

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Struggles for the soul of higher education:
a genealogy of graduate employability

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract:

Graduate employability is a central part of the contemporary debate over the purpose and value of higher education. This thesis undertakes a Foucauldian genealogy to interrogate the discursive formation of graduate employability in higher education in the United Kingdom. To the author's knowledge this is the first attempt to do so.

The thesis constructs a genealogy in two ways. Firstly, it identifies in the contemporary literature five distinct discourses of graduate employability. This establishes the discursive character of graduate employability. Secondly, it interrogates five higher education policy documents published since the Second World War to propose how different discourses might emerge through distinctive historical conditions. Each represents a critical moment of emergence of a distinctive configuration of graduate employability.

Thus, the illusion of graduate employability as a singular, neutral concept is dissolved. It is shown to be contingent upon the social, economic and political conditions of the times. Graduate employability is thus a product of power relations and not merely a technical concept. In unmasking graduate employability as contingent it reveals forgotten attempts to mould and shape higher education through policy. Graduate employability thus becomes part of the apparatus of the disciplining of higher education.

Furthermore, the research points to the futility of addressing graduate employability as something externally imposed upon the 'true' mission of higher education. Instead, higher education is inescapably bound up in this repeated contest for its own soul and is thus empowered to creatively resist. It therefore affirms the agency of higher education in shaping the very idea of graduate employability.

The major contributions to knowledge are, therefore: the demonstration of graduate employability as discursive; the reconstruction of those historical conditions that have enabled the emergence of different discourses; and the application of Foucault's genealogical toolkit to a novel aspect of higher education policy.

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ABSTRACT

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Graduate employability is a central part of the contemporary debate over the purpose and value of higher education. This thesis undertakes a Foucauldian genealogy to interrogate the discursive formation of graduate employability in higher education in the United Kingdom. To the author's knowledge this is the first attempt to do so.

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Thus, the illusion of graduate employability as a singular, neutral concept is dissolved. It is shown to be contingent upon the social, economic and political conditions of the times. Graduate employability is thus a product of power relations and not merely a technical concept. In unmasking graduate employability as contingent it reveals forgotten attempts to mould and shape higher education through policy. Graduate employability thus becomes part of the apparatus of the disciplining of higher education.

Furthermore, the research points to the futility of addressing graduate employability as something externally imposed upon the 'true' mission of higher education. Instead, higher education is inescapably bound up in this repeated contest for its own soul and is thus empowered to creatively resist. It therefore affirms the agency of higher education in shaping the very idea of graduate employability.

The major contributions to knowledge are, therefore: the demonstration of graduate employability as discursive; the reconstruction of those historical conditions that have enabled the emergence of different discourses; and the application of Foucault's genealogical toolkit to a novel aspect of higher education policy.

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1. Introduction

This thesis applies Foucault's notion of genealogy to analyse the emergence of different configurations of the idea of graduate employability. It argues that graduate employability is a discursive construct that adopts different forms according to the social, political and economic conditions of the time. Thus it is not one idea, but several. The significance of this research is to dissolve the presumed unity and continuity of the notion of graduate employability and to offer the potential for re-reading policy towards higher education. This will enable institutions, policymakers and practitioners to reflect in more complex and nuanced ways on the employability of graduates.

This thesis therefore addresses the following research questions:

1. What particular conditions, tensions and conflicts in the history of higher education in the UK have enabled the emergence of different discourses of graduate employability?
2. What new, critical understandings of the notion of graduate employability are enabled through an application of a Foucauldian genealogical approach?
3. How do these new understandings create spaces in which new critical understandings of the roles and purposes of academics, universities and higher education might emerge?

The significance of Foucault's work to this analysis of policy is visible through Olssen *et al.*'s (2004) critique of linguistic idealism in the analysis of policy text. There is a fallacy in assuming that 'the meaning of a literary text corresponds to what the author *intended*, that is, [taking the text] as being *evidence* of what the author intended to express' (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, pp.60-61; emphasis in original). To do so is to assume that policy text offers direct access to the thoughts and intentions of the author, and that there exists a direct relation between words, thoughts and the real world (Olssen *et al.*, 2004). Such analyses of policy would rest on establishing concepts in monolithic, immutable forms. However, such assumptions cannot account for language being 'a sphere of social practice' and that it is 'necessarily structured by the material conditions in which that practice takes place' (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p.64). Thus, to assume a one-to-one relation between words and meaning is to ignore the significance of practices situated in specific conditions in the formation of meaning.

Olssen *et al.* (2004) follow Foucault who, through his notion of *archaeology*, disrupts this assumed relation by dissipating those assumed continuities (Foucault, 2010a) and making

visible those breaks that might emerge discursively, in other words from outside of language. Thus, the opportunity exists to ‘[free] the conditions of emergence of statements’ so that ‘the law of their coexistence with others, the specific form of their mode of being, the principles according to which they survive, become transformed, and disappear’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.127). The contents of policy texts thus offer access to those conditions of reality that give rise to the meanings of statements, not the schemes by which certain interpretations might be validated (Foucault, 2010a). Policy texts and other associated artefacts therefore represent materials for the reconstruction of conditions within which knowledge and power intersect to form distinct configurations of concepts. This is encapsulated in Foucault’s (1984a) notion of *genealogy*. Genealogy does not seek eternal truths behind statements but looks instead for those *points of emergence* of ideas and the ‘complex course of descent’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.81) to make clear that ‘truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.81). To focus on points of emergence is thus to reject the search for origins or the ‘enigmatic treasure of “things” anterior to discourse’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.47). Instead, it is to be concerned with recreating those conditions that likely gave rise to certain configurations – focusing attention on ‘the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.47), and thus of proposing schemes by which particular discourses of graduate employability might have emerged. This represents what Roth (1981) characterises as Foucault’s approach to writing a history of the present, as in ‘writing in a field of power relations and political struggle’ (Roth, 1981, p.43) and thus denying claims to address universal ideas.

The thesis begins by exploring the literature relating to graduate employability. It uses Foucault’s (1978) notion of *discourse* to identify five distinct discourses of graduate employability: employability as gaining employment; employability as human capital; employability as self-perception; employability as graduate identity; and employability as a form of credentialism. It therefore conceptualises employability as a construct as opposed to a unified, timeless concept. In turn, this implies that no single perspective on graduate employability can account for the complexity of the successful transition to working life. Synthetic models of graduate employability have been posited as ways of addressing this dilemma. However, it is argued that such models are discursive constructs in themselves, in that they represent ways of governing the ‘employable’ graduate.

The discursive nature of graduate employability, and the emergence of models of employability that guide our conceptions of the employable graduate, thus point to a practical problem for academic staff in universities: how to respond to the emergence of an

employability agenda in higher education. The thesis rejects the binary choice between resisting employability as an external imposition and a wholehearted acceptance of employability as a guide to action. Indeed, to seek such a reductionist response would be to both ignore the problematic reality of students' future lives and leave higher education vulnerable to external control or irrelevance. Instead, it uses this tension to point to the possibility of reframing fundamental questions of value and purpose in higher education through a genealogy of graduate employability.

The thesis then details the methodology underpinning a genealogy of graduate employability. It begins from the premise that employability is a knowledge-power construct and locates its emergence in particular policy developments in the history of higher education. Foucault's conceptual tools of archaeology and genealogy are discussed, and an approach to their application as a research method is proposed. Previous approaches to researching graduate employability are addressed and the potential of genealogy to overcome them is identified.

Five significant policy documents in the history of higher education in the United Kingdom are then analysed. The *Robbins Report* (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) addresses the possibilities for graduate employability in the context of the post-World War 2 demographic upturn. *University-Industry Relations* (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976) locates graduate employability within a tension between a 'traditional' notion of being a graduate and a desire to reframe what counts as 'good' outcomes of higher education. *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s* (Department for Education and Science, 1985) portrays both a market-driven reshaping of higher education in response to a perceived economic crisis and a concerted attempt to reshape that market demand. *The Learning Age* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) explores graduate employability in a policy context underpinned by neoliberalism and *Third Way* thinking. *Success as a Knowledge Economy* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016) addresses the intersection of the 'graduate premium', consumerism, and the technocratic measurement of employability. Crucially, the objective is not to present a chronology of the development of graduate employability, but to use five cases to propose ways in which policy may be interrogated to recreate the conditions for the emergence of different configurations of graduate employability.

The thesis then returns to the research questions to draw out the implications arising. The genealogy presented here is, by necessity, incomplete; to recreate the totality of the conditions through which graduate employability is formed through discourse is beyond the

scope of this thesis – assuming, of course, that a total recreation is even possible. Thus, it represents a necessary first step; an original application of Foucault’s conceptual toolbox that serves to present graduate employability as a discursive concept. In particular, the thesis does not directly address matters relating to gender, race, class and disability, all of which speak directly to the conditions within which higher education policy is formed, interpreted and enacted. These are fruitful lines of inquiry for future work. Nevertheless, what is offered here demonstrates the potential for a Foucauldian genealogy of graduate employability to question taken-for-granted ‘truths’ and open new possibilities for reflecting on policies and practices in higher education. Its significance is thus twofold: the original application of Foucault’s concepts to the notion of graduate employability; and the opportunities for reflection and transformation of policy and practice that such an analysis offers.

2. Graduate employability and the struggle for higher education's soul

This chapter is the first step in undertaking a genealogical analysis of graduate employability. Drawing on Foucault's (2010a) approach in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, it identifies five distinct types of discourse of graduate employability. It suggests that graduate employability is a complex and contested notion constructed through the intersection of knowledge and power, as opposed to a straightforward empirical judgement of the knowledge, skills and qualities of a graduate. This challenges the presumption that graduate employability is a neutral, natural concept that may be regarded merely as an inevitable educational good or as an externally-imposed nuisance. Instead it locates graduate employability within a series of power relations that are 'imbued, through and through, with calculation' (Foucault, 1978, p.95) and thus establishes it firmly within the apparatus of governance of the *non-corporal* (Foucault, 1995) of higher education. Note that the term 'employability' refers to 'graduate employability' unless otherwise indicated.

Graduate employability has become a central part of the language of higher education in the United Kingdom. In some cases it has become a principle that reaches to almost every aspect of university life (e.g. University of Edinburgh, 2011). It has entered the public discourse about what a 'good' university or degree course looks like (e.g. Page, 2014). Yet, as will be argued here, it is not clear that graduate employability is a unified and coherent concept. It is not at all clear where the concept has come from, or how it has embedded itself so firmly in the language and life of higher education. It is a concept with very little visible history, whose emergence is shrouded in mist. In the words of Veyne it represents a point where 'the past masks the genealogy of our present' (Veyne, 1993, p.227). Yet it is a concept that has had a profound effect on the way that universities organise and promote themselves, on how society judges the worth of higher education and its institutions, on how academics teach and research, and on how students construct their future selves. It is a concept whose emergence and effects matter in important ways.

Graduate employability is a concept that encapsulates a conflict for the soul of higher education in the guise of reform. Ball (2003) writes of an 'unstable, uneven but apparently unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas' (Ball, 2003, p.215) that not only change what educators *do* but, crucially, change who they *are*. Among these Ball (2003) numbers the policy technology of *performativity*, 'a mode of regulation that employs

judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change' (Ball, 2003, p.216). Such reforms act upon our constitution as subjects and also our relations with one another. The soul, which Foucault describes as emerging through methods of 'punishment, supervision and constraint' (Foucault, 1995, p.29) and which '[articulates] the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge' (Foucault, 1995, p.29), thus expresses what it means to be an educator, a student, an employable graduate, a university leader and so forth. Graduate employability, when conceived of as part of a culture of performativity within higher education (Frankham, 2017), therefore represents a window into the political relation between higher education and wider society. In particular, it offers access to the various strategies, techniques and methods deployed by society – including institutions of government - in the name of reform of higher education.

The concept of employability is regarded with suspicion in some quarters. Echoing Ball (2003), Frankham (2017) associates employability with instrumentality and 'economistic metaphors' that 'construct education as a transaction and students as consumers' (Frankham, 2017, p.635). This might '[presuppose] a highly atomized society, in which lives interrelate only through market mechanisms' (Docherty, 2011, p.137), a perspective that appears to displace other ways of grounding the purpose of higher education. Yet it would be a mistake to disengage from the debate over graduate employability on an assumption that it is irrelevant to the 'real' ends of higher education. To offer a similar example, Barnett and Coate (2004) argue that the notion of 'curriculum' matters in higher education, yet appears to suffer from a paucity of engagement that carries with it serious implications:

the paucity of a serious debate about curriculum has not led to a void so far as curriculum reform and development are concerned. What has happened is that we have curriculum change being effected – in the UK, at least – by stealth. In the economicizing of the curriculum, it may be that we are in the midst of one of the most profound changes being wrought in higher education, and yet these changes are taking place without public debate and considered collective reflection by the academic community.

(Barnett and Coate, 2004, pp.25-26)

Barnett and Coate point to three important dynamics of the UK higher education environment. Firstly, higher education's connection with the performance of the national economy has become one of the central features of the debate around the value and worth of universities, in the UK at least since the *Robbins Report* (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). Collini (2013), for instance, suggests that matters of economic and labour market performance are assumed by government to be the only justifiable measures of the value of higher education.

Though this connection may be argued to be over-emphasised (Wolf, 2002), it is nevertheless a real feature of the present debate.

Secondly, Barnett and Coate (2004) imply a lack of transparency in the debate. Curriculum has become one of those taken-for-granted matters, held to be self-evident and consequently not in need of public examination. If that is true, then it would perhaps not be a surprise if other concepts had embedded themselves into the language of higher education apparently without precedent or rigorous examination. From Barnett and Coate's tone we might imply that this paucity of debate is not a good thing, and that such concepts are in need of serious interrogation.

Thirdly, Barnett and Coate (2004) imply that the academic community itself is detached from the debate or indifferent to it; perhaps - from an extreme viewpoint - clinging to 'a fading academicism, where value is judged by the knowledge producers themselves' (Barnett, 1997, p.150). As a consequence, consequential and important choices may be made about higher education by 'outsiders' with non-academic motivations. In short, a prominent and enduring component of the debate around higher education, for various reasons, seems to be eluding the very people who are in a position to engage with it and influence it – and who are likely to be directly impacted by it. This suggests the risk of universities becoming steered through agendas over which they exert little serious or critical influence. Graduate employability represents one such agenda.

There is a risk of the relationship between higher education and employability being defined on the basis of common sense and received wisdom. Wolf uses this theme as the basis for her 2002 work *Does Education Matter?* In it she recounts an incident at a conference, when the topic of conversation was how poorer countries could emulate the rise of the so-called tiger economies. The consensus seemed clear:

What was needed was the rule of law, market economies, access to overseas markets through free trade, and much, much more education spending. The sole educationist present, I demurred – just a little. More education spending might not, I suggested, be the top priority in most of the world's poorest nations. The reaction rather took me aback. As a social gaffe, mine went far beyond mistakes with the fish knife, or in passing the port. Questioning the automatic value of any rise in the education budget, it seems, places one somewhere between an animal-hater and an imbecile. (Wolf, 2002, pp.x-xi)

Wolf had encountered a strongly-embedded assumption of the relation between investment in education and economic performance. This relation not only seemed to be inscribed in the

perspectives of her fellow delegates, but also served as a marker of group membership. By daring to question such a fundamental piece of logic, Wolf had in the eyes of her dinner companions committed an act of heresy; through a single remark she had marked herself out as ‘not one of us’. This incident is quoted here to illustrate that the topic of employability, not least its relation to higher education, is freighted with concerns of politics, group identity, dogma and faith. Employability is argued to be ‘a notion that captures the economic and political times in which we live’ (Brown *et al.*, 2003, p.107). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the uncertainties and contestations that exist in our collective understandings of employability. This chapter sets out to show that employability, like curriculum, far from being an established fact that can be taken for granted, is actually a complex and contested subject. No single idea about employability is therefore likely to offer higher education a defence against being shaped by stealth, in spite of the clear warning offered by Barnett and Coate (2004). What is needed is a way of dispelling the false unity of graduate employability, bringing to the fore its tensions and contradictions, and enabling a serious engagement with the social and political forces bound up in its emergence. Only then might higher education engage fully with the implications that graduate employability poses for its way(s) of being.

Indeed, the consequences of the present debate on employability reach far beyond technical questions of regulation and process in the university sector. It signifies a transformation – or series of transformations – in the relation between higher education and wider society, and is fundamentally a contest for the *soul* of higher education. Foucault (1995) offers a parallel in the transformation of penal severity over the course of two centuries. Rather than considering such a transformation to be ‘a quantitative phenomenon’ (p.16) characterised by less cruelty, more kindness and so forth, Foucault regards it instead as a ‘change of objective’ (p.16).

Indeed, Foucault detects a shift away from the punishment of the body: ‘The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclination’ (Foucault, 1995, p.16). Penal judgement then ceases to focus on actions, but on ‘the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity’ (Foucault, 1995, p.17) that were previously regarded only as ‘shadows lurking behind the case itself’ (Foucault, 1995, p.17). It is this shift in emphasis – from the control of the body to the modification of the will – that offers a parallel to the present debate on graduate employability. What will be argued here is the constitution, through policy, of discourses of graduate employability that serve in multiple ways to govern the choices, preferences and inclinations of universities, students and employers. It is these that demarcate what might be regarded as the *non-corporeal* (Foucault,

1995) of higher education – things that extend beyond statutes, procedures and processes in order to allow access to ‘the present correlative of a certain technology of power’ (Foucault, 1995, p.29) over the ‘body’ of the university.

2.1 Discourses of graduate employability

This section explores the Foucauldian notion of ‘discourse’ and relates it to the notion of graduate employability. It argues for the use of the term ‘discourse’ to identify distinct notions of graduate employability within the literature. It proposes that, by understanding discourses in terms of relations of power as opposed to mere use of language, a new perspective on graduate employability can be opened for investigation. Particularly, it enables notions of graduate employability to be investigated as means of governing students and graduates, where to govern others is to ‘structure the possible field of action of others’ (Foucault, 1982, p.790). To govern others is not to dictate what they say or do; it is not an exercise in compelling others to be this way or that. Rather, the effect of such governance is to guide ‘the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome’ (Foucault, 1982, p.789). Governance, therefore, is more akin to the limiting of the field of possibilities for action. Particularly, governance in Foucault’s (1982) sense presupposes that those who are being governed are able to choose from a range of ways of behaving. Thus, any given idea of employability can never do more than communicate strong signals as to what sorts of conduct are (in)compatible with it. They are therefore ways of making certain choices of behaviour and attitude more or less likely and are thus exercises of power.

Power is not something that is possessed or wielded, nor is it synonymous with institutions, state or sovereignty (Foucault, 1978). Rather, power is a relation – never an equal one - in which one guides the behaviour of others (Foucault, 1988a). Power is ‘less than a property than a strategy, and its effects cannot be attributed to an appropriation’ (Deleuze, 1999, p.25). In this sense it represents a mode of action upon the action of others (O’Farrell, 2005), rather than being a weapon deployed against the other. In such a way, graduate employability might be thought of as a game, the conventions of which are rarely explicitly presented yet regarded as self-evident and open to all. Graduate employability thus becomes regarded as a factor of individual students and their willingness to play the game of employability. As a result, when we observe that certain students or groups of students appear to obtain less desirable employability outcomes than others, our tendency may be to ask how they can be equipped to succeed in the game as it is; we tend not to question whether the game itself acts as a systemic barrier to success.

Foucault regards discourses as more than content or ways of speaking; discourses are ‘tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations’ (Foucault, 1978, pp.101-102).

Discourses are not neutral descriptions of things or concepts but imply positions that individuals may take in relation to others. Discourses are therefore relational, not isolated; they represent a contest to establish what counts as ‘true’. To analyse a discourse is not merely to describe what is said, thought or written within it, but to interrogate what effects it has and the conditions that make its deployment necessary (Foucault, 1978). Foucault grounds this position in an attempt to escape from a law-and-sovereign notion of power, rejecting for example the idea that a concept of ‘sexuality’ exists, waiting to be studied, outside of relations of power. Rather, concepts such as sexuality become possible objects of investigation *because* they are established through relations of power. Foucault casts discourses as the vehicles for ‘a kind of incessant back-and-forth movement of forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge’ (Foucault, 1978, p.98). Discourses keep in motion the relation between power and knowledge, and these are observable in specific locations – for example the relations between doctors and patients, or between teachers and students. As a result, discourses represent windows into the way that such relations play out and the consequences of such a playing out of relations.

Such relations imply the existence of a range of different positions, interests, and so forth – yet an analysis of discourse is not simply a description of a hierarchy of interests or an account of who occupies dominant positions. Rather, the notion of discourse requires a focus on the transformative effects of these relations on the very individuals, roles and concepts concerned. Foucault refers to these as ‘matrices of transformations’ (Foucault, 1978, p.99) within which one might identify a complex and extended set of connections and relations. Consequently, an analysis of discourse can never be as straightforward as the playing off of one set of interests against another; treating different notions of graduate employability as discourses, rather than accounts as Yorke and Knight (2007) do, enables one to go beyond isolated descriptions of relations between two entities. It enables the construction of a more complex and nuanced analysis which attempts to make visible those relations and connections in their complexity. Analyses of discourses in the Foucauldian sense therefore make ideas more complex and unstable, not simpler and more clearly defined.

Foucault further warns against a simplification of the relations implied through discourses:

To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of

discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, 1978, p.100)

To describe this discursive complexity, bound up in power relations between individuals, positions, strategies, contexts and so forth, becomes the objective of analysis. To speak of individual ‘accounts’ of graduate employability, by contrast, would be to limit one’s investigation to the ‘surface of projection of these power mechanisms’ (Foucault, 1978, p.100) – the tip of a metaphorical iceberg. For a discussion of graduate employability to offer anything new, one must find a means of seeing beyond those conceptions that can initially be described and seek the ways in which they might have come about through a network of power relations that extends beyond the immediate bounds of the institution.

Furthermore, Foucault’s argument leads us to question the perspectives and positions that are taken relative to the notion of graduate employability. For example, we cannot be content with the juxtaposition of graduate employability and the ‘true’ mission of the university; we ought to be suspicious of analyses that pit a ‘conventional’ reading of graduate employability against a ‘radical’ one. To speak in terms of discourses is to imply the opportunity to act and choose, and thus also to resist. Resistance, argues Foucault (1978), is inevitable wherever relations of power exist; the existence of points of resistance is therefore essential to a relation of power. If there was no possibility of resistance, such a relation would be one of total domination and would cease to be a relation of power. Hence, resistance is not merely the antimatter of power (Pickett, 1996); it is not merely the negation of some oppressive force. Rather, resistance occurs at points within a network in which power is ‘produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another’ (Foucault, 1978, p.93). Thus, power relations ‘[depend] on a multiplicity of points of resistance’ (Foucault, 1978, p.93). As a consequence, to regard graduate employability as a force exerted on higher education from a position of externality, from which higher education must be liberated is to misconstrue the network of power relations within which higher education is located. Rather, higher education is inextricably located within any given discourse of graduate employability and is thus implicated both in the formation of and resistance to such discourses. Points of resistance, argues Foucault, ‘play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations’ (Foucault, 1978, p.95). Resistance thus is not necessarily antagonistic, but may also be supportive and productive, and has the potential to effect a reshaping of a discourse. One might go so far as to say that a discourse is as it is *because* it is resisted. Therefore, a major consequence of considering graduate

employability as a discursive notion is that it locates as central the possibility of higher education to engage with and recast the idea of employability.

Discourse is not constituted by the texts and utterances produced within it, but ‘the conditions under which certain statements are considered to be the truth... that which constrains or enables, writing, speaking and thinking’ (Ball, 2013, p.19; emphasis in original). Discourse is not concerned merely with the making of meaning, but with the making of truth. The analysis presented in this chapter discusses not just technical or operational meanings of the term ‘graduate employability’, but also the conditions that enable these meanings to carry the status of truth in given circumstances. It is therefore concerned with relations between knowledge and power: who has the right to set the thresholds of employability, and thus how employable a given graduate is, is not a mere empirical claim but an outcome of power relations. Such an analysis thus permits the investigation of the *effects* of discourse – the potential implications of constraining or enabling writing, speaking and thinking in certain ways become a legitimate target of research. Such effects may have implications beyond, for example, the organisation of the curriculum or questions of teaching and learning. They may bring into question the relation between higher education and government policy, societal value systems, academic disciplines, workplace culture and the practices of the media, to give but a few examples. It is in such effects that genuinely new and significant knowledge is likely to be found, for example by relating the notion of graduate employability to the role of institutions in ways that go beyond narrowly-focused descriptions. Thus, considering these different conceptions of graduate employability to be discourses, rather than accounts, enables attention to be paid to the disciplinary effects of such knowledge-power relations as they play out.

Perhaps the most significant effect of a discursive understanding of graduate employability is the impact on students’ conduct and actions. If discourses define the conditions under which statements can be considered true, and are thus an exercise of power, then ‘true’ definitions of behaviours that are consistent with a notion of employability must also be determined discursively. As a result, to attempt to direct or prompt individuals’ words, deeds and choices in a way consistent with a notion of graduate employability is also an exercise of power. Foucault argues that to govern another is to structure their possible field of action (Foucault, 1982), in other words to exert some kind of direction over the choices they might make in a given situation. Different discourses of graduate employability might therefore be interrogated from the premise that they represent ways of structuring the possible actions of students. For example, to pursue graduate employability might imply the teaching and

learning of certain bodies of knowledge such as functional numeracy and literacy, skills such as interview techniques, behaviours such as modes of speaking, or attitudes such as resilience and optimism. Note that this says nothing about what the stance of higher education *ought* to be with regards to graduate employability; before these *ought* questions may be addressed it is necessary to interrogate the interplay of power relations that a discursive approach to graduate employability implies. This is the focus of the present project.

Beginning from the premise of discursive complexity that constrains or enables certain conditions of truth necessarily means suspending ‘pre-existing forms of continuity, all these syntheses that are accepted without question’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.25) - those continuities that act as advance organisers of the targets of our analysis. Putting these notions into suspense does not mean rejecting them out of hand, but they must be shown to be constructions according to as yet unknown rules (Foucault, 2010a). What we ought to reject, however, is the assumption that a notion such as graduate employability is natural and pre-existing. It may be that a closer examination could justify its treatment as a unified concept with fixed boundaries and properties. However, the hypothesis is that it has no such boundaries, other than those constructed in the interplay of power relations. In this way, beginning from Foucault’s conception of discourse keeps open a greater range of possible outcomes of analysis, thus offering a greater prospect of yielding genuinely new knowledge.

The five discourses of employability described here each deploy a distinctive logic that is initially presented as neutral and reasonable. Nevertheless, the advance of each as a ‘definitive’ stance on graduate employability results in the obscuring of ‘the myriad events through which – thanks to which, against which – they were formed’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.81). These events – contingencies - represent mechanisms of power that come to form different configurations of the idea of graduate employability. This chapter restores these contingencies to the record, in a sense unmasking the demagoguery of the timeless idea (Foucault, 1984a), and thus establishes graduate employability as a discursive concept.

2.2 Employability as gaining employment

The term ‘graduate employability’ has been associated with the actual act of gaining employment. Yet, as this section will argue, discourses of gaining employment are not limited to the mere fact of finding and keeping work. Rather, notions such as the appropriateness of jobs and the intentionality of career choices have come to distinguish the evaluation of graduate employability from the measurement of raw employment rates. Such discourses have come to reflect back on the reputations of institutions of higher education. This section

will argue that discourses of gaining employment are related to systems of social conventions to which students, to a greater or lesser extent, are expected to conform. These social conventions speak to the ‘drama of self and government’ (Ball, 2016b, p.1131) or the tension between regulating our own conduct and having our conduct regulated by others. This reading indicates the potential value of an analysis of the role of higher education in negotiating the tensions between agency and societal expectations associated with the notion of graduate employability.

Hillage and Pollard (1998) offer the following definition of employability:

Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. (Hillage and Pollard, 1998, p.12)

This definition is directed clearly towards the acquisition of work. It places the emphasis squarely on the qualities and characteristics of the individual jobseeker, particularly on what they have to offer to employers. Though it alludes to the relevance of the societal context in which the jobseeker moves, the emphasis is very much on employability as a personal set of characteristics and the ability to do something with them. These represent a set of assets or possessions, such that employability can be thought of as a thing or set of things that can be acquired and lost, exchanged and traded. Indeed, Hillage and Pollard (1998) argue that merely possessing employer-relevant knowledge and skills is not sufficient; individuals also need the ability to exploit their assets, to market and sell them. This is underpinned by the ability to be adaptable to and realistic about labour market conditions, to present oneself well in order to secure a job, and to take account of one’s personal circumstances. The role of the employer in the ‘actualisation of employability’ (Hillage and Pollard, 1998, p.20), or the successful gaining of employment is defined by: their recruitment procedures; the way they articulate their skill needs; the specific nature of their skills; the extent to which they discriminate in favour of or against any particular groups of applicants; and their training and development strategies. All of this indicates a conception of employability that is grounded in a transaction or exchange: employers are cast as customers of the skills and attributes supplied by jobseekers, who are expected to sell themselves in terms of what they possess.

Rothwell and Arnold (2007) begin with the premise that a key goal for individuals is to maintain and enhance their attractiveness in the labour market, such that employability is ‘the

ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires' (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007, p.25). However, they reject Hillage and Pollard's (1998) definition as being too multi-faceted and too prescriptive, preferring instead a 'succinct yet broad' (Rothwell and Arnold, 2007, p.24) definition that refers to jobs rather than careers. In doing so they distinguish employability as predominantly a matter of one's momentary success in the labour market, as opposed to an overarching narrative of a working life that the term 'career' might imply. The use of the term 'the job one desires' moves the definition of graduate employability beyond a mere measure of graduate employment; introducing the notion of desire implies a connection with success in fulfilling one's ambitions or plans. Employability thus is not simply the successful exchange of one good for another (i.e. getting any job) but must necessarily involve a degree of intent or choice.

Caballero Fernández *et al.* (2014) continue the theme of acquiring employment. They begin their investigation into the association between universities and employability by asserting that: 'Employability is one of the main objectives for a university graduate on completion of their studies – this means finding a job that is satisfying and in the shortest time possible' (Caballero Fernández *et al.*, 2014, p.24). This statement foregrounds efficacy in the acquisition of employment and, like Rothwell and Arnold (2007), moves beyond the measurement of employment rates by connecting with graduates' conscious choices. However, the notion of a 'job that is satisfying' has a further consequence: it privileges the judgement of the individual graduate by introducing a connection with graduates' personal outlooks and values. This shifts the definition of employability further: it is not sufficient for graduates merely to be consistently successful in the labour market, nor is it enough to intentionally secure the jobs that graduates deliberately seek. Rather, graduate employability now depends upon graduates achieving agreeable forms of employment.

Thus, while Hillage and Pollard (1998) privilege the judgement of the employer by equating employability with success in securing jobs, Rothwell and Arnold (2007) and Caballero Fernández *et al.* (2014) both incorporate the judgements of graduates themselves in evaluating whether graduates are employable. The consequences of this distinction may be important in practice. If employability is merely defined in terms of obtaining work, then one may justifiably base a strategy for graduate employability entirely on responding to employers' demands. However, by introducing to the notion of employability graduates' own perspectives and preferences, employability can begin to offer a critique of the very aims and methods of higher education. Such a definition of employability would require that students

are not conceived of as passive receivers or consumers of education, but as agents active in their own self-development and growth.

This distinction between the passive recipient and the active agent positions the acquisition of employment as both a relation of power and a relation of strategy. Foucault writes:

Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. A relationship of confrontation reaches its term, its final moment (and the victory of one of the two adversaries), when stable mechanisms replace the free play of antagonistic reactions. Through such mechanisms one can direct, in a fairly constant manner and with reasonable certainty, the conduct of others.

(Foucault, 1982, p.794)

The acquisition of a job that one desires and has reason to desire therefore is not an exercise of graduates hawking their skills and qualifications like door-to-door salespeople; instead, it takes the form of a negotiation. Job-seeking graduates never become subsumed by employers to the point that they cease to be recognisable as distinct from them. A university qualification can therefore never be just a passport to a good job. However, the employment relationship takes the form of such a 'stable mechanism' that permits the employer to shape the conduct of the employee. To establish such a relation depends on the relative autonomy of employer and jobseeker/employee. Thus the extent to which graduates are equipped to engage in such negotiations can conceivably become a means by which the efficacy of higher education institutions can be judged.

Success in finding employment post-graduation is used to form relative judgements about higher education institutions. For example, the Guardian University Guide routinely ranks universities by its measure of employability, namely the proportion of graduates that are in work or further study six months after graduation (Page, 2014). This derives from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education* survey's employment indicator and its related UK Performance Indicator on the employment of graduates (HESA, 2014). This approach privileges actual outcomes for graduates and, by including further study in a measure of employability, seems to broaden the notion of employment to include both paid employment and educational activity that might lead to paid employment. This seems to connect graduate employability with being on a path or journey towards employment, as opposed to a pure employed/unemployed binary measure. Arguably, this type of approach is oriented towards signalling to prospective students the relative

chances of ultimately finding employment by studying a given course at a given university. Such an approach is underpinned by the policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003) which represent the ‘calculated deployment of techniques and artefacts to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power’ (Ball, 2003, p.216). The use of such signalling mechanisms communicates a strong expectation that the most employable graduates study certain subjects in certain institutions, which consequently signals a stratification amongst universities and subjects of study.

As a counterpoint, Harvey (2001) likens measuring employability effectiveness by measuring employment rates of graduates to a:

‘magic bullet’ model of the impact of higher education on employment.
The assumption implicit in this is that the higher education institution provides employability-development opportunities that enable the graduate to develop ‘employability’ and hence get employed (Harvey, 2001, p.101)

This implies a causal link between opportunities to develop employability and the *actual* employability of graduates, and strongly echoes the logic of human capital-based discourses of employability. Harvey (2001) counters this by offering a range of factors which he suggests mediates the employment process, irrespective of the opportunities afforded to learners. These include the reputations of types of higher education institution among recruiters, modes of study, age, ethnicity, gender, social class, subject of study, previous work experience, and geographical mobility. Harvey (2001) also dismisses as illogical the presumption that employers’ approaches to recruitment are rational. Such mediating factors serve to make more complex the connection between the undergraduate experience and the likelihood of employment, thus calling into question the assumption that high post-graduation employment rates signify a high-quality higher education experience.

Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013), following Yorke (2006), also reject the conflation of employability with employment rates. They argue that using employment rates as a proxy measure for employability fails to take into account the structural characteristics of the labour market and ignores the role of the employer as a mediator in the process of gaining employment. If universities are thought of as graduate-producing machines, then the idea of employers as mediators of employment seems to throw a spanner in the works. It suggests a degree of complexity in the relations between education and the labour market of the time. This complexity immediately casts doubt on the value of post-graduation employment rates as a way of differentiating between universities. Without adequately articulating the relations

between education and the wider economic system, and by reducing the evaluation of a university's contribution to a comparison between outputs and labour market needs, we are unable to say much about how the university contributes (or otherwise) to the employability of its graduates. Furthermore, if post-graduation employment rates were taken as the sole measure of graduate employability, this would be an example of a 'false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech' (Foucault, 1984a, p.79), thus resulting in a masking of a dynamic of power. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) offer an explanation of such a masking when they characterise this as the '[t]echnocratic measurement of educational output' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.181), which derives its goals directly from the economic system and orients education towards producing outputs that respond to the perceived needs of the labour market. They describe the consequences and dangers of such an approach as follows:

In short, the technocratic notion of 'output' has the function of preventing analysis of the educational system's system of functions: if it were carried out, such an analysis would forbid recourse to the implicit or explicit postulate of the 'general interest', by showing that none of the functions of the educational system can be defined independently of a given state of the structure of class relations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.184)

A technocratic stance towards education serves to close down lines of inquiry in order to protect the ability to promote a 'general interest', one which is presumably defined according to a dominant perspective. Such an approach might serve to reduce education to the satisfaction of economic goals, approximated to a narrow set of interests of one group in society. The notion of 'general interest' that would be invoked through such a reductionist approach would be a strategy directed towards establishing a particular position or set of positions as hegemonic. By this logic, a discourse of national economic competence might be deployed in order to maintain the primacy of economic goals over other potential goals of education. This might present the needs of the economy as 'the rational, reasonable basis for a consensus on the hierarchy of the functions incumbent upon the educational system' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.185). By maintaining that this represents a general interest, one might effectively mask the effects of differentials of position, such that 'the most hidden and most specific function of the educational system consists in hiding its objective function, that is, masking the objective truth of its relationship to the structure of class relations' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p. 208). One of the consequences of this masking effect would be to obscure the role of education in maintaining and reproducing the status quo. This makes it possible for graduate employability (in terms of labour market success) to be presented as something natural and objective, self-evidently in the common economic and social interest –

and thus no longer recognisable as discursive. While Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) analysis is grounded in notions of class relations, it does illustrate the potential for a discourse to be deployed in a way that masks the playing out of power relations.

While being able to be successful in the job market may be a good thing in itself, the masking of the structures of social relations by a technocratic approach to measurement presents a number of dangers. Firstly, the measurement of outputs such as labour market success take on added significance only when considered alongside other relational factors that might also exist. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) observe that the relevance of a measure of women's participation in higher education to 'democratisation' of the educational system is contingent on the cultural distribution of labour between the sexes. In some cases, even a low proportion of women participating in higher education could represent a major advance. By divorcing measures of graduate success in the labour market from the system of relations that impact on a graduate's likelihood of success, we are left with both an inadequate guide to action and a potentially misleading picture of what is happening. At worst, we are:

[condemned to] abstract comparison of statistical series divested of the significance which the facts measured derive from their position in a particular structure, serving a particular system of functions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.179)

For example, Rothwell and Arnold's (2007) discussion of graduate employability includes the notion of graduates securing the jobs they desire. Merely measuring employment rates post-graduation cannot differentiate between those graduates in jobs they desire and those graduates taking jobs out of necessity. While graduates may by definition have to work their way up to the jobs they desire, a pure statistical measure of employment rates cannot even indicate whether graduates are on a trajectory to the jobs they desire. Such a measure also says nothing about what kinds of employment a graduate *ought* to desire, and indeed can carry implicit understandings of what constitutes good graduate employment outcomes. Hence, the reduction of employability to mere statistical measurement masks how the concept of employability can 'make possible a mode of political and economic management' (Foucault, 1980, p.141) of graduates and universities; its mode of deployment effectively serves to hide such effects.

Secondly, a simple measure of labour market success basically assumes that the outcomes of higher education are valued equally. Bourdieu and Passeron observe that 'girls are still consigned more often than boys to certain types of studies (Arts subjects in the main), the more so the lower their social origin' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, pp.182-183). Likewise,

divisions along lines of sex (e.g. Powell *et al.*, 2012; Jones, 2007; Atkinson, 2011) and social origin (e.g. Zimdars, 2010; Mathers and Parry, 2009) have also been identified in certain careers, industries or professions. Merely measuring labour market success cannot explain differential outcomes by characteristic. It cannot in itself explain why male students might appear to do proportionately better than females, or why those from ethnic minorities might have worse employment outcomes than white students. In other words, we cannot offer an account of the extent to which universities affect ‘the relationship between the social starting point and social point of arrival of the educational trajectory’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990, p.209) by merely measuring how many graduates go on to work or further study within six months. In short, such a technocratic approach to graduate employability leads to the masking of such consequences as being effects of power relations. Consequently, when institutions deploy technocratic notions of employability as guides to action they are essentially placing themselves and their students in a situation in which their agency is obscured.

Thirdly, masking the role of the university in maintaining a social status quo risks obscuring a system of practices that frame the education of students in higher education. Disciplines, conventions, ways of thinking, acting and speaking – all of these become viewed as self-evident, natural, conventional; no more in need of questioning than the fact that humans breathe oxygen. That such things seem self-evident leads to their masking as effects of power. Technocratic measurement of graduate employability thus legitimises the pathologisation of graduate unemployment, prompting us to look at students from a deficit perspective – what they lack and what university can put right for them. As a result, we come to regard students’ progression through higher education and into work as ‘a pure mechanics devoid of reason’ (Foucault, 1978, p.78), a process through which the inert body of the student is acted upon by the lifeless force of education.

At the same time, Foucault’s (1988a) notion of power as an action upon the action of others carries an implication for universities. Because, in this case, employability is held to be a measurable outcome of degree studies, universities themselves are implicitly deemed to be guiding and moulding the behaviours of their students – yet the focus on the raw outcomes achieved by students masks the complexity of the relations between the university and the student. This says more about the relative status of institutions and the social backgrounds of their students than the qualities and abilities of their graduates, or even the potential of institutions to equip their graduates for success after their studies. The chief beneficiaries of such a mode of thinking are the so-called elite universities and their graduates, who benefit from the reputational capital conferred through having the name of an institution with a

strong reputation on their CVs. Other institutions, lacking the reputational capital of some of their peers, become victims of a simplistic assumption that three years of undergraduate study moulds the employability of graduates. Such discourses therefore serve to entrench the stratification of institutions and, by extension, their graduates.

Conceptions of employability grounded in the gaining of employment reduce the notion of employability to a simple statistical concept. The bare fact of gaining employment is ultimately sufficient grounds on which to regard a graduate as employable. Such accounts leave no room for the exploration of dynamics of power between students, institutions, employers and policymakers. Indeed, where the acquisition of employment is the chief measure of employability, the relation between student and university is characterised by a ‘form of power [that] resides in the function of the legislator’ whose ‘mode of action... is of a juridico-discursive character’ (Foucault, 1978, p.83). By rendering such power dynamics invisible they leave unexplored the possibility of systematic exclusion of graduates from the labour market or the stratification of institutions and disciplines – all done under the guise of a natural inevitability. Regarding graduate employability merely in terms of employment thus leaves untroubled persistent differentials in outcomes between groups of graduates and fails to account for the significance of changes to the political, social and economic context within which higher education is situated. Hence, the consequence of a technocratic notion of graduate employability is the masking of a range of relations and effects of power through an appeal to a simple logic of a relation to law (Foucault, 1978).

2.3 Employability as human capital

This section explores discourses of graduate employability grounded in notions of human capital. Human capital discourses of employability focus on the individual skills and attributes possessed by graduates. Identified here are a number of senses in which graduate employability is defined in terms of demonstrable skills, knowledge and behaviour. These represent individualising discourses that enable the pathologisation of the ‘unemployable’ graduate. Within institutions of higher education such discourses form the basis of skills-driven approaches to employability that risk pursuing labour market success in isolation from the wider aims and values of higher education. An alternative approach, presently missing from the literature, would be to conceive of graduate employability as the negotiation of difference and diversity in a shared world, in which the norms and expectations of society are recognised and problematised.

Human capital has been used as a shorthand term for the skills, knowledge and capabilities of the workforce; it is a trait of the individual worker, inseparable from the individual (Blair, 2011). It is defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as ‘the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being’ (Keeley, 2007, p.29). This echoes a neoclassical understanding of human capital as ‘the stock of knowledge and skills that enables people to perform work that creates economic value’ (Nahapiet, 2011, n.p.). Discourses of employability that are grounded in human capital imply that a key function of university education is to imbue students with specific, demonstrable, measurable things that enable them to engage in productive work. Students are conceived of as building up a store of human capital which can subsequently be exchanged, through the labour market, for rewards in the forms of economic and social status. This is consistent with a conception of education as a private good (Olssen *et al.*, 2004). Such logic justifies investment by individuals in their own education, along with policy signals that emphasise the responsibility of individuals to make such investments.

However, the notion of human capital, when considered at the level of the population, is consistent with the idea of education as a public good (Olssen *et al.*, 2004). Whereas private returns from education are (in part) represented by the labour market outcomes of this or that graduate, public returns take into account the sum returns to the population as a whole. Formal education is thus located as a means of increasing the stock of human capital in a population through the skills, talents and knowledge embodied therein (Olssen *et al.*, 2004). This provides the logic for policy interventions aimed at governing the production of human capital through the governance of formal education. Fundamentally, the reduction of education to the production of specific forms of human capital is an example of what Foucault describes as a ‘uniformity of apparatus’ (Foucault, 1978, p.84; emphasis removed). In this case education is deemed to operate according to ‘the simple and endlessly reproduced mechanisms of law’ (Foucault, 1978, p.84) and is a further example of a technocratic discourse that masks the complexity of effects and interactions of power relations.

In broad terms, human capital discourses concentrate on identifying a set of ‘employability skills’ – which can include traits and behaviours – justifying their selection and relating them to the education offered to students. For example, employers’ representative organisation the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) refers to employability as follows:

A modern, competitive economy needs workers who possess skills, knowledge and attitudes they can take to any work situation and have the

willingness to continually adapt and prosper in a changing world. Universities and employers have attempted to define a sub-set of skills, which we have referred to as ‘employability skills’ as well as the specialist knowledge and skills necessary for a particular role. (CBI, 2009, p.8)

The CBI’s definition is notable for several reasons. Firstly, it posits an explicit conceptual link between the skills of workers and the performance of businesses. Focusing on the quality and breadth of skills demonstrable by the graduate population therefore becomes justifiable in terms of enhancing national economic performance; investment in education is thus held to account for economic growth (Olssen *et al.*, 2004). Secondly, it suggests that there is a subset of skills for employability that is somehow distinct from ‘specialist knowledge and skills’. This suggests the existence of a specific domain of skills that are common to the diverse enterprise of finding work and being economically useful. By implication, it is possible for students to develop these distinctive skills and be evaluated against them. Thirdly, it implies a link between employability and resilience, underpinned by an assumption of continual change, such that employability represents a defence mechanism against the vicissitudes of a world in flux. Fourthly, it suggests that employers are invested in the outcomes of higher education, positioning them as customers or clients of universities and, by implication, charging them with responsibility to help shape what ‘employability skills’ are understood to be. While the CBI (2009) acknowledges that producing work-ready graduates is not the only purpose of higher education, they clearly afford it a good deal of importance.

Morrison (2014) identifies two broad conceptual approaches to employability that are relevant to the development of human capital. The first – the consensus perspective - is a supply-side approach grounded in theories of human capital. In this model, universities are essentially responsible for producing employable, productive workers. The second – the conflict perspective – holds that an individual’s employability is a function of both their individual skill and their position within a hierarchy of job seekers. This approach de-emphasises (to an extent) human capital as a pure measure of a graduate’s employability, and instead brings into play other factors, such as the ability of individual graduates to make their human capital count. Thus, while the first approach to employability is related directly to the individual’s store of human capital, the second implies another set of factors that regulate the kinds of rewards and statuses for which individual graduates might exchange their human capital. The implication here is that not all degrees or universities are made equally; the demonstration of seemingly equivalent skills and abilities does not necessarily translate into equivalent opportunities post-graduation.

Tan (2014) connects human capital theory with the neoclassical school of thought in economics, which assumes that individuals seek to maximise their own economic interests; investments in education and training are related to a positive expectation of rewards in the form of higher income. It presupposes a focus on individuals and their motives, and assumes individuals make rational choices with regards to maximising their rewards. Tan identifies limitations in these basic assumptions that impede the ability of human capital theory to account for certain social and economic phenomena. Despite these limitations, Tan notes that 'it would be fair to say that it is still a strong theory' (Tan, 2014, p.436), and argues that some criticisms of human capital theory are motivated by desires to attack the dominant mode of thinking (Tan, 2014). Thus, one must be alert to the risks of reading employability in terms of a dominant discourse pitted against a dominated one or in terms of 'good' and 'bad' discourses. To do so would be to stray into the territory of regarding law as the 'truth of power [or] its alibi' (Foucault, 1980, p.141), and thus to a reliance on a juridical conception of power. Rather, Tan's (2014) warning ought to be responded to by reading a human capital discourse of employability as one that competes with others, thus offering a means of rejecting 'an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of law' (Foucault, 1980, p.141).

The notion of human capital suggests a connection between the outcomes of education and the performance of the economy. Knight and Yorke (2002) note a tendency among governments around the world to draw on human capital theory in the formulation of higher education policy, on the basis that economic success is linked to the education of the workforce. In the UK, this connection seems to have been firmly embedded in official thinking for a number of years (Yorke, 2004; Wolf, 2002). Human capital therefore suggests the evaluation of an individual's worth on the basis of measurable and demonstrable factors – things that the individual knows or can do, and hence their potential to contribute to the performance of a business or an economic system. This points to a definition of graduate employability that is centred on measurable and demonstrable characteristics of the graduate.

Human capital is held to act as a short-hand signal to employers that job applicants deserve to be hired by virtue of their accumulated job-relevant knowledge (Ng and Feldman, 2010). The importance of the ability to signal the relevance and worth of the outcomes of education is therefore an important part of human capital-based discourses of employability. As Yorke and Knight (2007) observe: 'ESECT [the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team, with which Yorke and Knight were associated] argued that, in order to enhance employability, it is necessary to ensure that practices that foster these achievements are in place in whole degree

programmes, and that both staff and students know how achievements arising from them can be represented effectively to employers' (Yorke and Knight, 2007, p.159). When taken to be an indication of an individual's capacity for innovation and thus productivity (Pedersen, 2014), employability as human capital provides a means for sorting and separating job applicants and represents a graduate's 'suitability for appropriate employment' (Yorke and Knight, 2007, p.158).

Knight and Yorke (2002) adopt as their definition of employability the possession of the understandings, skills and personal attributes necessary to perform adequately in a graduate-level job; they regard this definition as 'near-tautologous' (Knight and Yorke, 2002, p.261), perhaps acknowledging a certain self-evidence in the concept. However, this self-evidence gives way to greater complexity when the differing requirements of graduate-level jobs are considered. In a similar vein, ESECT defined employability as:

a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation. (Harvey, 2014, n.p.)

There are three notable features of the ESECT definition of employability. Firstly, it clearly places the emphasis on the qualities and characteristics of the individual, and hence strongly echoes the OECD definition of human capital; it is an overwhelmingly individualised definition which makes no reference to any kind of relational or structural factor. Secondly, this vision of employability is probabilistic – it hints at the positioning of individuals within a competition to exchange their accumulated human capital for employment. It is by no means a straightforward transaction or a passport to a given occupation, and thus leaves unaddressed the possibility that other social forces might exert an influence. Thirdly, by referring to 'their chosen occupation', the ESECT definition suggests that what counts as employability is contextual; it therefore refers not to a generalised, universal set of skills and characteristics, but to the possibility that employability might be defined locally in terms of the demands and requirements of a given kind of work. In this respect the ESECT definition departs somewhat from the CBI (2009) definition, which holds out the possibility of a discrete, universal set of employability skills.

A human capital approach to employability can be associated with a skills-led approach, where employability is reduced to a set of attributes – or 'key skills' - that can be addressed in isolation. Knight and Yorke (2002) argue that some higher education institutions have adopted a 'tokenistic' approach by packaging up key skills into separate modules, 'sometimes trivialising them and dis-integrating them from the curriculum' (Knight and Yorke, 2002,

p.263), thus ‘divesting [employability] of its complexity and richness and compromising the credibility of the employability agenda’ (Knight and Yorke, 2002, p.263). Yorke (2006) later characterises this as a tendency to reduce employability to ‘the simplistic notion of key skills’ (Yorke, 2006, p.13). Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) criticise this so-called ‘list approach’ (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.566), arguing that such an approach cannot provide a basis for prioritising skills and qualities, thus leaving us with ‘nothing better than an employer wish-list’ (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.567). Reduction of employability to the acquisition of key skills is thus self-defeating in that, by actively addressing the expressed demands of employers, it singularly fails to respond to those needs.

Discourses of employability grounded only in human capital tend to over-emphasise the agency of individuals and downplay the significance of the particular social and economic conditions in which individuals operate. For example, Brown *et al.* (2003) argue that definitions of employability centred on the capability to gain and maintain employment ignore ‘the fact that employability is primarily determined by the labour market rather than the capabilities of individuals’ (Brown *et al.*, 2003, p.110). Human capital-based discourses therefore do not take account of structural factors of the labour market, and thus over-emphasise the responsibility of individuals to invest in and convert their human capital. A key consequence of this is to constitute the student seeking worthwhile career opportunities post-graduation as an obedient subject of a legislative power (Foucault, 1978). Students are thus judged, by virtue of their demonstrable human capital, according to their compliance or otherwise; students who fail such judgements may be squarely blamed for such a failure and regarded as disobedient subjects.

A further problem with the human capital approach is the implication that employability is somehow a constant and stable concept. Bynner and Parsons (2001) found ‘significant shifts across the generations in the key requirements for employability and consequently inclusion in the workforce’ (Bynner and Parsons, 2001, p.289), noting that the importance of basic skills in remaining part of the workforce seems to have increased over time. Human capital discourses of employability that posit a simple relationship between demonstrable skills and employment prospects may therefore fail to take account of shifting labour market conditions, and thus may deny the significance of the particular social and economic conditions of the day. Again, just as students may be constituted as obedient subjects through the disregarding of the structure of the labour market, to assume that employability is a stable, timeless concept creates the conditions for the constitution of the university as subject to a law of employability. In this sense, universities are constituted within a ‘law of transgression and

'punishment' (Foucault, 1978, p.85); those institutions deemed unsuccessful at inculcating in their students a form of employability consistent with a simple relation between skills and employment are sanctioned through mechanisms such as reputational harm. Coupled with the constitution of the university sector as competitive (see section 4.6 for an exposition of how this occurs through the higher education white paper of 2016), this serves to mask a significant disciplinary effect upon institutions that cannot run the risk of losing out in the competition for tuition fee income.

Human capital discourses of employability privilege certain forms of capital (represented by skills, behaviours, expressed attitudes, knowledge, dispositions and so forth) at the cost of masking the effects of other forms of capital. Human capital does not move beyond economism, a focus on monetary investments or those outcomes directly convertible into money. Thus the notion of graduate-level employment can be distinguished from low-skilled jobs primarily by starting salary and the potential for progression to higher-paid roles. As with discourses of employability grounded in gaining employment, human capital discourses encourage a reduction of employability to factors that are easily measurable and quantifiable. They assume a direct relationship between the educational experience offered by the university and the outcomes demonstrable by the graduate. This assumption – a reduction of the products of education to freely exchangeable currency – can be questioned by reference to a sorting dynamic identified by Devine-Eller (2004). Schools, she argues, aim implicitly to produce bodies differentiated by groups, preparing them for different roles in society. Not only do schools produce 'educated' people for high-status roles, they also produce 'uneducated' people, those whose destiny it seems to be to occupy lower-status service and production roles. To define employability as merely the acquisition of human capital through education thus masks the dynamics of this process of sorting, an example of the 'neglect of everything that makes for its productive effectiveness, its strategic resourcefulness, its positivity' (Foucault, 1978, p.86). Universities and teachers are placed in an ethical bind by a discourse of employability that presents obtaining the 'ideal' career as a matter of obtaining sufficient human capital of the right kind. By ignoring the deliberative dynamics of sorting that are implied through the differential acquisition of social capital, teachers are in effect compelled to claim that any student may succeed in any way imaginable simply by satisfying an easily visible set of technical demands.

In one sense, this ethical bind arises as an inevitable and indispensable consequence of the exercise of power through an economicistic approach to graduate employability. Foucault writes:

[Power] is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? For it, secrecy is not in the nature of an abuse; it is indispensable to its operation. Not only because power imposes secrecy on those whom it dominates, but because it is perhaps just as indispensable to the latter: would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of freedom – however slight – intact? (Foucault, 1978, p.86)

An economicistic, skills-led discourse of employability therefore depends on the maintenance of a veil of secrecy around the sorting mechanism that Devine-Eller (2004) identifies. Given the centrality of individual agency and achievement already posited (Harvey, 2014), to constitute a university experience as merely a means of differentiating people by group would be to dispel the illusion of personal agency. Thus, the efficacy of the discourse of employability as human capital depends upon acceptance of the notion that students are in control of their own destinies – and, for that matter, that individual universities can foster the success of any student. This inevitably depends on downplaying contextual factors of the labour market and the policy environment for higher education.

Holmes (2001) identifies and criticises what he sees as two key assumptions that underpin skills-led approaches to employability. Firstly, there is an assumption that the term 'skill' has the same meaning in an educational context as when used in an employment context; indeed, 'it is by no means clear that employers should want skills *per se*; rather, they want the graduates they recruit and employ to perform in desirable ways – competently and effectively' (Holmes, 2001, p.112). Thus, a limitation of a skills-led approach is that it assumes a connection between demonstrable skills and the ability to perform to an acceptable standard. Secondly, skills-led approaches go so far as to assume that the performance of certain skills on discrete, isolated occasions is representative of a general ability to perform in ways desired in an employment setting. Holmes rejects the suggestion that human behaviour can be specified in terms of objective observation, instead arguing that behaviour requires interpretation; skills-led approaches arguably fail to provide a basis for such interpretation. Human capital discourses of employability, which privilege simple and quantifiable measurements and observations, arguably run in to Holmes's limitations. As such, they reduce the role of education to that of the development of discrete skills, devoid of the potential for their translation into performance.

Foucault (1988b) signals a clear consequence of a reduction of employability to the acquisition of human capital. Through the deployment of different practices 'a certain idea or model of

humanity was developed, and now this idea of man has become normative, self-evident, and is supposed to be universal' (Foucault, 1988b, p.15). To associate the idea of employability with a set of supposedly objective and uncontroversial personal qualities is to posit the possibility of the universally employable graduate, a timeless construct and an ideal to which all ought to be expected to aspire. The reduction of employability to human capital thus carries a number of implications. Firstly, individual graduates may be expected to uncritically pursue such an idealised concept of employability, thus legitimising the stigmatisation of those who fail to live up to the ideal; this transforms the acquisition of employability from a technical to a *moral* imperative. Secondly, higher education institutions may be expected to impart certain discrete skills and qualities to their students as a matter of course. Thirdly, the governance of higher education at the level of policy can be justified in terms of responding to a natural, objective, scientifically-knowable concept of the employable graduate. This enables policy interventions with respect to graduate employability to be (mis)represented as merely technical operations, much as one might specify standard weights and measures.

Foucault (1988b) points to the significance of technologies of power and of the self in '[implying] certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes' (Foucault, 1988b, p.18). Technologies of power 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination' leading to 'an objectivizing of the subject' (Foucault, 1988b, p.18). Technologies of the self 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988b, p.18).

It is arguable that the presenting of the employable graduate as a natural, uncontested concept bound up with the acquisition of certain traits, attitudes, skills and knowledge creates conditions that favour the deployment of both of Foucault's technologies of the modification of individuals. Firstly, an objectivising of the employable graduate is an implicit strategy associated with employability as human capital. For example, Yorke and Knight's (2007) insistence on the importance of representing a graduate's suitability for employment implies that graduates may be scrutinised, evaluated and considered as discrete entities, separated from their contexts. This is also seen in the CBI's (2009) insistence on employable graduates being adaptable to a changing world; ironically, this adaptability in itself represents a certain quality of timelessness and the reduction to the matching of qualities with needs. Such

assumptions clearly allow for the positing of a distinct understanding of the employable graduate, and thus the objectification of the graduate.

Secondly, the positing of a distinct, technical specification of the employable graduate can encourage, and justify, the pursuit of such an idealised way of being by individual graduates. This may lead to students becoming permanent money changers of themselves (Foucault, 1988b), consistently engaged in a process of self-reflection, self-evaluation and – ultimately – a constant declaration or verbalisation of their ‘employable’ qualities. As Foucault (1988b) notes, this verbalisation does not represent a renunciation of the self, in other words a pure submission to the authority of another. Rather, this represents the positive constitution of a new self (Foucault, 1988b). Thus, employability as human capital represents not a strategy of subordination of the dominated graduate to the dominant employer, but of an induced reformulation of the self in accordance with the predominant social and economic logic of the times. This again points to the significance of context in the emergence of different forms of employability, as well as dissolving the illusion of employability as an objective, scientifically-knowable concept. The pursuit of the idealised, universal employable graduate is thus a strategy that is central to the discourse of employability as human capital.

2.4 Employability as self-perception

To read employability in terms of self-perception is to foreground students’ own perceptions of what they can do. Such ideas of employability emphasise the importance of beliefs about one’s abilities. This section identifies how graduate employability can become associated with graduates’ own perceptions of who they are, what they do and what they are capable of. These discourses of employability imply the existence of social arrangements that induce students and graduates, to a greater or lesser extent, to engage in self-regulation. Taken to its limits, such arrangements cast higher education in the role of promoting docile, self-managing attitudes among its students. It suggests the value of investigating higher education institutions as places in which individuals’ attitudes towards their own conduct become a key object of education.

Bandura (1997) refers to ‘self-efficacy’ as a generative capability, concerned ‘not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances’ (Bandura, 1997, p.37). Thus, what individuals believe they can do has a bearing on whether or not they actually can. However, while the subskills necessary for performance can contribute to the judgement of operative efficiency, they do not substitute for it, such that it is not sufficient to analyse self-perceptions of individual skills in order to

form a judgement about an individual's potential to perform well. Furthermore, 'efficacy beliefs may be high for the subskills but low for their integrated use in taxing situations' (Bandura, 1997, p.38). For example, while an individual might consider themselves strong at analysing data, forming arguments and delivering presentations, this does not necessarily mean that they will believe themselves capable of giving a paper at a major international academic conference. Yet perceptions of self-efficacy can have a bearing on one's career trajectory. In terms of career choice, 'efficacy beliefs set the slate of options for serious consideration' (Bandura, 1997, p.423). Individuals can rule career options in and out on the basis of their perceived self-efficacy, irrespective of whether these perceptions relate to objective reality. Furthermore, self-efficacy beliefs impact an individual's ability to convey favourable impressions about their capabilities and potential, particularly to employers. Higher perceived self-efficacy can lead to more extensive job-hunting efforts, greater confidence to find opportunities and present oneself well, and greater success in dealing with the social realities of work situations. Self-efficacy is also related to resilience, through the importance of taking charge of one's self-development in coping with change. In short, perceptions of self-efficacy can affect one's employability by increasing the likelihood of successfully putting oneself forward for work opportunities. Self-efficacy discourses of graduate employability are individualising, emphasising confident presentation of oneself without necessarily relying on actual performance. Such discourses also imply the necessity of aligning one's perceptions of oneself with an idea about others' perspectives.

Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013) note that there is little empirical research into the relevance of self-perceived employability to employment success. However, they suggest what they refer to as emotional self-efficacy as being a potential contributor to employability. Emotional self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their own emotional competence, and may be connected with employability issues such as developing and maintaining networks of contacts. Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013) connect employability with 'having certain skills and attributes that make a person more likely to choose, secure, and retain employment' (Dacre Pool and Qualter, 2013, p.220), such that those who are more confident in their emotional competence and regard themselves as effective communicators are more likely to develop and maintain personal networks and gain the respect of others. Emotional self-efficacy implies a link between employability and the confidence to engage with others, to build networks in the wider world and to position themselves in ways that maximise their chances of success in finding employment. This also implies that graduates must *choose* to be employable; employability is thus not a technical concept that can be evaluated against a systematic

specification of the employable graduate. One cannot simply measure the employability of a graduate in the same way as his or her height or muscle mass. Instead, employability is the product of individuals' deliberate positioning of themselves in relation to others, bound up in the way in which individuals choose to engage with others. By extension, it is also related to the conventions that govern social interactions within a given social setting. To choose to be employable involves being conscious of the perspectives and expectations of others, particularly those who can speak on one's behalf, and choosing to speak and act in ways that maximise one's chances of eliciting positive responses from others. Thus, Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013) extend the notion of self-efficacy from being aware of oneself to being aware of oneself *in relation to others*. Such an approach again invites a foregrounding of power relations, in the sense of students regulating their own conduct in the light of their perceptions of both themselves and others; hence employers, teachers and others in positions of authority can exert both direct and indirect effects on individuals' conduct.

Wu *et al.* (2014) focus on higher education students as being at 'the critical stage of career development' (Wu *et al.*, 2014, p.182), with the development of employability being the key part of individuals' career development outcomes. Reflecting to a certain extent a human capital perspective of employability in its relevance to national economic development, they argue for the importance of a contextualised approach that conceptualises career development within a system of social factors. Vocational self-concept, they argue, is an important factor in the development of students' future careers; by implication, this emphasises the importance of conceptualising oneself according to the conventions and norms of a particular profession or industry. Qenani *et al.* (2014) also emphasise the 'critical importance' (Qenani *et al.*, 2014, p.201) of students' self-perception. Self-perception is related to perceived self-efficacy (drawing on Bandura), and self-perception of employability is held to precede self-efficacy; these self-perceptions help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills that they have. They argue that the university, in helping students manage how employable they view themselves to be, is 'fundamentally managing the active learning of its students at a broad level' (Qenani *et al.*, 2014, p.211). Promoting the development of self-efficacy is thus connected with promoting active engagement in one's own learning, tied to a critical understanding of oneself in relation to the wider world. This potentially leads to more holistic growth and development. Such an analysis foregrounds a role for higher education institutions in exercising conduct upon the conduct of others; if employers' views or expectations are also brought into play, then this complicates the ensuing network of power relations even further.

Berntson and Marklund (2007) attempt to measure the relationship between perceived employability and health. They define employability as the individual's perception of his or her possibilities of getting new employment, such that an individual with high employability thinks that it is easy to acquire new employment. Their study measured self-perceived employability using a mean value index of five items relating to the respondents' perceived skills, experience, network, personal traits and knowledge of the labour market. De Vos and Soens (2008) use a similar methodology to assess perceived employability. Alongside perceptions of individuals' ability to gain a comparable job with another employer, their study also sought views on the ease with which respondents felt they could obtain another job in line with their levels of education and experience, or even a job which would give a high level of satisfaction. In this way, De Vos and Soens (2008) highlight the significance of one's perceptions of what 'appropriate' employment looks like. Such approaches invite the foregrounding of the effects upon individuals' senses of wellbeing of the use of employability as a technology of governance.

As noted, notions of self-efficacy involve a conception of oneself in relation to the conventions and expectations of a given social situation. This might prompt reflection on the extent to which our actions are freely chosen and projections of our authentic selves, or whether the ways in which we act are regularised by the social conventions to which we are subject. At this point it is helpful to reflect further on Foucault's understanding of the notion of 'governmentality', since this offers a useful theoretical basis for exploring the implications of self-perception for graduate employability. Foucault (2009) assigned three senses to the term 'governmentality'. Two of these, namely the tendency of government as a pre-eminent form of power in Western society and the result of the development of the state of justice into the administrative state, are very particular applications of the concept to particular contexts. However, Foucault (2009) invokes a third sense of governmentality that speaks more clearly to the relation between higher education and society:

Firstly, by 'governmentality' I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. (Foucault, 2009, p.108)

Foucault's notion of governmentality begins from the premise that while 'government' is concerned with the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed (Foucault, 1982), it is not synonymous with ruling, commanding or laying down the law

(Foucault, 2009). Governmentality, therefore, is not concerned with an analysis of power that is focused purely on its effects of constraint, repression and sanction. It is not a merely negative exercise of power, the elimination of undesirable conduct. Rather, it opens up the possibility of an understanding of power relations in terms of the pursuit of particular idealised ends. In the case of graduate employability, it may suggest the importance of concepts such as economic security and self-sufficiency, national economic competitiveness, idealised standards of conduct and behaviour, personal qualities such as entrepreneurialism, and societal value systems. Governmentality, then, helps to shift the analysis away from a simplistic notion of the control and constraint of individuals towards an interplay of factors and power relations.

Furthermore, governmentality is not primarily concerned with the particularities of power relations that are specific to individual institutions. Rather, it seeks to move the analysis of power relations outside of the setting in question and into a wider context. Foucault (2009) gives the example of the army: rather than reading the ‘disciplinarization’ (Foucault, 2009, p.119) of the army as a function of its control by the state, Foucault proposes connecting this disciplinarization with factors such as the importance of commercial networks, technical innovations, networks of alliance and support and so forth. In doing so, the analysis moves beyond the search for the genesis of military discipline (i.e. the statutory relationship between the army, state and soldiers) towards its genealogy (i.e. the way that military discipline connects with things other than the relation between the military and the state). Thus, an analysis grounded in the concept of governmentality may offer the possibility that a reading of practices within institutional settings might yield more generalizable conclusions that have relevance beyond the specific institutional setting. In the case of graduate employability, it is possible to look beyond a straightforward reading of graduate employability as a function of the relation between universities and the government of the day. One might then argue that graduate employability finds its emergence and descent in things beyond the direct relation of higher education institutions to public policy.

A third important characteristic of governmentality is that it represents ‘contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self’ (Foucault, 1988b, p.19). Governmentality directs one’s attention to the intersection between the effects exerted by others on an individual’s conduct and the self-regulation exerted by the individual. As a result, it does not deny the role of the individual as an agent in the regulation of conduct; indeed, individual agency is a precondition. Governmentality thus requires an analysis of a social situation to go beyond a top-down reading of power relations; one should focus not only on the governance of individuals by others, but on the role of individuals in governing themselves.

This derives from the necessity of the freedom of the individual as a precondition for their government; power, argues Foucault (1982), can only be exercised over free subjects, ