

# Education economics

Quantification, fetishism and commodification.

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# Introduction

Marx, *The capital* (I), chap 3.1

It is not money that renders commodities commensurable. Just the contrary. It is because all commodities, as values, are realised human labour, and therefore commensurable, that their values can be measured by one and the same special commodity, and the latter be converted into the common measure of their values, i.e., into money.

D. Harvey, 2003, p. 141

capitalism can [...] make use of some pre-existing outside [...] some sector within capitalism - such as education - that has not been proletarianised.

- 1 Ideology
  - Academic enchantment
  - Disenchantment
  - Reenchantment
  
- 2 Effects
  - Redefinition
  - Reification
  - Abstraction

## Academic enchantment

Secularisation of the university with the enlightenment  
⇒ academic values :

- Autonomy of Reason,
- Knowledge,
- academic autonomy,
- equality and evaluation among peers...



## Academic enchantment

University is defined by its relative autonomy, from the State as well as from the market (and of course church). This means that its academics themselves -autonomously organised- and not State or Market's representatives, that define the criteria of legitimacy and the value of knowledge, [...] it's the condition for scientific fruitfulness and democracy

A. Caillé, Ph. Chanial, « Présentation », p. 5-30, Revue du *MAUSS*, n°323, « L'Université est en crise. Mort ou résurrection », 2009.

# Disenchantment

Marx & Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848

For exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, [the bourgeoisie] has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation [...] all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

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Evaluations, rankings and benchmarks appear as “objective” (since quantitative) valorisations of research and teaching, as opposed to subjective peer judgement.

# Evaluations

## Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The REF distributes funding among universities labs, according to a weighted mean of publications scores  $\times$  nb of researchers  $\times$  market share  $\times$  costs index.

And have you seen change in how the REF results are used either by the university or within the department ? (Boulet, 2013)

Yes. So they are much more... they are regarded now as measures of individual performance in ways which can lead to HR, human resources, discussions with individuals. And that was also the case in the previous RAE, in 2008. It wasn't the case in previous RAEs [before 2008]. (academic)



# Rankings

## USN ranking of Law schools (Espeland & Sauder, 2007)

USN's goal in creating rankings was [...] to provide accessible information to educational consumers.

Ranks according to reputation (40%), selectivity (25%), employment (20%) and budget (15%)

## French R& HE ministers

le classement de Shanghai [est] certes critiquable mais [...] nous devons gagner des places (2007)

les critères qui sont utilisés pour le classement de Shanghai sont des critères absolument partiels [?] malgré toutes ces réserves [?], la France ne s'en sort pas si mal [et] grignote des places (2015).

# Benchmarking

## Open Method of Coordination (Bruno et al., 2010)

European integration by means of numbers instead of law : statistics on R& HE are defined at the EU level and therefore induce comparability and rankings.

This also works within countries and even within universities, inducing competition among departments of laboratories.

## Reenchantment :

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Lisbon strategy (2000)

aims to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world

Human capital, Becker, 1962, p. 9

Activities that influence future real income through the imbedding of resources in people. This is called investing in human capital.

# Authority

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- Simplification makes information more authoritative
- “Objectivity lends authority to officials who have very little of their own.” (Porter, 1995)

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  - Simplification makes information more authoritative
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- ⇒ Self-realisation : rankings reproduce and intensify the stratification they are designed to measure (through recognition and funding)

# Redefinition

Quantification is always a redefinition and an homogenization.

## USN Law school ranking

LSAT tests are available to quantify the quality of the student body. It eliminates specifics criteria and social grants.

## REF

Research quality is quantified as articles production  $\times$  journals citations.

Researcher value is given by the among of funding her REF scores brings.

Ranking universities produces a common norm, the best.

# Reification

## Marx, *Productive and Unproductive Labour*

the means of production, the objective conditions of labour, do not appear as subsumed under the worker ; rather, he appears as subsumed under them. Capital employs labour. Even this relation in its simplicity is a personification of things and a reification of persons.



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- Low wage teachers, specially content producers for MOOC, do not control syllabus nor organisation of teaching
  - Large research programs are organised as sets of scheduled deliverables
  - Patents are university or company properties
- ⇒ taylorisation of labour by legal frame and quantitative management

## Abstraction of academic labour

Quantification commensurate different fields and activities :  
to improve a score or a ranking, actors move efforts and funding from  
an activity to another (close the philosophy dpt. to extend the  
chemics dpt ; social grants → merit-based grants). REF costs indexes  
are conversion factors

### Deepening quantification : REF

Measure is more precise : from 5% (2008) to 1% (2014).  
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### Laval *et al.*, *La nouvelle école capitaliste*, 2012, p. 13

La forme valeur de la connaissance est l'effet de la normalisation qui  
lui est appliquée par les outils managériaux de sa gestion et de son  
évaluation.

First abstraction : Academic labour loose it's individuality, it's field  
specificity.

# Monetisation

Second abstraction : commensurate academic labour with general labour.

Once the production is quantified, it just lacks a conversion in money.

## Human capital (Gazier, 1992)

« Human capital is of productive capacities [...] : knowledge, skills, experience, [...] as valued on labour market.

- Fees  $\Rightarrow$  teaching monetisation
- $\Rightarrow$  split among dpts according to CATS
- REF expected funding  $\Rightarrow$  research monetisation

# Profitability

MBA	Prix 2011	1 <sup>er</sup> wage	Profitability
ESCP	11 500 €	36 000 €	3,1
HEC	11 900 €	36 000 €	3,0
ESSEC	15 000 €	36 000 €	2,4

$$\text{Profitability} = \frac{\text{first wage}}{\text{last year tuition fees}} \quad ; \text{ l'Étudiant.fr, 2013}$$

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Misleading scheme : le fetishism obscures the exploitation.