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"The Art of Punishing": The Research Assessment Exercise and the Ritualisation of Power in Higher Education

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Abstract

In this article it is argued that the recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)--undertaken by the United Kingdom's Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFC)--is part of a much larger process of assessment in education generally. By taking the RAE as its focus, this article uses a Foucaultian analysis to amplify the nature and practice of disciplinary power in the setting of Higher Education. Foucault's notion of an "integrated system" of control and production, with its routine operation of surveillance and assessment--and its dependence on coercion and consent--is directly applied to the RAE. The impact on research and teaching is discussed. The critical response of academics to the exercise has failed to challenge the process in any fundamental way. It is argued here that this failure is a reflection of the degree to which disciplinary logic is embedded in the academic system.

Introduction

The demands made to "publish or perish" have long played a central role in the academic's career advancement and critiques of this phenomenon are not new. The articulation of a "Research Assessment Exercise" (RAE) within British Higher Education takes this demand to an extreme limit and uses the funding of university Departments as its ultimate weapon. Witnessing the operation of the Exercise has provided a salutary lesson in the effects of product driven research and raises a number of questions about the nature and purpose of academia. The largely unquestioned acceptance of the imposition of such a funding mechanism is a dangerous practice.

Positive (if any) and negative effects should be considered. Of greater import academics should reflect on the larger process of which the RAE is a part.

This article provides a critical examination of the use of assessment practices in higher education as exemplified by the RAE. Drawing on Foucault's work on the nature and practice of disciplinary power, the bulk of our consideration will be of the RAE in its internal operation as a ritualisation of such power: a consideration, in Foucault's terms, of the "micro- physics" of power. Naturally, this "micro" level cannot be properly understood without reference to the broader context of British education policy, itself located in a socio-economic setting increasingly characterised by management-centred disciplinarian approaches.

Foucault considers disciplinary power in the context of an "integrated system" of control and production; a system in which, due to the intense, routine operation of surveillance and assessment, both coercion and consent feature prominently. This article investigates the current intensification of the operation of the integrated system in the surveillance and assessment of British academics.

Foucault, Power and the Integrated Disciplinary System

The writing of French philosopher Michel Foucault constitutes one of the most thorough investigations into the evolution and operation of disciplinary systems in the West and the mechanics of power at work within them. Foucault's concern is with the ongoing legacy of "a historical transformation: the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society." (Foucault, 1977: 209) The following analysis of the RAE draws most heavily on his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. As Foucault makes clear, though his study is of prisons, it cannot be a study solely of them, so integrated are they with other forms and elaborations of disciplinary power:

"'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by 'specialized' institutions...or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end...or by preexisting authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power..." (Foucault, 1977: 215)

Foucault sees the system of disciplinary power as productive and integrated. He argues that such power cannot rely exclusively or pre-dominantly on punitive measures, essential though these are. For power to be self-sustaining, it must produce and reproduce definitions of reality which the objects of this power come to see as normal. Thus, the moulding and integration of 'the individual' is a central part of the production of power. "Discipline," Foucault argues, "'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise." (Foucault, 1977: 170)

In the context of the prison, this "exercise" is designed to be continuous and relentless. Surveillance is the key technique, both of observation and normalisation of behaviour: it integrates the individual within the prison system, "producing" the prisoner, whose ideal variant is highly co-operative and responsive to the authorities.

This co-operation is essentially a combination of habitualised, normalised fear of punishment and hope of reward.

In the context of education--identified by Foucault as one of the key sites of the habitualising, normalising exercise of disciplinary power--the primary techniques remain the deployment of surveillance and the inducement of co-operation, albeit in a less brutal and more nuanced manner. Whether in prison or education, integrated power is realised through surveillance and extended and guaranteed through co-operation. And in both--and all such sites--"assessment" combines and produces both.

The growing use of assessment/punishment in higher education

Assessment has traditionally been a defining characteristic of the academic professional: assessment of students, and--generally to a lesser degree--of fellow professionals through peer review. A new, more exaggerated form of assessment has, however, become prevalent in recent years. The trend toward the "publish or perish" mentality has brought with it a new, rigid, punitive and hierarchical approach to assessment. The Research Assessment Exercise is merely one, albeit extreme, example of this tendency.

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE): A Descriptive Introduction

The RAE was established by the Conservative government in June 1992 to accommodate its "wish to see selectivity in the allocation of research resources based on assessments of the quality of research" in higher education (Note 2). (HEFCE, 1994, para 4.) The first RAE was concluded in March 1994, publishing its findings in the form of a "league table" later that year. Our focus is on the second RAE, which refined the workings of the assessment structure and concluded its work on 31 March 1996, the results of which were made public in December 1996.

The RAE accords a ranking to every "unit of assessment" (UOA--most usually an academic department--in the United Kingdom). This ranking can be expected to exert a decisive influence over research funding allocations. "Units" are marked on a scale from 1 to 5 (with a new 5* category for star performers). A ranking of 3 is generally understood to be the minimum accepted standard necessary to warrant continued institutional support. However, "3" is now divided into 3A and 3B, with 3B likely to be judged the wrong side of the divide. Definitions are duly provided in the voluminous documentation accompanying the exercise--along with definitions for all of the many key words and terms employed. These definitions serve not only to clarify and guide, but limit and confine, participation and response.

The RAE is a massive operation, dominating the operation and orientation of higher education. No activity can take place without reference to it. The activity required to set up the Exercise was itself intensive. In 1994, 60 assessment panels were established to consider the submissions from 69 subject areas. Under direction from the funding councils, the Chairs--appointed by the funding bodies, on the advice of the 1992 RAE panel Chairs--were charged with assembling their teams, achieving a specified optimum degree of continuity in personnel (33%) with previous panels. Personnel selection was required to be based on detailed criteria including the "research experience of nominees and their standing in the research community" and "the need to secure representation from the research commissioning and user communities within commerce, industry, government and the public sector." (HEFCE, 1995, para. 4a) Chairs' recommendations for personnel would then require approval by the Chief

Executive of the relevant funding body. (Ibid., para. 5a)

In line with the increasingly utilitarian re-assessment of research in higher education, and "in the light of the emphasis on developing the partnership between higher education and the users of research," some 1,000 invitations were issued, by the Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) on behalf of the four British funding bodies, to industrial and business and professional organisations for nominations for membership to the panel. (HEFCE, 1994, para. 18) Each panel was provided by the funding council with a Secretary. The Secretaries were responsible for ensuring that the elaborate procedures and regulations of the Exercise were carried out. One important regulation was that panels were "instructed to channel requests for clarification of data through the funding bodies and not to contact institutions directly." Similarly, any feedback they wished to give UOAs at the end of the process would also be channelled through the funding bodies. (HEFCE, 1995a, para 29)

Panels were charged with drawing up the assessment criteria for their own areas, taking into account "previous statements on the framework of the Exercise; advice from the funding bodies on policy and administrative considerations, and representations made by subject associations and other interested parties." (HEFCE, 1995b, para 4) Despite the appearance of a degree of freedom in establishing the criteria, it is important to recognize that a definition of "research" is provided by the funding councils which can not be challenged. The task of the panels is thus essentially to interpret this mandatory definition--"fine-tune" it to the specific requirement of the subject under review.

The common definition of Research reads:

"'Research' for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, as well as to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship*; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances and artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and analysis of materials, components and processes, e.g. for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques.

* Scholarship embraces a spectrum of activities including the development of teaching methods; the latter is excluded from the RAE." (HEFCE, 1995a, annex a)

The definition vaunts, above all else, the wider, specific benefits of the results of applied research to society and the economy. This seemingly indisputable and worthy objective can act to constrain criticism of social and economic values and norms. It valorises research as a means of production: research as production-line. It also implicitly suggests that the quality of such research is likely to benefit from intense processes of assessment and judgement.

One reason why scholarship such as development of teaching materials is excluded from consideration may be that it does not lead, concretely enough or quickly enough, to "ascertainable" benefits, commercial or otherwise. Teaching is doubtless not seen as in opposition or contradiction to such utilitarianism: its utilitarianism is merely of a longer-term kind, beyond the horizon avidly scanned by the RAE. That is, teaching,

like research, is still a production-line, but one producing--moulding and integrating--workers (researchers) rather than products.(Note 3)

The decision to exclude such scholarship understandably proved controversial within the profession--"caused some difficulty," in RAE-speak. (HEFCE, 1995, annex a, para 19) Many academics see teaching-preparation as a legitimate contribution to, and an integral component of, their research activity. For the RAE, this legitimacy is conferred only when it "can be shown to embody research outcomes within the RAE definition." Such "embodiment"-- the production of appropriate, i.e. published, assessable output--precludes consideration of what has hitherto generally been regarded, and valued, as creative, original research. This research--a great body of work and output--is now "disembodied," relegated somehow to the status of "phantom" research; an incomplete production of thought. This view is simply dismissed--for reasons not explained--in the RAE: "the broader argument that the preparation of teaching material, as a form of scholarship, must generally be accepted as a research activity within the RAE is not accepted." (Ibid.) Such a blunt refusal starkly illustrates the arbitrary power of the Exercise. The nature, functions and effects of this power are those of an integrated disciplinary system. Understanding the workings of such a system can therefore illuminate the deeper implications of a process such as the RAE.

The Research Assessment Exercise: Operation and Effects

As mentioned, assessment of academic performance and "quality" in higher education has traditionally consisted of peer-review exercises operating within a hierarchical framework. While both features are retained within the RAE, hierarchical aspects take precedence, controlling and constraining the peer-review dimension. Likewise, the RAE is constrained by its location within broader hierarchical relationships. At the top of the hierarchy is the government, making pronouncements and establishing the mandate under which the funding councils must operate. The funding bodies dictate to the RAE panels they have approved. Once the rules of the process are established, the UOAs are obliged to reach the targets set for them by the panels. Ultimately, pressure is exerted on the individual academic, whose "output" and performance becomes bound to, and binds, all the links in this long chain of command. As a consequence, the existing hierarchical nature of the UOAs themselves becomes exaggerated.

Maintaining and monitoring such an elaborate hierarchy requires considerable levels of both surveillance and consent. Cooperation is vital at each level, as is "assessment," i.e. surveillance, of its effectiveness. A dynamic is established which serves to integrate and service the system. A "network" of power-relations between and within each level is produced, and continually reproduced, on the basis of the integration of those apparent polarities, surveillance and cooperation: "for although," as Foucault says, "surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of regulations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network "holds" the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors perpetually supervised." (Foucault, 1977: 176-7)

The Integrated System and Surveillance

Foucault identifies and discusses "five distinct operations" at work within the integrated regime of disciplinary power. (Ibid., 182-3) How are they at work within the

RAE?

The first operation "refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the principle of a rule to be followed." In the RAE, all individual research action is referred to its value as determined by the Assessors. This determination is made on the basis of standards of comparison and differentiation ostensibly set out for all to see, but actually open to a few--the Panels--to interpret. In the Exercise, while individual performance is assessed, it is the UOA concerned that is judged. For the RAE, the UOA is the "individual": UOAs are compared to each other as if they were Supra-Researchers. For the individual, the UOA is one of two "wholes," the other being The Exercise. Additionally, researchers within UOAs are compared to each other, and in many cases penalised or rewarded for success or failure in meeting goals set within the hierarchical structure of both the RAE and UOA.

As mentioned, latitude of interpretation--freedom of manoeuvre--for the assessors is built into the process. This latitude serves to constrain the freedom of manoeuvre for the assessed, the researcher, who is compelled to refer her or his output to injunctions which are both imperious and imprecise--indeed, whose imperiousness is enhanced and characterised by its very imprecision.

This characteristic is justified, indeed vaunted, in The Exercise thus: "The assessment process is not a mechanistic one." This claim gives Panels the right to remain vague in their pronouncements of what specifically is taken into consideration in arriving at a judgement. The individual researcher is told, for example, that publishing in "prestigious journals" or chairing "key conferences" will enhance their UOA's standing, though no definitive list is provided. Naturally, were such a list to be provided, it would be controversial and rightly condemned for its dictatorial audacity. The point being made is that this vagueness is not the consequence of wishing to accommodate others, but an essential mechanism in the accommodation and consolidation of the ultimately arbitrary power and remit of the assessors to assess.

