed in chapter three), then the functioning of universities in 'the international marketplace' could just as well be thought of as a feature of the social structure and cultural practices of universities rather than something to which they are opposed. Once again, the construction of the opposition between universities functioning to produce commodities and universities pursuing social, cultural and intellectual objectives relies on a positioning of commodification as a 'corrosion' of a principled view of the nature and purpose of higher education.

The discourse concerning the commodification of higher education also includes the opposition of the 'use-value' of higher education representing its genuine' or real nature, value or purpose, and its 'exchange-value' as empty expression. For example, Bob Brecher (Director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics at Brighton University) has written that:

> For some time now, degrees have been increasingly regarded as a commodity, to be bought and sold like any other…a commodity whose worth is a matter solely of their perceived exchange value. Never mind the content: the packaging is everything. So long as the name is right, the content and its quality are irrelevant…Perhaps its not too late to…construct a system and structure of genuine higher education. (THES: 14.6.06)

and recently in promoting a campaign for 'critical higher education' he has said that:

> …a critical higher education is one that encourages scepticism of authority, the ability to weigh argument and to distinguish it from rhetoric…That sort of thing is being replaced by a wholly economic view of universities as providing the corporate state with a compliant and unthinking workforce, a view of education as a commodity rather than as a process, a set of 'inputs' to be delivered and consumed rather than as a conversation. (THE 24.1.08)

Similarly, in an article entitled 'Sausage factory culture puts the squeeze on ideas' Hugh Hubbard (senior research fellow at Leeds University) is quoted as saying:

> …the ideology of market managerialism is now pushing into British universities with escalating ferocity. This managerialism and auditing culture results in the systematic corruption of knowledge, the dumbing down of the intellect and a Philistinism of learning that affects both the form and content of all our intellectual endeavours. (THES: 5.5.06)

The reference to 'managerialism and auditing culture' is also relevant to the idea that the introduction of bureaucratic quality assurance systems facilitates a higher education exchange market by quantifying and standardising higher education as a product. For example, Phipps (2005) argues that the dominant discourse in higher education constitutes a marketised system of audit and quality assurance (see also Peters 2005).

> This is what we might term the default discourse –a technicist and managerial view of research that plays to the auditors as audience and 'does training' to the students…In many ways, astoundingly, but also unsurprisingly in a marketised system of higher education, this dominant discourse relies on a banking model of education. (Phipps, 2005, p38-39)

Read this way, quality assurance processes (such as Academic Review) are being constituted as an exchange technology that drives the commodification of the higher education system: in other words, a means by which higher education is standardised and quantified to enable an equivalent market value to be established. The above description of higher education presents the view that 'a marketised system of higher education' constitutes a dominant discourse that reflects the system of financial exchange. However, the idea that 'auditing culture' inevitably leads to a more commodified or marketised system of higher education ignores the possibility that bureaucratic systems can just as well underpin the authority of both individual academic production and institutional autonomy in academic matters. That is to say, quality audit systems can provide the institutional homogeneous context for singularised descriptions of higher education. For example, the bureaucratic system for recognising an institution as having degree-awarding powers and university title (discussed in chapter two) is the means through which individual higher education institution autonomy is constituted.

The implication of these types of descriptions of higher education is that discourse is limited to one-dimensional binary oppositions (genuine/corrupted, market/non-market, use-value/exchange-value etc) that ironically, operate to close the discursive space concerning higher education. The approach taken within the thesis has been to attempt to open this discursive space and to consider how official higher education texts are strategically operating to construct higher education. The application of this method has demonstrated a more sophisticated means (than reliance on 'market/non-market' approaches for example) to describe how the idea of the commodification of higher education can be strategically employed within official texts to regulate and/or promote various aspects of practice within the higher education field.

Constructive description as a productive method of textual analysis

The textual object that I have constructed (this thesis as text) describes an analytical methodology that does not seek to produce a representation of 'reality' either by 'discovery' or 'critique' (see Dowling, in press). I have not attempted to discover the 'genuine' or 'real' nature, value or purpose of higher education. Nor have I attempted a critique of existing practice by identifying its shortcomings in relation to the realisation of an educational principle. Rather, I have attempted to read official higher education texts as instances of socio-cultural action that are historically contingent and are constituted by the strategic formation, maintenance and/or destabilising of oppositions and alliances.

In promoting this thesis as an original contribution to knowledge of the subject (in this case an intersection of philosophical and sociological fields), I have attempted to produce a text that is an integrated whole and that presents a coherent argument. Specifically, the method I have used to construct the analysis of official higher education texts has sought to produce relative coherence between my descriptions of these texts and the specialised theory I have developed. My analysis of antecedent texts within the philosophical and sociological theoretical fields has resulted in the development of my specialised theory or 'organisational language'. This organisational language has provided the specialised theoretical context to produce an analysis or elaborated description, of the empirical data that has emerged in my reading of selected official higher education texts.

I would argue that it is not possible or desirable to produce an analysis that establishes absolute coherence between empirical and theoretical fields. I have attempted to be explicit in describing the process of construction that I have been engaged with but there has not been an attempt to use my organisational language to define empirical instances. To do so would be to attempt closure of the discursive space. Rather, as Dowling has put it:

> My project has been to attempt to develop a sociological organisational language that does not seek or claim to describe that which lies beyond its ability to theorise. This is not a closed system, but one that learns from its theoretical and empirical encounters. (Dowling, in press and http://homepage.mac.com/paulcdowling/ioe/timely_utterance/page02.html - last accessed 7.10.08)

The method I have employed to analyse official higher education texts has sought to identify the oppositions and alliances that have emerged in my reading of these texts and has constructed discursive spaces from the binary variables that are constituted by these oppositions and alliances. I have then used these spaces to map the discursive strategies being employed within texts. Following Dowling (2004, 2004a, 2007, in press), I have described these spaces as *modes of action*. This method has provided a means to describe the strategic dynamics and modalities constructed in each of the official higher education texts that I have analysed. I have argued that the relationship between these modalities operates to strategically construct specific descriptions of higher education practice.

The description of a text as predominantly aligning with one mode of action (strategy) implies a corresponding relative opposition to other possible modes but does not imply that this description is necessarily confined to one mode to the exclusion of others. By way of analogy, I can think of the

way that the binary variable of low/high-pressure within a weather system. Low-pressure areas are dynamically implicated in high-pressure areas, the dominance of one entails the weakness of the other somewhere else on the weather map constituted by the relative density of air at a particular moment. Modes of action describe textual strategies constituted by binary variables that have emerged from my reading of the text. My analysis has demonstrated that texts can deploy more than one and potentially all strategies available within a given discursive space.

For example, in my analysis of the *QAA Handbook for Academic Review* (chapter four) I describe a discursive space called *modes of review*. This space was constructed by relating the binary variables concerning *insider/outsider* relations to the peer group whose practice is under review with the binary variable of *hierarchical /non-hierarchical* authority relations to the subject peer group. From this emerged four *modes of review*, *facilitation/therapy*, *inspection*, *peer review* and *peer exchange*. This analysis focused on the dynamics or modalities evidenced in the specific ways in which textual subjectivities (for example, Review Coordinator, Specialist Reviewer and Subject Review Facilitator) are constructed.

This analysis indicated that the subjectivities constructed by the Handbook do not operate significantly in the *peer exchange mode* even though this mode is alluded to in the text. Interestingly, those subjectivities that are constructed as representative of the QAA (Review Coordinator, Specialist Reviewer) are positioned (in the context of the Academic Review) in a hierarchical relation to the subject peer group. In other words, the text presents Academic Review to some extent as a non-hierarchical peer exchange, whilst operating to constitute Review Coordinators and Specialist Reviewers in a hierarchical, and as such, regulatory relation to those whose practice is under review. Whilst this may not be surprising, it does indicate two things. Firstly, official higher education texts can construct descriptions of higher education practice strategically, presenting constructions that operate in different, multiple and competing modes in addressing different audiences. Secondly, that the Handbook text presents higher education (quality assurance) practice as constituted by open peer exchange but primarily operates to close discursive practice.

I have sought to allow my organisational language to 'learn' by not imposing my theoretical framework upon texts but by constructing discursive spaces drawn from my reading of each text that operate to reconstitute or further elaborate my organisational language. In this way, my specialised theory has informed my reading of texts and the empirical data that has emerged in this reading has informed my specialised theory. In other words, the discursive spaces that I have used to describe strategies at play have emerged from my reading of each text. The benefit of this approach is that it establishes a relative coherence between theoretical and empirical fields without closing discursive space and without constituting conceptual violence to the text being analysed. As such my analysis is constituted as an artefact rather than as a representation.

Commodification as a modality of discursive objectification

The central research question of this thesis concerns how official texts that describe higher education, operate to (re)produce and/or resist the idea of its commodification. I have taken the position (following Foucault 1972) that texts, as well as constructing subjectivities (for example, author and audience), also 'construct the objects of which they speak', in other words, discursive objectivities or textual objects. The particular textual objects that this thesis has been concerned with

are descriptions of higher education. I have constructed a means to describe commodification as a discursive strategy or more specifically what I have called *the commodified mode of discursive objectification*.

I have constructed this discursive space from the oppositions and alliances that have emerged in my reading of theoretical antecedent texts (specifically Bourdieu and Kopytoff). This discursive space has been constructed from the binary variables of open/closed discursive exchange and singular/homogeneous objectification. I have sought to analyse official higher education texts to find out the extent to which they are operating in this mode. In addition, I have sought to analyse the dynamic relations between the commodified mode and other modes to describe the strategic dynamics of the various descriptions of higher education within official texts. The method I have developed has also opened the discursive space concerning the commodification of higher education to provide a means of describing how texts, or discursive objects are operating in the higher education field.

This constitutes an original contribution to the field by developing a unique method of describing instances of commodification as one of four possible *modes of discursive objectification*. This enables all possible instances of discursive objectification to be described in relation to one, or more, of the four modes - *iconic/symbolic*, *institutional*, *aesthetic* and the *commodified* mode. The description of instances of 'commodification', as a modality, provides the opportunity to describe the dynamic relationships between modes in the strategic construction of textual objects. This breaks the reliance on the binary opposition of concepts such as 'use-value/exchange-value' in describing commodification, which is implicated in reproductive principled perspectives as discussed above. The thesis has demonstrated that this method can provide researchers and practitioners with a productive means to describe how texts are constructed to gain strategic advantage in the discursive field. Seen as one of a range of strategies (modes) of discursive objectification, 'commodification' can be described not as a 'corruption' of 'genuine' higher education but rather, as a textual construction aligned or opposed with other textual constructions such as authors and audiences. This approach has constituted an opening of the discursive space concerning the idea of the commodification of higher education.

Summary of the findings from the analysis of official higher education texts

HOW OFFICIAL TEXTS OPERATE STRATEGICALLY TO DESCRIBE HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE

Much of the current debate concerning the commodification of higher education is described as a matter of government policy. For example, one recent article entitled 'Market focus at odds with scholars' priorities for sector' quotes Roger Brown (Professor of Higher Education at Liverpool Hope University) as saying that:

> It's clear that the majority of academic staff are out of sympathy with the general thrust of government policy on higher education. If the future unfolds as one fears it will, with ever-increasing resource pressures and greater consumerism and so on, then where are the academic staff going to be found to deliver it? (THE: 19.6.08)

The analysis of a range of official texts has provided a means to test the extent to which the view that governmental action is operating to drive the commodification of higher education is supported by the evidence presented by such texts. The conclusions drawn from the analysis indicate that while official texts do operate to describe higher education in relation to market value, they primarily operate to resist its commodification.

The thesis provides insight into how individual official texts operate to construct aspects of higher education practice and employ different strategies to present these constructions to various audiences. At the same time strategies that position audiences in relation to each other and in relation to textual authors construct descriptions that include a range of degrees of imperatives for action. The selected texts also operate to constitute a range of governmental agencies and institutions that explicitly relate to the imperatives described.

The QAA Handbook for Academic Review text was selected for analysis as an example of 'technologies of subjectivity', describing the process of determining 'who' are the officially 'approved' providers of higher education. *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper was selected as an example of 'technologies of government' describing an official rationale for governmental action and 'why' the Government is right to implement change in higher education provision. *The Schwartz Report* was selected, as an example of 'technologies of discourse' describing the 'true knowledge' about fair higher education admissions. In each case, the analysis of these official texts identified the ways in which they operate to construct aspects of higher education practice and employ different strategies to present these constructions to various audiences. The analysis has demonstrated that each text operates differently in relation to the explicitness of the degrees of imperatives that it constitutes.

THE ANALYSIS OF EMERGENT MODES OF ACTION WITHIN OFFICIAL TEXTS

The QAA Handbook describes processes through which individual institutions will be approved or otherwise, as such the description of Academic Review explicitly identifies its regulatory function. However, the text also describes processes of 'self-evaluation' and 'peer review' that operate to partially position the authority for such approval on the one hand with individual institutions and with the academic community on the other. Governmental regulation is presented as 'self-evaluation' and 'peer review' as higher education practice is recontextualised as quality assurance practice. The processes of Academic Review described within the Handbook operate to require institutions to internalise a specialised language for describing higher education practice and to recognise themselves in relation to descriptions produced in this language. This self-recognition also invites identification with a description of an academic peer community with the authority to make final judgments about academic quality.

These textual constructions constitute a complex description of higher education practice that includes a dynamic relation between various modes of discursive action. Academic Review is presented as being based on institutional self-evaluation but the forms of self-evaluation are prescribed by bureaucratic systems and procedures. Similarly Academic Review is presented as constituting an open exchange between academic peers and yet only those officially recognised by the QAA can contribute to making final judgments of academic quality. These constructions are constituted in dynamic relation with each other as the Handbook text operates to emphasise and de-

emphasise different modes of action. My point here, to reiterate, is not a critique of the QAA or of the Academic Review process but rather to describe how the text is operating to construct the processes of approval of institutions that provide higher education.

The Future of Higher Education White Paper provides a rationale for the expansion of higher education participation and the introduction of variable tuition fees by describing the individual and national economic benefits of doing so and by asserting a fundamental principle of social justice. At the same time the White Paper explicitly reinforces the institutional autonomy of higher education institutions. By considering these textual constructions in relation to modes of higher education participation it has been possible to describe how the White Paper is operating to balance these potentially competing agendas. This text operates to elide the opposition between selecting the most talented and providing opportunity for all those who have the potential to benefit from higher education. The text also effectively excludes descriptions of the universal mode of participation by primarily constituting descriptions of higher education participation that are institutionally regulated. The analysis has provided insight into how authority relations between government and its associated agencies, higher education institutions and students are strategically described. In this context, the White Paper describes ways in which higher education institutions will be 'examined' as a disciplining practice, for example, by conforming to the requirements of the 'Access Regulator'[8]. In other words, the White Paper operates to promote the maintenance of the balance of forces between governmental power and university power, whilst at the same time introducing regulatory mechanisms designed to promote the expansion of higher education.

It is unsurprising then that the Government chose to instigate reform in higher education admissions, not through direct legislation that could challenge institutional autonomy but rather through an 'independent review'. *The Schwartz Report*'s terms of reference required that institutional autonomy in academic matters be maintained and that the Steering Group report on the options for assessing the merit of applications. This technology of discourse operated to exclude descriptions of fair admissions practice that challenge institutional autonomy. Rather, the text positions fair admissions practice as primarily a matter of the professionalism of individual institutions. This means that whilst *The Schwartz Report* promotes the consideration of the reliability and validity of assessment methods, the validity of a method is for individual institutions to determine. For example, if an institution decides to not recognise equivalent non-A level entry qualifications, then this practice could still be described as fair in relation to the Schwartz principles, if the institution in question had established to its own satisfaction that this was a valid means of assessing applicants. This is not to say, that such an approach is right or wrong but rather to describe how the text is operating to produce the 'true knowledge' about fair admissions to higher education.

The method of analysis I have employed in relation to all three example official texts has provided an insight into how they construct specific descriptions of higher education. These texts operate to include some descriptions and exclude others strategically constituting oppositions and alliances between the textual objects constructed. The analysis of the dynamic relation between such constructions has enabled me to describe how these texts are operating strategically within the higher education field.

The analysis of other kinds of official texts using the same method may have provided different findings. Similarly, other authors could identify different oppositions and alliances in their reading of these or other texts and construct different modes of action. It is also the case that the analysis presented does not include all possible modes of action and I could have constructed other discursive spaces than those included in my analysis. For example, as indicated above the QAA Handbook states that Academic Review is based on self-evaluation. This opens the possibility for the binary variable 'self/external evaluation'. At the same time the Handbook describes the principles that self-evaluation must adhere to in order to gain recognition in the context of Academic Review, as such these principles are pre-determined. This provides for the possibility for the binary variable 'open/closed principles of evaluation'. By relating these binary variables I could have provided an analysis of the QAA Handbook by constituting a discursive space that described *modes of evaluation* (see Bravenboer 2008). Each mode of action that emerges in the reading of a text constitutes a particular way of conceptualising or describing it.

The modes of action that I have described have been constructed from the analysis of oppositions and alliances that have emerged in my reading of each text. Further work could include consideration of a wider range of possible modes of action in the analysis of each text and the analysis concerning additional modes of action could provide a richer and more textured description of individual texts. However, each specific mode of action within the thesis is designed to facilitate the description of the relationships between textual instances that are possible within the specialised and localised discursive space constructed. As such this approach provides for a comprehensive range of possible descriptions provided by any individual discursive space, as each space contains all possible modes in relation to the specific binary variables used to construct it.

I have attempted to demonstrate that it is possible to consider the ways in which descriptions of higher education operate in the commodified mode without recourse to principled oppositional approaches. As a consequence, it has been possible to describe how the official texts selected for analysis strategically position higher education in the *commodified mode* to different degrees, in different ways and in dynamic relation to other modes.

For example, the analysis of the QAA Handbook indicates that it does not explicitly refer to higher education as a commodity. It does state that it is operating to provide HEFCE with a means to ensure that it is securing 'value from public investment' but this is the only explicit association with financial exchange within the text. Academic Review is however, the means through which 'value' is described and measured and only that which has been described by the process of Academic Review as of 'approved' quality, will be funded. The description of higher education value is related to highly institutionalised systems and procedures that operate as disciplining practices to individualise providers of higher education as 'approved' or otherwise. The Handbook operates to regulate discursive exchange (in the interaction between the text and reader) by constructing subjectivities (for example, 'Reviewers') that demarcate who can speak, what can be said and by whom, as well as institutionalised technologies that determine how they can speak (for example Self-Evaluation Documents).

The Handbook describes a range of bureaucratic and regulated systems that I argue constitute *institutional objectification,* which operates to close discursive exchange. The description of these systems is homogeneous in that they provide a means with which to compare instances of higher education practice. However, the Handbook does not describe a standardised system that might facilitate open discursive exchange operating in commodified mode. Rather, the Handbook describes quality assurance systems and procedures that primarily operate to singularise higher education practice (for example in Final Judgement Reports) constituting *iconic/symbolic* as opposed to *commodified discursive objectification*. The 'value' of higher education that is described by the Academic Review process is a singular value determined in relation to individual institutions stated aims; it is not a common value that establishes a comparable currency. As such, the analysis has demonstrated that the descriptions of higher education within the Handbook primarily operate to resist the reproduction of the idea of the commodification of higher education. This conclusion can be contrasted with the view that a quality 'audit culture' (as evidenced by the QAA Handbook for Academic Review) is necessarily a driver towards marketised or commodified higher education practice.

In contrast, the analysis of *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper indicates that it does make explicit reference to the individual and national economic value of higher education, in making the case for the introduction of variable tuition fees and the expansion of higher education. In addition, the text describes both students and employers as potential 'intelligent customers' of higher education institutions. These descriptions would seem explicitly to reproduce the idea that higher education is a commodity that is of economic value and is sold to customers. Superficially, this reading could add weight to the view that Government policy is driving a change in the practice of higher education towards a more commodified system. However, the analysis of the White Paper also indicates that it deploys a range of descriptions of higher education that operate strategically in relation to different modes of objectification, as a means of promoting the legislative changes it proposes.

These legislative changes primarily relate to the creation of both individual agencies with *iconic/symbolic* authority to regulate higher education practice, for example the 'Access Regulator', and *institutional* bureaucratic systems that provide the means of doing the same. The textual construction of these agencies and systems operate within the text to close discursive exchange by presenting aspects higher education practice as that which requires regulation. This means that whilst the White Paper seemingly reproduces higher education as a *commodified* textual object, this description is strategically deployed as a persuasive device to legitimise the construction of *institutional* systems that operate to resist the *commodified mode*. On the one hand, higher education is explicitly described as an individual and national economic benefit or good, whilst on the other, it is also presented as that which universities have institutional autonomy to determine or define in relation to each institution's individual mission, positioned as what I have called an *aesthetic objectification*.

The findings from the analysis of the White Paper indicate that it is simultaneously operating multiple modalities of discursive objectification, which undermines the idea that the text is primarily operating to reproduce the idea of the commodification of higher education. Despite the explicit nature of the association of higher education with economic benefit, it seems clear that the *commodified mode* is

not predominant amongst other modes. The White Paper is rather, predominantly operating to describe singular authorities and agencies whose role is to further regulate various aspects of higher education practice. It is also operating to describe the introduction of a range of bureaucratic systems and procedures. It is possible that this could be misread as necessarily constituting a means through which higher education is commodified by providing a standardising metric in relation to which it is measured and quantified. However, the analysis of the text in relation to *modes of discursive objectification* provides the opportunity to read the strategic dynamic moves between what I call *institutional objectification* (the description of institutionalised systems, frameworks etc) and other modes. So for example, the description of the introduction of the 'Access Agreement' can be read as a bureaucratic mechanism primarily related to the *iconic/symbolic* description of the 'Office for Fair Access' (OFFA) as a singularised institution and the 'Access Regulator'.

The analysis of *The Schwartz Report* indicates that it makes an explicit reference to higher education as a valuable commodity that provides financial as well as other benefits, in describing the need for a fair admissions system. This text also describes the need for transparency in admissions systems to produce 'intelligent consumers' of higher education. The text also positions fairness in admissions to higher education in terms of fair access to a valuable good, rather than as something inherent in the meaning, nature or purpose of higher education. Such descriptions clearly reproduce the idea that higher education is a commodity but the text also includes a range of other descriptions that operate differently. For example, the analysis of the text identifies that higher education is described as something that applicants can have differing amounts of 'merit and potential' in relation to. As such, merit and potential seem to be positioned as the currency that determines admission to the benefits of higher education. However, this is not a common currency, rather each individual institution is positioned by the text as describing its own currency, its own definition of merit and potential, in accordance with the principle of institutional autonomy. This principle is written into the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group's terms of reference and has been maintained in the Group's final report (the object text analysed).

By reading *The Schwartz Report* in relation to *modes of discursive objectification* it has been possible to describe the text as a complex utterance that strategically positions higher education as a commodity in relation to other oppositional constructions. A superficial or more literal reading might have (quite understandably) taken the text as a concrete example of how official or governmental bodies are driving the commodification of higher education. The results from the analysis have found that the text describes a range of institutionalised systems, framework and principles that could, in theory, standardise a common currency of 'merit and potential'. Such a description could have indicated that the text was indeed predominantly operating in the *commodified mode*. However, the findings of my analysis also indicate that the text specifically avoids describing a 'common' or homogeneous description of merit and potential. In reinforcing the *iconic/symbolic* authority of individual institutions to determine how merit and potential will be recognised, *The Schwartz Report* primarily operates to resist commodification. This is a move away from an open and homogenised description of merit and potential towards a closed and singular description. The recommendations described in the text all amount to a matter of guidelines for institutional professionalism in admissions as a means of regulating discursive exchange but without the *iconic/symbolic* authority to enforce them. This specific reading has only been possible as a consequence of the particular analytical methodology employed within the thesis.

The analysis of official texts has provided examples of how the White Paper and *The Schwartz Report* employ descriptions of higher education in the commodified mode strategically to legitimise the introduction of governmental agencies and systems. These agencies and systems operate primarily to resist the commodification of higher education. In the case of the QAA Handbook explicit descriptions of higher education in the commodified mode are not significantly employed. The Handbook does introduce a range of bureaucratic mechanisms that are designed to standardise higher education quality assurance practices and procedures. However, these constructions primarily relate to and underpin the *iconic/symbolic* authority of QAA Reviewers rather than facilitating commodification.

The Handbook also strategically employs descriptions of higher education in the *aesthetic mode* to promote the regularisation of practice. For example, the text describes processes where higher education institutions are invited to submit singular and unique descriptions of their practice in self-evaluation documents. These unique constructions are then described as being subject to 'peer review' reflecting the language of academic production. The Handbook employs the language of an established academic practice to apprentice readers (higher education institutions and practitioners) into the practice of quality assurance.

In the case of the White Paper, the language of economic value is employed to legitimise higher education reforms designed to expand participation in higher education. The White Paper also describes reforms that operate to regularise practice by maintaining and constituting the *iconic/symbolic* authority of governmental agencies and individual higher education institutions. *The Schwartz Report* describes higher education as a valuable commodity but the text primarily operates to reinforce institutional autonomy in determining fair admissions. The prospect of a common currency of merit and potential is raised but once again trumped by *iconic/symbolic* authority.

In each case, the language of open discursive exchange is strategically employed to promote descriptions of higher education that are operating to close or regularise discursive exchange. The results of the analysis can be said to find a common strategic approach in the official texts described in the thesis. All three examples strategically import an organisational language of open exchange (*aesthetic* or *commodified*) to describe and promote higher education practices that operate to do the reverse. This provides evidence of a dissonance between language and practice in the official discourse of higher education. Once again, it is important to note that I do not offer this conclusion as critique as this may for example, be a very effective way for official texts to operate. I have been concerned with providing a constructive description of *how* official texts are operating. However, the strategic deployment of official descriptions of higher education has been identified as a consequence of the specific method applied to construct the analysis within this thesis and this constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in the field. This may indicate the *modus operandi* of official texts but it may also be possible that the use of this strategy is evident in a wider range of contexts.

Further implications of the thesis for higher education practice

The outcomes of the research have significant implications for practitioners and researchers who are investigating or implementing higher education policy, as described above, for example, by providing an alternative method of analysis to describe the strategic construction and modes of action of official

texts that promote and implement policy. Specifically, as a consequence of the research undertaken, practitioners and researchers have available to them a new way of describing commodification as a textual modality rather than an object associated with 'use-value' and 'exchange-value'. The method is also equally applicable to the analysis of any form of text, including those not related to the higher education field. For example, it could be interesting to construct an analysis of 'eBay', the online auction and shopping website, as object text, to consider the extent to which it operates in other modes than the commodified mode. Similarly, it could be interesting to investigate religious television programmes as object texts, to ascertain the extent to which they operate outside the iconic/symbolic mode. Perhaps also a work of art could be analysed to consider the extent to which it operated in the institutional mode, and so on.

It would also be possible to use the method described, to construct an analysis of different kinds of texts that are within the higher education field, for example, by analysing the discourse of academic practitioners through the collection of interview transcripts, or higher education institution texts such as, self-evaluation or policy documents. These different kinds of texts could be compared and contrasted to consider how they distribute descriptions of higher education in relation to modes of discursive objectification. It would also be possible to conduct longitudinal studies that analyse a particular kind of text that had been produced a number of times, such as a prospectus, over a period of time to identify patterns and changes in descriptions of higher education. Further work could also be undertaken that focused specifically on how *aesthetic*, *iconic/symbolic* or *institutional* modes of objectification are instanced within texts as opposed to concentrating on the *commodified mode*.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of official higher education texts have directly informed my own practice. For example, my analysis of *The Schwartz Report* describes the ways in which the text operates to reinforce the predominance of institutional autonomy of universities in all academic matters. As a consequence of the reproduction of institutional autonomy within the text, the space to describe merit and potential as a 'common currency' is significantly closed. The text emphasises 'institutional autonomy' in determining higher education admission practices and as such is predominantly operating in a singularised *iconic/symbolic mode*. This means that the practice described by the text positions individual higher education institutions as independently determining which kinds of qualifications they will recognise and which they will not. In this sense, a more open and homogeneous description of 'merit and potential' as the currency of fair admissions in the *commodified mode* could promote a more explicit and transparent systems of admissions.

For example, as a Director within a Lifelong Learning Network[9] I work to open and construct opportunities through which students/learners[10] can progress to higher education through vocational, applied, work-based or other non-A Level[11] routes. This practice includes establishing institutional recognition of equivalent entry qualifications in admissions practices. One of the mechanisms I have developed to achieve this is the introduction of 'progression accords' (see Betts and Bravenboer, 2008 and Bravenboer, 2008a). These constitute localised agreements between institutions and organisations involved in learner progression to higher education. Progression accords establish the recognition of (non-A Level) equivalent entry qualifications and best practice in promoting progression opportunities. I have developed this practice as an attempt to address the lack of clarity

and consistency constituted by the emphasis on institutional autonomy in admissions to higher education as evidenced in my reading of the White Paper, *The Schwartz Report* and other texts.

Further implications for practice have also been highlighted by recent attempts by the Government to address the issue of 'fair admissions' more broadly in the field. This has included proposals to require higher education institutions to include admissions policies within Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreements[12]. Access Agreements are required by legislation to be provided and approved by OFFA if universities wish to charge variable tuition fees. This could be read as a challenge to institutional autonomy as it would bring an aspect of admissions practice in scope of the legislation surrounding tuition fees. Interestingly however, Sir Martin Harris, the Director of OFFA, has sought to reinforce the autonomy of higher education institutions.

> The Secretary of State has asked David Eastwood [Chief Executive of HEFCE] and myself to look at how higher education institutions' widening-participation and fair-access policies might be brought together in a single document. We are happy to do this…He has also asked us to look at how admissions policies might be made transparent, perhaps by being published as an annexe to this new single document or perhaps in some other way. We will give our views by September on how this might best be done. However we take this forward, individual decisions on admissions will remain a matter for institutions themselves.
> (THE: 12.6.08)

This indicates that the strategic positioning of higher education admissions practices as described within my analysis of official texts could directly inform the practice of senior managers in formulating institutional policy with regards to admissions practice. It could also inform the practice of those higher education practitioners who work to implement and review admission and progression practices. For example, some higher education institutions in the East of England have sought to embed progression accords within institutional practices such as teaching and learning strategies, quality assurance procedure and their OFFA Access Agreements[13].

I have demonstrated above how this work has influenced my own practice but further study could also be undertaken to attempt to establish the relationship between the description of how official higher education texts are operating and the performance of the practices they describe. Evidence could perhaps be gathered that indicated how textual constructions within official texts are recontextualised in practice. For example, further study could include the analysis of a sample of institutional Self-Evaluation Documents constructed in the enactment of the Academic Review processes described within the Handbook. This could be used to identify the relationship between the strategies employed by the Handbook and those employed by individual institutional authors. Other forms of empirical data could also be gathered (for example from interviews with academic staff whose practice is under review, Students and QAA Reviewers etc) to provide the opportunity for analysis at differing levels including governmental, institutional and practitioner texts.

In conclusion, my position is that constructive description is a productive method of analysis that provides a means of generating descriptions of the complex strategic operation of official higher education texts. In addition, by describing the strategic operation of texts in relation to *modes of discursive objectification* I have opened the discursive space concerning the idea of commodification

and introduced a new way to describe how texts might be operating in the *commodified* and other modes. I have demonstrated the implications of this in my analysis of official higher education texts and indicated how the approach and findings of this research have informed my own practice and could inform the practice of others in the field. Lastly, in constructing this thesis I have attempted to be explicit in identifying the strategies that I have employed to align my description of the work with that which will emerge in the reader's construction of the thesis as text.

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Notes

[1] *See Lukes (2006) for an interesting analysis of various criticisms of the 'invasion' of commodification and marketisation into public spheres of life.*

[2] The previous (1998) Subject Review methodology resulted in scores between 1 and 4 in six 'aspects of provision'. As a consequence the maximum 'score' for all aspects was 24.

[3] *For the purposes of this analysis unregulated access will mean access to higher education that is not formally regulated by a Governmental agency or institution*

[4] *Regulated access for the purposes of this analysis mean access that is formally regulated by a governmentally approved body*

[5] *See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013879/index.shtml for a link to the Taylor Nelson Sofres Omnibus Survey, 2002*

[6] *In some instances the text implies that merit is a measurement of previous achievement (perhaps in the form of examination results) and that potential is measured by 'wider contextual factors'. I will use the term 'merit' to be synonymous with 'merit and potential' as the text defines one in terms of the other. For example, the principle of selecting for merit, potential and diversity states that "Ability to complete the course is an essential criterion for admission to HE" (AHESG, September 2004, p35).*

[7] *The terms non-reliable and non-valid are preferred here to unreliable and invalid as a consequence of the potentially unhelpful connotations that the latter terms bring.*

[8] *Later to be described as the Director of the Office for Fair Access*

[9] *Lifelong Learning Networks were proposed in the Future of Higher Education White Paper and have been funded by HEFCE since 2005. "The overall objective for Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) is to improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education." HEFCE http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/lln/ - last accessed 14.10.08*

[10] *I will use the term 'learner' here to signify the inclusion of both 'students' studying at traditional educational institutions and others who may be learning at work or in other settings.*

[11] *"There are far fewer progression opportunities for learners on vocational programmes than for those on an academic route. About 90 per cent of those on conventional A-level programmes enter higher education, but only 40-50 per cent of those qualifying at Level 3 in vocational subjects do so. Those who do enter HE from vocational learning programmes often find that progression within higher education is also problematic. There are fewer choices open to them, and greater uncertainty attaches to the choices that do exist." HEFCE http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2004/cl12_04/cl12_04.pdf - last accessed 14-10-08*

[12] *"Without an access agreement approved by the Director [of OFFA], an institution will not be able to charge tuition fees for full-time students above the standard level…Institutions are required to use some of the money raised through tuition fees to provide bursaries or other financial support for students from under-represented groups, or to fund outreach activities to encourage more applications from under-represented groups." Office for Fair Access http://www.offa.org.uk/access-agreements/basics/ - last accessed 14.10.08*

[13] *See 'Embedding Progression Accords in HEI Practice' http://www.move.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=15&Itemid=77&limit=4&limitstart=4 - last accessed 14.10.08*