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**Education For Sale!**  
**The Commodification of Everything?**

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The principles of the market and its managers are more and more the managers of the policy and practices of education. (Bernstein 1996 p. 87)

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Let me begin by clarifying my use of terms and specifying the terrain of my argument and of my concerns. To start with the latter, this lecture may be thought of as, in-part, a cost-benefit analysis of the increasing use of ‘the private’ as a means of delivery of public services, including education. Current political and policy wisdoms stress, almost exclusively, the benefits of such moves, ignoring, almost entirely, the apparent and possible costs. Over and against this, I want to stress, in an attempt to achieve some balance, almost exclusively, the costs of various kinds of private participation and privatisation. For while I am happy to concede that there are benefits to be obtained from some forms of privatisation of public services, these benefits are widely rehearsed and sometimes exaggerated, while the costs, and I mean primarily social costs, are systematically neglected. Furthermore, in policy rhetorics which laud ‘the private’ there is deafening silence in relation to the role of the profit motive, and a systematic neglect of business failures, and of business ethics. Although we have had some high profile examples of problems with private providers which highlight all three.

**Many firms such as Educational Alternatives Inc., which took over the Hartford and Baltimore public schools, have had their contracts cancelled as a result of numerous complaints. The complaints range from the way in which such firms deal with kids with learning disabilities and engage in union busting to the charge that their cookie cutter curriculum and testing packages fail to provide the quality of educational results that were initially promised by such companies. (Giroux 1998)**

#### MUTINY AGAINST PRIVATE CONTRACT

Private consultants are to be left in charge of a troubled London education authority for another year, prompting threats of non co-operation from angry heads. Southwark Council this week approved plans for Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) to run the authority until July 2005, despite fierce opposition from local heads. Already wounded by their experiences in 2003 with WS Atkins, which pulled out of running the borough three years early, heads are claiming that CEA has been even worse since it started last summer. They have accused the company's consultants of rude and aggressive

behaviour and complained about its target-driven approach. Instead they want to see the kind of not-for-profit trust now running Hackney, introduced in September. (TES nd.)

In effect within current policy discourse ‘the private’ is idealised and romanticised, while the bureau-professional regime of public welfare provision is consistently, and often unthinkingly, demonised. As Basil Bernstein put it:

**Market relevance is becoming the key orientating criterion for the selection of discourses, their relation to each other, their forms and their research. This movement has profound implications from the primary school to the university. (Bernstein 1996 p. 87)**

Thus, to be clear, this is not a rant against private provision. It is, I hope, a timely reminder of the need to bring a critical gaze to bear equally upon the two forms of provision – private and bureau-professional. I also hope to highlight the need for proper debate about the necessity or validity of defending some boundaries between public and private – in other words to ask whether there are places where the market form is just inappropriate.

I also need to be clear about my use of terms here. Privatisation, for simplicity’s sake, I will deploy fairly generically throughout, although I want to note one crucial subdivision in the application of the term – a distinction between endogenous and exogenous privatisation, in Richard Hatcher’s (Hatcher 2000) terms. The latter refers to the bringing in, in various ways, of private providers to deliver public services. The former refers to the re-working of existing public sector delivery into forms which mimic the private and have similar consequences in terms of practices, values and identities. This is what Glenn Rikowski refers to as ‘Capitalisation’; that is, ‘making public schools/universities into value/commodity producing enterprises’ (Rikowski 2003). They ‘become institutionally rearranged on a model of capitalist accumulation’ (Shumar 1997 p.31). I will point to and take up examples of both as I go along.

Then there is that portentous term in my sub-title – commodification. The term originates from Marx’ notion of commodity fetishism, but its connotations can be traced back to Adam Smith and his deep ambivalence about the moral implications of markets and competition<sup>2</sup>. Commodity fetishism, or what Marx also called ‘the mystery of the commodity form’ (Capital 1, ch.1, sec 4) ‘is the simplest and most universal example of the way in which the economic forms of capital conceal underlying social relations’. The concept ‘discusses social relations conducted as and in the form of relations between commodities or things’ (Bottomore, Harris et al. 1983 p.87). Or ‘the fantastic form of the relation between things’ (Marx 1976 in Lee 1993). This is a form of reification, that is the transforming of human properties, relations and actions, into things independent of persons and governing their lives. It is also ‘a way of modelling certain changes that have taken place in social life’ (Shumar 1997 p.23); which is an important aspect of my use of the concept here. Commodification encompasses both an attention to the naturalisation of changes which are taking place in the everyday life of our production and consumption activities and more general processes of capitalism and its inherent crises and instabilities which underpin the search for new markets, new products and thus new sources of profit. In fetishising commodities, we are denying the primacy of human relationships in the production of value, in effect erasing the social. ‘Our understanding of the world shifts from social values created by people, to one which is pre-given’ (Shumar 1997) p. 28) and within which ‘...everything is viewed in terms of quantities; everything is simply a sum of value realised or hoped for’ (Slater and Tonkiss 2001 p. 162). As I develop my discussion, I will move between issues to do with general commodities (as in the case of education itself) and those involved with educational labour and other social relations inherent in the processes of education.

In contemporary usage, commodification is deployed in two main ways; either to refer to the displacement of *use values* by *exchange values* or more generally to describe how consumer culture becomes embedded in daily lives through an array of subtle

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Though persuaded by writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that self-love and self-interest *may* lead to socially positive effects, he [Smith] was aware that whether or not they *actually* do have such effects depends on the institutions through which they are channelled and directed’ (Muller 1993 p. 98).

process (Gottdiener 2000). Hugh Willmott's discussion of recent developments in UK Higher Education offers an example of the former usage when he describes how the 'commodification of academic labour as its use value, in the forms of its contribution to the development of the student as a person, as a citizen or at least as a depository and carrier of culturally valued knowledge, becomes displaced by a preoccupation with doing those things which will increase its exchange value in terms of the resources that flow, directly or indirectly, from a strong performance on the measures of research output and teaching quality'. In relation to this, he goes on to say 'students have been explicitly constituted as "customers", a development that further reinforces the idea that a degree is a commodity that (hopefully) can be exchanged for a job rather than as a liberal education that prepares students for life' (Willmott 1995 p.1002). Here then we have various aspects of the transformation of social relations into a thing. As part of seeking after new 'markets' and the re-orientation to the customer, new forms of 'delivery' and consumption of Higher Education are being created which can result in learning becoming increasingly fragmented. The curriculum is reorganised as a sequence of knowledge gobbets (Bytesize as it is on the BBC revision website) which can be transferred as 'credits' and combined in novel ways with no guarantee of internal coherence – they are made 'readable' in the jargon of the Bologna Declaration – a 'cut and paste HE curriculum' as David Robertson (2000) calls it, fluid and non-linear. Nonetheless, Robertson is optimistic about the effects of this in terms of 'organizational flexibility and professional academic cross-fertilization' (Robertson 2000 p.91). More pessimistically it may be that pedagogic relationships and values are marginalised. In such changes, the student is rendered as an active consumer but a passive learner (Cloete, Fehnel et al. 2001) (Fabos and Young 1999).

I am going to explore the processes of commodification in three social fields:

- ❖ First in relation to childhood and parenting.
- ❖ Second in relation to social relationships (in education) including our relationship to ourselves.
- ❖ Third, and more briefly, in relation to knowledge

And of course aspects of each are embedded in the others as I hope will become clear. In particular the commodification of social relations is a recurring motif. My focus here is not privatisation, of and in itself, but its consequences and what it is symptomatic of – others take up other aspects. It also has to be noted that my illustrations and examples hardly begin to touch upon the massive diversity of private sector involvements in public sector education – much of which goes un-noticed in the quiet commodification of education in the UK and across the globe. Both the pressures of corporations seeking profit and the interests of the state in seeking alternative sources of funding are at work here.

**I believe that schools will be putting all their back office services [once mainly supplied by LEAs] into the private sector within a few years ... Everyone will want to earn a reasonable margin. (Head of Arthur Andersen's government services department, quoted in the Times Education Supplement (09. 01. 98)**

**The government will today set up an impartial "one-stop shop" to broker US style multi-million pound sponsorship links between big business and schools. The Business Development Unit - in effect an arm's length agency inside the Department for Education and Employment - will try to foster a more co-ordinated national approach to the private sector (Financial Times 20.03.01).**

I need to make it clear that these are things I am still thinking about and need to think about more. And, further, this is very much a whistle stop tour of issues; the laying out of an agenda of concerns and questions needing to be explored much further.

### **Childhood and Parenting**

The education market is no longer simply a matter of choice and competition between educational institutions. The education market is a diffuse, expanding, and sophisticated system of goods, services, experiences and routes – publicly and privately provided. For many parents, educational opportunities are sought for their children through a made-up mix of state and/or private institutions, and paid-for add-ons, like educational toys, parental tasks, tutoring, commercial activities (Tumbletots, Crescendo, StageCoach, Perform etc.), and sources of information and advice (School and Higher Education Guides). Parenting is increasingly serious, demanding and professionalized – and parenting is now widely taught.

Parenting is also increasingly experienced in response to both policy and economic changes as a ‘risky’ business (Ball 2003). Parents are expected to act as ‘risk managers’; ‘committed and opportunistic actions’ (Giddens 1991 p. 132) are required to ensure the best for your child in relation to an increasingly competitive and unpredictable future and resulting dilemmas about how to act for the best. Risk, uncertainty and anxiety, in part produced by the market, are also themselves market opportunities – spaces to be filled – parenting itself is increasingly commercialised. For example, the new generation of specialist childhood and parenting magazines (**Junior: The Worlds Finest Parenting Magazine; London’s Child Magazine: Loving Family and Life; Families South West**) thrive on both the commercial exploitation of anxiety and childhood generally as a new market.

Such magazines offer advice, but also create new desires and fuel fears; perversely, ‘the provision of advice and information means precisely the “production” and communication of risks in greater numbers’ (Crook 1999 p. 180). In these magazines,

parenting is a blur of normative practices, risk assessment, consumption, and investments in the child<sup>3</sup>. The child is caught up in an ensemble of desire/aspiration/guilt and expectation. The market, as Bauman suggest (1988/9) is now the primary means through which consumers gain certainty about their lives, or, here, the lives of their children. As part of this, all aspects of the lives of children are opening up to commercial exploitation, as new needs and desires are created as necessary for the child's fulfilment and success.

In the context of risks and anxiety (obesity, anorexia, unemployment, drugs, child abuse, poor schools, dangerous streets, air pollution, food additives) the prudential parent can no longer take on trust either state services or their own intuitive parenting as adequate in providing the kind of childhood which will ensure their child opportunities, advantages, happiness or well-being. To paraphrase Beck 'In the individualised society' the parent must learn, 'on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of activity, as the planning office with respect' to the 'biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on' of their children (Beck 1992 p.55). Where they are possible, such investments in the child can later be realised in terms of social advantage.

But, as Beck acknowledges, such conditions of responsibility give rise to a new form of inequality 'the inequality of dealing with insecurity and reflexivity' (p. 98). These conditions call up particular resources and skills which are unevenly distributed across the population and require a 'strategic morality' which Beck and Giddens now see as dominating society and social life – in other words 'putting the family first' (Jordan, Redley et al. 1994) (Ball 2003).

The culture of the market 'is so organised that incompetence and weakness cannot be compensated for' (Douglas 1994). Within these new conditions of responsibility the failings of the child are increasingly blamed on the parents and there is a constant stream

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<sup>3</sup> The magazine culture of parenting plays an increasingly important role in defining good parenting, and all that it involves. Responsibilities increase exponentially, possibilities become needs, and 'those needs can position us within the ideological system of consumption' (Lee 1993 p. 22).



of media panics around irresponsible parenting which constitute a highly normative and covertly classed view of parental responsibility – ‘cloning the Blairs’ as Sharon Gewirtz calls it (Gewirtz 2001).

The commercialised and objectified child is the product of a collective endeavour of 1<sup>st</sup> order parenting and 2<sup>nd</sup> order commercial experiences and interactions. The child is ‘made up’ as a ‘successful’ social and educational subject – deliberately and knowingly produced, formed, channelled, motivated and constructed through the crafting and purchase of ‘opportunities’, ‘interactions’ and experiences<sup>4</sup> – but clearly such purchases are not available to all! **And in part that is the point.**

The child, or more precisely the liberal bourgeois child, is always incomplete, a developmental child, a child who is becoming, with talents to be realised, weaknesses and problems to be overcome. Planning and anxiety go hand in hand in this enterprise of realisation. Again, the market plays a key role within such a social perspective – choice is about getting from the present to a particular kind of class and social location in the future. Control is important but risk is ever-present<sup>5</sup>.

Within all this, more clearly than ever before, we can see the family as shaping and producing particular capacities and conducts, producing entrepreneurial subjects, who (in Beck’s terms) take on the world by making a project of themselves. The ‘ethics of enterprise’ have come to ‘infuse the “private” domain that for so long appeared essentially resistant to the rationale of calculation and self-promotion’ (Rose 1992 p. 157).

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<sup>4</sup> There is a ‘dematerialisation of the commodity form, where the act of exchange centres upon those commodities which are time rather than substance based’ (Lee 1993 p.135) and a concomitant growth in ‘experiential commodities’ representing ‘the push to accelerate commodity values and turnovers’ (Lee 1993 p.137).

<sup>5</sup> Perversely as the market spreads in and through education the sense of risk and uncertainty, experienced in particular by middle class parents, increases. The market form rests on responsibility, resourcefulness and an absence of certainty. Perversely while ‘calling-up’ skills, dispositions and resources particular to the middle classes, the market also has a degree of openness and unplannedness which constantly threatens to overwhelm the orderliness, planning and futurity that denotes parenting in many middle class households.

*The economy of student worth*

Markets of course have two sides – consumption **and** production – and the education market is no exception. I want to suggest that the operation of the state market in schooling, with its endogenous privatisation, also provides clear evidence of another kind of commodification of the child. The demands of competition, the ‘information’ provided by League Tables, pressures from the state for performance improvement and target-achievement and per-capita funding, in a period of spending constraints, work together to create local ‘economies of student worth’. In effect schools compete to recruit those students, most likely to contribute to ‘improvements’ and ‘performance’, the easiest and cheapest to teach, and most likely to contribute to the attraction of others like them. As many Headteachers seem ready to admit, the best way to improve your school and thrive in the performative culture is to change your intake<sup>6</sup>.

**If you want to improve the performance of your school, get control of your admissions. (South London Comprehensive Headteacher).**

In this economy, some children then are of high value, are ‘value-adding’ and much sought after, others, of low value, who ‘add negative value’ (Kenway and Bullen 2001 p. 140) are, where possible, avoided. Students and their parents are, in effect, producers of the exchange value of the institution (Kenway and Bullen 2001 p.137). The parent ‘is expected to work hard at making their children work hard’ (p. 138). The child becomes a means to an end – a thing; valued for their value-added or stigmatised by their costliness. Thus, girls carry higher value than boys on the whole in the education market (Ball and Gewirtz 1997).

**I think the [Wyeham] girls schools are competitors because there are more girls’ schools than boys’ schools they are diluting the amount of girls that are available ... if they’re**

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Principals are expected to hustle for customers, reputation and resources. Encouraged to cultivate clients and the media, and to seek sponsors, they have become educational entrepreneurs’ (Kenway and Bullen 2001 p. 135).

**allowed to choose girls, then we should be allowed to choose girls to balance our intake ... which would also improve our exam results ... the harder thing is to improve the school with boys. (Tennyson, Headteacher).**

Without controls on admissions, the market produces ‘cream-skimming’ –the use of subtle (and not so subtle) stratagems by schools eager to ‘control’ their intakes. Hence the need for an admissions regulator. One sub-text of this market in pupil-commodities is social class. Certain classes of pupils also carry higher value – a ‘good’ reputation can attract more middle class students and the recruitment of more middle class students can be ‘cash-in’ for ‘improved’ school performance.

**If they [and Tennyson] had no banding that would probably enable them, because they have a good, reputation, and a very large proportion of middle class parents would like to get their children into there. It would enable them to recruit more able students. (Teacher, Hazlett)**

**Banding is abolished. [...] From September 2004. [...] So that could make us more of a middle class school. [...] It will be interesting to see how- what type of intake we get in 2004. [...] In theory it could improve the school in the sense that the quality is going to be higher. (Chair of Tennyson Governors)**

The economy of student worth – seeking the ‘easy child’ and seeking success in the performative culture – is very much a product, albeit a side-effect, of current education policy.

Here the derogation of ethics, brought about by endogenous privatisation and the ‘disciplines’ of the market, becomes apparent. In the business of survival in the marketplace, the niceties of care and equal value, become easily dispensable. The social relations between providers and ‘clients’ and among the providers themselves are changed significantly. This is a process of ‘ethical-retooling’ (Bourdieu, 1986 p. 310). In an example from the FE sector (below), we see both aspects at work. The interests of the

institution, the need for student numbers, are privileged over and against the best interests of the learner. Students are accepted on courses for which they are unsuited – indeed here student failure can be financially productive as students are kept-on for 'a second bite'. The student becomes de-personalised and is primarily 'valued' as a source of income. The student has exchange value in the economy of education funding.

**Look, it's dog eat dog nowadays in (local area). We'll take them on intermediate (GNVQ) courses even if we know they are not up to it because if we don't, someone else will... And we know they will drop off. So we encourage them to transfer routes and we are providing strong pastoral support to ensure that we retain them for a second bite at the apple. We've got to hold our numbers you know (laughs).. (FE college tutor).**

### *Commerce in the Classroom*

Let me add to this outline sketch a very brief mention of one other aspect of the new relations between education, children and capital, That is, the school itself as a site of consumption – the penetration of commercial advertising and sales and product placement into the daily life of children at school, the activities of what Kenway and Bullen (2001 p. 90) call 'promiscuous corporations'. Alex Molnar and the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University, have done a considerable amount of work in monitoring and examining this phenomenon in the US, particularly in relation to student health. I can offer just one example from their data-base.

**In September of 1998, John Bushey, the executive director of school leadership for Colorado Springs' District 11, sent a memo to Principals. Mr Bushey who oversaw Colorado Springs exclusive contract with Coca-Cola, was the District's self-proclaimed 'Coke Dude'. In his memo, Mr Bushey pointed out that District 11 students need to consume 70,000 cases of Coke products if the District was to receive the full financial benefit from its exclusive sales agreement. In order to better promote the consumption of Coke products, Mr Bushey offered Principals tips such as: "Allow students to purchase and consume vended products throughout the day" and**

**“Locate machines where they are accessible all day”. He also offered to provide schools with additional electrical outlets...**

In this country the Food Commission, and others, have raised concerns, among other things, over the Cadbury’s chocolate and Walker’s crisps promotions which target school children through schemes to collect tokens towards school equipment. Cadbury’s scrapped its campaign for free sports equipment after it was revealed that pupils would have to eat 5,440 chocolate bars – containing 33kgs of fat and nearly 1.25 million calories – to qualify for a set of volleyball posts. In some kind of contrast, the Weetabix Energy for Everyone pack which includes advice on planning sports days and free (branded) equipment, was requested by 48% of all English primary schools (TES 25.06.04). The NUT estimates that brands are now spending £300 million a year targeting classroom consumers.

Markets, of any kind, are complex phenomena. They are multi-faceted, untidy, often unpredictable and both creative and destructive. It seems clear that the child and childhood are now thoroughly saturated by market relations and, within this saturation, the meaning of childhood and what it means to be well educated are subject to significant change. As Kenway and Bullen argue, ‘we are entering another stage in the construction of the young as the demarcations between education, entertainment and advertising collapse’ (2001 p.3).

**Social relationships**

I have already begun to point to some of the ways in which the privatising and commodification of education and of the child, changes the nature of the social relations of education. I want to focus on social relations more specifically now and note some general, and more specific, changes which are taking place.

Generally speaking, education is increasingly, indeed perhaps almost exclusively, spoken of within policy in terms of its economic value, its contribution to international market competitiveness. Robert Cowen writes about this as the 'astonishing displacement

of "society" within the late modern educational pattern' (Cowen 1996 p. 167). Education is increasingly subject to 'the normative assumptions and prescriptions' of 'economism', and 'the kind of "culture" the school is and can be' (Lingard, Ladwig et al. 1998 p. 84), is articulated in its terms. This economism takes many forms.

Within institutions – colleges, schools, universities – the means/end logic, education for economic competitiveness, can transform what were social process of teaching, learning and research into a set of standardised and measurable products. The use of benchmarking, National Curriculum levels of achievement, performance indicators and targets etc. also contribute to this reification of educational processes. These new currencies of judgement in education provide an infrastructure of comparisons which value practitioners and institutions solely in terms of their productivity, their performances! Productive individuals are the central economic resource in the reformed, entrepreneurial public sector.

The performances of individual subjects or organisations serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. Metrics are constructed which are used to make different sorts of activities commensurable. They stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. The human being is commodified. We come to value others solely for their performance, their contribution to the performance of the group or the organisation, rather than their intrinsic worth as persons. This is indicative of the sorts of changes in sociality which I will comment on later – a move to what Wittel calls 'network sociality' which is 'informational' rather than narrational, and based on the exchange of data – here performance data (RAE ratings, numbers of publication, GCSE %s, no. of students gaining Oxbridge places, etc.). Performativity consists of what Lyotard (1984 p. xxiv) calls 'the terrors - soft and hard - of performance and efficiency – we must 'be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear'. These terrors arise in good part from 'the natural inclination of modern practice - intolerance' (Bauman 1991 p. 8) – the driving out of weakness or under-performance, constantly seeking improvement – the extraction of greater surplus value

from educational labour. For Lyotard, performativity encapsulates the functionality and instrumentality of modernity and the commodification and **exteriorisation** of knowledge (to which I shall return below). It is achieved through the construction and publication of information; and the drive to name, differentiate and classify.

The use of metrics, targets, linked to incentives and sanctions, and the constant collection and publication of performance data, embeds instrumentality in everything we do. And in the process, what we do is all too often emptied of all substantive content. Increasingly, we choose and judge our actions in terms of effectivity and appearance. Beliefs and values are no longer important - it is output that counts. Beliefs and values are part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse of public service.

### *The reformed teacher and authenticity*

Within all this, individual *pre-reform or pre-privatisation* teachers, researchers and lecturers find themselves **struggling for authenticity**. A kind of *values schizophrenia* is experienced when commitment and experience within practice have to be sacrificed or compromised for impression and performance. Here there is a potential 'splitting' between the teachers own judgements about 'good practice' and students 'needs' on the one hand, and the rigours of performance on the other. There is a 'disjunction between policy and preferred practice' (NcNess, Broadfoot and Osborn 2003 p. 255). The result for many is a kind of 'bifurcated consciousness' (Smith 1987) or 'segmented self' (Miller 1983) or a struggle with 'outlaw emotions' (Jaggar 1989) as they try to live up to and manage 'the contradictions of belief and expectation' (Acker and Feuerwerker 1997 quoted in Dillabough 1999 p. 382). In Bauman's (1991 p. 197) terms, this is 'the privatisation of ambivalence' which, 'casts on individual shoulders calls for a bone structure few individuals can boast'. Stress, illness and burn out are often the result. To the extent to which they hold onto their 'outlaw emotions', teachers risk being 'constructed outside' (Acker and Feuerwerker 1997) this dominant view of the professional, despite the demands placed upon them to conform to it' (Dillabough 1999

p. 382). They become moral dinosaurs – irrelevant and inconvenient. Authenticity and performativity clash and grate at every turn.

There are three versions of (in)authentic practice signalled here; in relation to oneself, one's sense of what is right; in relations with one's students, when a commitment to learning is replaced by the goals of performance; and in relations with colleagues, when struggle and debate - what De Lissovoy and McLaren (2003 p. 134) in their version of authenticity refer to as 'a true dialectical relationship ... between individual and collective moments of being' – processes of making and self-making, knowing that the world as something we have produced - is replaced by compliance and silence. This structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes, and the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness which results is increasingly an everyday experience for us all. Put another way, those who seek to maintain an authenticity within their practice are attempting to hold onto knowledges about themselves and about their practice which diverge from prevailing categories. These are now seen as 'knowledges inadequate to their task ... naive knowledges ... disqualified knowledges' (Foucault 1980 pp. 81-82). A new kind of teacher and new kinds of knowledges are 'called up' by educational reform - a teacher who can maximise performance, who can set aside irrelevant principles, or out-moded social commitments, for whom excellence and improvement (in whatever forms required) are the driving force of their practice. The notion of 'doing a good job' in these terms is reduced to a 'thin' version of professionalism in terms of accounting for measurable outcomes (Cribb and Ball 2004).

### *Post-professionalism*

In all this, practice itself is commodified. Value replaces values. Moral reflection is unnecessary, indeed obstructive. What is needed is flexibility, in terms both of skills, interest, application and morality. The new knowledge worker should not be encumbered by scruples. Here cold calculation and extrinsic values predominate. This is the archetypal 'post-modern' professional - defined by depthlessness, flexibility, transparency and represented within spectacle - within performances. Like the performative institution,



the 'post-professional' is conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets, armed with formulaic methods – ‘what works’- suited to every eventuality. Their ‘professionalism’ inheres in the willingness and ability to adapt to the necessities and vicissitudes of policy. This is a professional who is essentially inessential and insubstantial; who is ‘disembedded’ (Weir 1997) and an ‘object of knowledge’ (Dillabough 1999 p. 387).

The rendering of educational processes into metric form, into comparable performances also serves another important function, in that it renders educational processes into a form which is more readily privatised – that is, into a contractable form, into a **form for cost and profit calculation**, into a version of education which can be reduced to a commercial exchange based on output indicators, which can be monitored.

#### **Rare Bonus for Bradford Firm**

**The private company which manages Bradford’s education has received £880,000 after persuading the City to lower its targets. Last year Education Bradford received on £8,450 in bonuses. This year it managed to hit 31 of its 66 new targets, and according to a survey by the TES, became the only company of the nine running local education authorities to receive performance bonuses. (TES nd.)**

This process of objectification contributes more generally to the possibility of thinking about social services like education as *forms of production*, as ‘just like’ services of other kinds and other kinds of production. The ‘soft’ services like teaching that require ‘human interaction’ are necessarily made just like the ‘hard’ services (book supply, transport, catering, instructional media) which can be standardised, calculated, qualified and compared. This involves the ‘flattening’ of complex human and social processes into ‘crude representations’, it is a form of violence. The ‘imperative of exchangeability depends upon the violence in the principle of identity’ (De Lissovoy and McLaren 2003 p. 133). Within all of this, the specificities of those human interactions involved in teaching and learning are erased. The practice of teaching is re-made and reduced to externally generated rule-following and target achievement. This provides the logic for the substitution of specialist labour with generic or unqualified labour, and specialist

institutional cultures by generic management systems and cultures designed to ‘deliver’ improvements in quality and efficiency, irrespective of substance.

### **Knowledge**

I want now in my last field of enquiry to return to the issue of knowledge and Lyotard’s concept of ‘exteriorisation’ or alienation. **This is summed up in Lyotard’s terms in a shift from the questions ‘it is true’ and ‘it is just’ to ‘is it useful, saleable, efficient’ (Lyotard 1984 p. 51).** Or as Basil Bernstein put it: ‘the contemporary dislocation, disconnects inner from outer, as a precondition for constituting the outer and its practice, according to the market principles of the New Right’ (Bernstein 1996 p. 87). This is the precondition of the knowledge economy, or what Lyotard calls ‘the merchantilization of knowledge’ (p. 51). Knowledge is no longer legitimated through ‘grand narratives of speculation and emancipation’ (p. 38) but, rather, in the pragmatics of ‘optimization’ – the creation of skills or of profit rather than ideals. Again, it is economism which defines the purpose and potential of education<sup>7</sup>.

These are not simply esoteric or abstract concerns about academic freedom. They relate closely to practical matters enmeshed in the clash between business principles and purposes and academic principles. They are implicated in the closing down of the space of possibility for being a public intellectual, for researching, speaking, or ‘finding’ against the grain, against the imperatives of economic necessity, against the ‘useful’ and the ‘efficient’. There is a fundamental challenge to the possibility of ‘really useful knowledge’ or to simply retaining a sense of independence that serves both indirectly and directly the public good rather than institutional advantage.

Given the lack of space, let me ground this point with one example of the general trend – and the way in which changes in allegiance and purpose also change values and the nature of community or the possibilities of community.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government’ (Lyotard 1986 p. 9)

**In February 2000 the New England Journal of Medicine made a public apology for falling standards in its pages over recent years. It found that in nearly half of the 40 articles on drug therapy which it had published since 1997 (articles which are cited as constituting objective accounts of results in reliance on the reputation of such a journal) the ‘reviews of drugs were by authors with financial links to the manufacturers of the products’. (Evans 2001 p.107)**

Here the boundaries between scientific evaluation and commercial promotion are blurred in a number of ways. The status and independence of the NEJM is used by manufacturers as a form of endorsement for the efficacy of their products, based on the work of scientists who appear to be independent but who in practice were funded to do their research by the manufacturers of the drugs they were testing and reporting on. As the THES put it in a recent article, there is a ‘crisis of identity among academics who feel caught in a tug-of-war between the desire for free inquiry and the demands to win corporate sponsorships to bolster tight university budgets’ (THES 28.05.04 p. 1). Here again are the bifurcation of consciousness and changing social relations I have been exploring.

### *Knowledge FOR schooling*

There is now a massive literature, particular in relation to science which addresses these issues. I want to pick up the concerns signalled here in respect to schools, and again relate knowledge back to social relations. I want to consider the developments, made possible by the 1998 and 2002 Education Acts, of a new school-to-school market in educational knowledge and services<sup>8</sup>. That is, the possibility for schools to assert their Intellectual Property Rights and thus profit from the sale of their curriculum developments or act as for-profit consultants etc.. Again, what is created is a new form of social relations between schools and a new relationship of schools to knowledge, a relationship which is no longer articulated in terms of the public good, and certainly not

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<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Joe Hallgarten for drawing my attention to this.

in terms of knowledge for its own sake, but rather a relationship to knowledge as a commodity. These new Rights impose new limits to and conditions on communication between schools and between professionals and replace collegiality with the potential for distrust within communications (as we shall see). Another example of the creative destruction of the market.

### **Thomas Telford**

**The number of pupils taking vocational ICT exams is due to rocket with teaching materials now being marketed by Thomas Telford and Brooke Weston City Technology Colleges. More than a quarter of secondary schools have bought Thomas Telford's materials, earning the school £3 million.**

**Brooke Weston's website flashes up a page which proclaims "GNVQ ICT Intermediate – 4 GCSEs equivalent" ... Alan Smithers, of Liverpool University said: "Some Heads have told me they plan to run this course because of the impact it would have on the league tables". (TES nd.)**

Thomas Telford school is probably the best known example of the taking up of these opportunities and there are a small number of others entering this new market. However, these legal developments formalise processes already at work within the education market place. A couple of examples from Further Education:

**Oh yes we always spy, we have to I'm afraid (laughing). Yes and quite often people will go out and find out how they are recruiting and what their recruitment procedures are like and what their induction procedures are like, what their enrolment procedures are like because it can always be a trying time for students so often people will go along and see what other Colleges are like, see how well they do and see if we can learn anything from them. (Deputy Head of Faculty)**

**- which ranges from keeping an eye on the activities of competitors, to 'poaching' and direct copying. It doesn't matter any longer that the College down the road has always run that course very successfully. (Student Counsellor)**

And from School.

**A Deputy Head at Hazlett School explained that without the presence of an LEA Advisor and with ‘delegated budgets, League Tables - I think people in schools now have one eye on recruitment, and you know, the reputation of their school against another school. So that if I had something going on as a Head of Department, I might be reluctant to share it with the school next door because there’s a sense that I’ve got one up on them’.**

**The Excellence in Cities Co-ordinator (the LEA Officer charged with over-seeing this government initiative) reported that:**

**... one Head actually said to me, we’re not going to show you a copy of our plans and whatever, we’re not going to have you stealing our good ideas, and taking them round to other schools.**

Within such enactments of social and moral relations we are witnessing what Richard Sennett calls the ‘corrosion of character’ – the erosion of responsibility and trust (Sennett 1998) – the antagonism of functionality and morality (Wittel 2001 p 71)<sup>9</sup>.

What these examples point to is the social dissolution of public service education. In the context of competitive and contract funding, there is an individuation of schools **and** of the school workplace – more and more short term projects, freelancers, consultants, agency-workers, fixed term contracts, skill-mixes – these new kinds of workers are ‘with’ and ‘for’ the organisation, rather than ‘in’ it as Wittel (p 65) puts it. Social ties within educational work become ephemeral, disposable, serial, fleeting – we live as Bauman terms it in ‘the age of contingency’ (Bauman 1996). This further contributes to the dissolution of moral obligations.

The forms of rational calculation represented here also point up some of the paradoxes built into current social and educational policy, policy responses to the conundrums of ‘creative destruction’.

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<sup>9</sup> Although Giddens might see these conditions as the bases for ‘active trust’.

- ❖ While schools are encouraged to act as knowledge businesses they are also urged into collaboration and sharing.
- ❖ While schools are set in competition to recruit students of high value in local economies of performance they are also urged to think about federations.
- ❖ While schools are required to compete in league tables of examination performance they are also urged to be more creative.
- ❖ While schools are required to focus their internal efforts and resources differentially in 'A-C economies' they are given the responsibility to create learning communities.
- ❖ While Headteachers are required to maximise their budgets, manage their workforce, and drive up performance, they are also expected to demonstrate ethical leadership.

There is a double irony in these various examples of state intervention – **the attempt to re-create within the logic of economic rationality, forms of social relations which were destroyed by the imposition of the logic of economic rationality.**

Both competition and collaboration here are 'produced' and 'done' through incentives and deliberate action. The 'doing' of community or of collaboration can also be seen, in many instances, as involving the recognition of the 'value' to be added, or extracted from such doing. As Michael Fielding points out in his discussion of the 'high performing school'; it is 'an organisation in which the *personal is used for the sake of the functional*: community *is* valued, but primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the market place' (Fielding 2003 p. 10).

The current policy enthusiasm for the notion of social capital is a further example of the thorough subordination of the social to the economic. Social Capital theorists like Putman and Coleman, envision social relations in terms of their productive effects and consequences, not things of value in their own right. This is yet another form of the

displacement of use values (a qualitative relation) into exchange values (a quantitative relation – a ratio of exchange between commodities – so much social capital gets you so much output in terms of levels of employment, or crime). Here social relations themselves are a commodity – something to be ‘invested in’, that produces ‘returns’. As Wittel (2001 p. 71) puts it ‘the paradigmatic form of late capitalism and the new cultural economy’ is ‘characterised by the assimilation of work and play ... (and the) increasing commodification and the increasing perception of social relationships as social capital’. In effect, in Wittel’s terms, we no longer simply *have* social relationships, we *do* them, and such relationships have to be *managed*.

In effect, such forms of collaboration and community are **virtual** social relations. They have to be ‘done’ because they are not **there**, not natural, they do not have their **own** materiality, their own history, they do not have a narrative, they do not have a basis in mutual experience or common history. Rather, they are continually and deliberately produced and reproduced and ‘consumed’ – part of our ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000). There are what Knorr-Cetina calls ‘post-social relationships’ – ‘a shifting of social activities away from humans towards objects’ – a desocialisation (Wittel 2001 p. 64). They are also often virtual in another sense of being ‘de-localised’, based on communication technologies rather than face-to-face encounters.

## **Conclusion**

I now find myself in an analytical dilemma. I am wary of the grand simplicities involved in arguing that we are seeing the emergence of a society ‘entirely ordered by a single mode of exchange’ (Slater and Tonkiss 2001 p. 199) – a market society if you like. I am more than ready to accept that the useful trope of commodification can be easily over-stretched and promiscuously applied and thus lose its bite and power. I am clear that education, families, research, are actually represented by a broad range of behaviours, mechanisms and institutions and that at different points within these social fields, exchange and order are accomplished in different ways. Education policy itself is clearly, as I have tried to indicate, full of contradictions and attempts, however misconceived, **to**

**save itself from itself.** Nonetheless, within the public services, the effects of privatisation, commodification and market forces are ineluctable, not just in terms of a mechanism of reform, but in terms of the possible forms of self that they make available to us, and the 'practices through which we act upon ourselves and one another in order to make us particular kinds of being' (Rose 1992) p. 161). The question is do these things make a whole – is there something happening here invested in but also beyond a set of technical changes in the form of public service delivery.

While there is clearly an urgent need for 'more nuanced analyses of the structuring of exchange within complex social systems' (Slater and Tonkiss 2001 p. 199) – like education, I want nonetheless to suggest that perhaps what we are seeing is what Foucault has called an epistemic shift - that is a profound change in the underlying set of rules governing the production of discourses, the conditions of knowledge, in a single period – a cultural totality or multi-dimensional regularity if you like; social structures and social relations that take shape as the flesh and bones of the dominant discourse.

That is, a general transformation in the nature of social relations – based on the removal of many of the key boundaries which have underpinned modernist thought and a concomitant collapse of moral spheres and a total subordination of moral obligations to economic ones (Walzer 1984), what Bernstein calls a dislocation (Bernstein 1996). A break as significant as – and a break from the creation of the welfare state. A dislocation within which a new kind of citizen is produced in relation to new forms of government and governance – and a concomitant loss of 'citizenship capacity' (Crouch 2003 p. 21). More specifically, new kinds of relations to and within education and learning are being enacted - 'there is a crisis, and what is at stake is the very concept of education itself' (Bernstein 1996 p. 88).

What I am arguing here is that privatisation is not simply a technical change in the management of the delivery of educational services – it involves changes in the meaning and experience of education, what it means to be a teacher and a learner. It changes who we are and our relation to what we do, entering into all aspects of our everyday practices



and thinking – into the ways that we think about ourselves and our relations to others, even our most intimate social relations. It is changing the framework of possibilities within which we act. This is not just a process of reform, it is a process of social transformation. Without some recognition of and attention within public debate to the insidious work that is being done, in these respects, by privatisation and commodification – we may find ourselves living and working in a world made up entirely of contingencies, within which the possibilities of authenticity and meaning in teaching, learning and research are gradually but inexorably erased.

It is time to think differently about education policy before it is too late. We need to move beyond the tyrannies of improvement, efficiency and standards, to recover a language of and for education articulated in terms of ethics, moral obligations and values<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Unions like the NUT and Unison and groups like Catalyst are already doing important work in this respect, and many individual educators struggle daily in their own practices to hold at bay the pressures of commodification.

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