The second operation is the differentiation of "individuals from one another, in terms of the following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimum threshold, as an average to be respected, or as an optimum towards which one must move." In the Exercise, this function is exemplified by the designated number of publications sought. Following on from the results of the 1992 RAE ranking, the UOAs began to set targets for its individual researchers to aim for four publications in the four years between the Exercises. "Getting your four" became the mantra to "guide" the British academic. Here again a deliberately vague set of criteria left both the individual and the UOA struggling with a variety of unknowns: such things as the value (defined by the assessors) of different kinds of publications (books, chapters in books, articles in journals, etc), and the source of publication. Even the "four" is a variable. In an effort to avoid the appearance of a strictly quantitative approach, the funding councils have specified that the assessment panels should take into consideration "particular professional circumstances likely to lead to a reduced publication rate." (HEFCE, 1995b, para 12) In such cases, it is incumbent on the UOA to provide evidence of long term research projects or mitigating circumstances; extreme care must be taken if utilizing this clause lest the assessment panel fails to regard the reduced "output" as justifiable.

The third operation is one which "measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals." Here again we see the UOA doing to the individual what the RAE does to it. In accepting the "logic" put forward by The Exercise that certain forms of research "output" are superior to others, the UOA demands of its individual researchers that effort be made to attain certain

standards. A single-authored book--quality is not an important consideration, or rather is assumed to be present in any such work--is given precedence and scores most heavily; more heavily, say, than a single-authored paper, which, if certain conditions are met, counts for more than a chapter in a book, and so on. The hierarchy of "good researchers" is thus established within the UOA, with--paradoxically--less value accorded to individual, thoughtful, long-term research.

Changing thus the "nature" of research changes also the "nature" of researchers. This is a prime example of what Foucault describes in the context of overtly penal institutions as assessment being far more concerned with the creation, through a system of rewards and punishments, of a certain type of individual than with the reform or improvement of individuals. In this case, the British government hopes to manufacture a "new breed" of researcher, more concerned both with their own hierarchical positioning and with the market-value of their research; market-value in terms of utility for "users," in business and elsewhere, and in terms of the contribution to the UOA's ranking, and thus its positioning within the UOA hierarchy. And this is so important because of its relation to funding and--as may well be seen increasingly in the near future--survival. This leads on to Foucault's fourth and fifth operations, which we consider together.

The fourth operation "introduces...the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved"; the fifth "traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal." These two operations form the crux of the penal mechanism of the RAE. Put starkly but accurately, for the UOA non-participation can mean extinction. Equally, participation demands conformity to an array of specifications and definitions, all of which demarcate the normal from the abnormal, success from failure. Most importantly, the 3 ranking is widely regarded as marking the "external frontier," on one side of which lies "safety" in the sense of the continuation of probable adequate funding (at least until the next assessment).

The emphasis in these operations on conformity--normality--points to an apparently contradictory aspect of the disciplinary system much referred-to by Foucault: namely, that its concentration on the "difference" between individuals--their examination, assessment and consequent categorisation--is actually an insistence on a sameness, a uniformity and conformity. In the penal setting, for example, what matters is not that there are different types of individuals in prison, but that all individuals become--are reduced to being--different types of prisoner. However, in all disciplinary systems--and for both the individual researcher and the UOA--the following applies: "The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institution compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes." (Foucault, 1977: 183)

The Integrated System and Cooperation

For the integrated system to succeed, Foucault argues, cooperation is a necessary accompaniment to surveillance. It is also a consequence of it: the individual cooperates in part because s/he knows s/he is under surveillance. Thus, "good," cooperative behaviour has every likelihood of being rewarded; "bad," uncooperative behaviour, of being penalised. Cooperation also entails self- surveillance--one checks to ensure one is adequately mapping an entire research performance and planning to the requirements of those who will assess it--and the surveillance of fellow professionals: after all, a "non-cooperator," or under-performer, is capable of inflicting potentially calamitous damage on her/his colleagues.

Further, cooperation acts to endorse and legitimise the process of assessment and

surveillance, and thereby the disciplinary system, as an integrated whole. This acts to fragment units which were previously cohesive. A dramatic example of this is the emergence of a "transfer market," as Departments (at least those who can, or make sacrifices to be able to) buy-up "star" players to strengthen their team and thus bolster their chances of "promotion" to a higher "league," in this case ranking. As in sport, such promotion brings with it increased money with which further valuable acquisitions can be made. As the journal *Managing HE* recently observed:

"There has been no formal quantification yet of the transfer market, but analogies with football were reinforced by one contributor to a File on Four [BBC Radio] programme, who had pursued phone-calls at midnight and meetings in motorway service stations. ...one university 'losing' a professor has sent the new employer a bill for £0.5 million for intellectual property transfer in relation to a vital database developed for research." (Note 4) (*Managing HE*, 1996: 4)

University solidarities are put under further pressure as "high-ranking" Departments (who may have bought their rank in the above manner) look askance at those beneath them, fearful that they will be tainted by association and/or that they will be asked to subsidise them. Within Departments, collegial solidarities are undermined as researchers who may not meet targets set by the UOA are classified as "weak-links"; at which point, penalties against them may be exacted. Examples might be the imposition of heavier teaching and administrative loads, and the loss of research allowances, both financial and temporal (i.e. sabbaticals). Thus, features of the job once regarded as standard and unexceptional have been drawn into and deployed as part of an all-encompassing system of rewards and punishments designed to maximise "cooperation" with The Exercise.

The examples given above, and others like them, are ways in which both UOAs and researchers participate in and cooperate with the RAE not reluctantly but imaginatively, aggressively and competitively; such methods are overtly mandated, required or encouraged by The Assessors. This phenomenon begs questions about the "nature" of the profession itself and its ability to resist such an apparently clear threat to it.

It is perhaps easiest to understand the profession's complicity in its own surveillance and oppression by utilising the Gramscian notion of "spontaneous consent," a concept akin to the cooperative dimension of the integrated disciplinary system. In the case of The Exercise, consent is spontaneous--comes "naturally"--to the academic as a consequence of many years of systematic moulding of the professional personality. This moulding begins before entry into the profession, through the long years of being examined, assessed and rewarded as a student. Further examinations await, but the key test now is the professional's ability to examine, assess and either reward or punish. This ability is not only exercised on students but on colleagues in the culture of peer-review. The positive internalisation of this way of proceeding and being leads to the unquestioned--"spontaneous"--acceptance of disciplinary power, the ritualisation of which is the examination; a glorification of which is the RAE. Foucault sums up the nature and effects of this ritualisation thus:

"The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes

over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualised. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected." (Foucault, 1977: 184-5)

The RAE is a drastic imposition of such processes on a profession which itself practices them continuously and unquestioningly. This is not to say, however, that it is not changing that profession in important and disturbing ways. On the nature of research, on the value of teaching, and on the experience of students, the impact is proving profound.

Conclusions: The Impact of the RAE on Higher Education

We have argued that the RAE is an example of an exercise in disciplinary power as that term was understood by Foucault. The effect of the RAE on the academic profession can be seen on many levels, ranging from day- to-day stress and workload to the likely long-term nature and value of research and teaching. The RAE was intended to have a dramatic effect: it has had.

Impact on Research

The RAE represents a new phase in the "commodification" of academic research. Academics have long been expected to view publications as "assets," or what Ronald Barnett refers to as "academic currency" to trade in the pursuit of advancement. (Barnett, 1992) The RAE has linked commodification directly to the overall goal of making the intellectual community "competitive," with Departments adding up their members' currency in order to compete for declining government funding. The government's intention is to create a leaner, fitter, research "sector," providing in the words of the then Education Secretary "a national resource of knowledge and expertise for the benefit of our international competitiveness..." (Department for Education and Employment, 1996).

While the RAE claims not to be concerned with the number of publications, its imperative has encouraged researchers to publish more often in order to meet the pressure within their UOA to be "research active." On the face of it, the emphasis in the RAE on research productivity, and researchers as producers, is having the desired effect: more academics appear to be publishing with greater frequency. Producing more articles, however, is not the same as doing more research. The regurgitation and multiple-placing of articles is on the increase. This process, although intellectually untaxing, is time-consuming, reducing time and energy available for both fresh research and course review. Moreover, as more is being published, recent studies suggest that less is being read. (Daly, 1994)

The pressure on the UOAs is, as we have shown, subsequently placed on the individuals within. Indeed, in many cases, a system is instituted within the UOA which closely mirrors that of the RAE. Because so much is at stake, the individual academic must conform to dictates and her or his own research plans fall victim to larger forces. This necessarily begs larger questions about academic freedom. Individual researchers are coming under increasing pressure not to undertake complex and/or radical work

which may not be able to be compressed into the Exercise's four-year cycle. Furthermore, pressure is exerted to produce work in specified forms and places, regardless of their appropriateness in the perhaps grander scheme of the individual's research project or career. Researchers who resist may hinder their own position within the UOA, potentially also jeopardising the UOA's ranking. Not only may this set of pressures act to undermine the position, confidence and job- satisfaction of researchers, it may act to prevent researchers with ambitious, long-term research programmes from either moving to other Departments, or even being hired in the first instance. It is more important than ever to be, and to be seen to be, a "safe bet."

Impact on Teaching and Learning

The RAE has had a negative impact on teaching in a number of ways, both ideological and practical. Ideologically, the previously cited definition of "research" used in the Exercise has both exacerbated the false split between teaching and research and tended to stress the superior relevance--in terms of the quality of intellectual endeavour, the practical benefit to the economic well- being of the country, etc.--of the latter. Practically, there has simply been less time for academics, scrambling for their "4," to devote to teaching.

In terms of both logistical and ideological emphasis, the Exercise has acted to devalue previously rewarding and esteemed aspects of the academic profession. Perhaps the most tangible example is the devaluation of course- and lecture-preparation, which, if done properly, involves extensive, high-quality research. It is, however, difficult to gauge the extent of the subsequent decline in course standards. Moreover, a crucial aspect of such preparation is interactive research; that is, reflecting on and incorporating the responses and attitudes of students. In other words, the Exercise not only reduces the learning experience of the student but the learning experience of the academic.

There are a whole range of ways in which the Exercise has tended to devalue both the academic's role as teacher and learner, and the student's intellectual, and ultimately personal, respectability and dignity. One major consequence is the diminished amount of time made available for out-of-class intellectual engagement with students--again, a loss to each party; a precluded interactivity. More directly, perhaps, time for meetings with students on strictly course-related work--discussion of draft essays, supervision meetings, etc.--is also reduced or made more pressurised. In broader terms, when courses are modified and adapted, academics will be highly unlikely to accept improvements from the students point of view that could reduce the amount of precious research-time they need to set aside to complete the research programme--their own, increasingly time- consuming course work. Other equally negative developments could be cited, but our purpose here is not to list them but, rather, consider the response to them by the academic profession.

Resisting the RAE

Resistance to the RAE is inevitable: it has been an abrupt and draconian intrusion into the profession, increasing the job-insecurity, and diminishing the job-satisfaction, of many academics. Despite its professed dedication to improving research quality, the Exercise is clearly a politically motivated prelude to closures and redundancies--an exercise in justifying, ultimately in the name of British economic competitiveness, a further fierce attack on the higher education sector. However, the resistance of

academics has not translated into any noticeable degree of effective action. No doubt this in part because of the very fear the Exercise has generated. There may be a deeper explanation, however, suggested by our use of Foucault's concept of the integrated disciplinary system.

A Foucaultian analysis, such as that proffered above, suggests that higher education--indeed, education generally--is a Research Assessment Exercise: a competitive system run by--and, at least traditionally, operating to the powerful benefit of--disciplinary technicians of reward and punishment. In such a system, it is precisely the combination of complicity and coercion which is integrative, irresistible, seemingly inevitable. For the academic the RAE is the equivalent of the examination, combining the negative and positive elements of the integrated system; the examination is a concentrated, spectacular exercise of surveillance, observation and normalisation. In this sense, the RAE is distorting the academic profession by taking its own logic and turning it against it.

A truly radical critique requires the contemplation of the desirability and necessity of a new, non-disciplinary logic. Such critiques have been offered in the past and, significantly, they have been articulated as part of a wider critique of society. (Freire, 1972; Dale, 1976; Ilich, 1971; Gramsci, 1971). As a starting point, we might return to these earlier debates to renew our acquaintance with the ways in which education functions as part of the larger structures--political, economic and social--of discipline within society. It is only then that we will be able to make connections between our own actions as academics in disciplinary structures and the disciplinary structures to which we are subjected.

Notes

1. The authors' names have been placed alphabetically; the order does not denote an unequal contribution to the research and writing of this paper. The authors would like to thank Gavin Beckett and Jeannie Grussendorf for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. UOAs are now coming under pressure to elaborate Five Year Research Plans, integrating each individual's research programme into a single, "coherent" programme, thus increasing the compression on researchers from above.
3. As argued above, this power is itself exercised within the context of an integrated, hierarchical, disciplinary system. The assessment criteria established by each Panel is expected to faithfully reflect what are in effect injunctions from above (the funding bodies).
4. The introduction of a Teaching Assessment Exercise is said to offer a corrective for this tendency, but early indications suggest that this Exercise will not consider the needs of students any more than the RAE considers the full value of research.

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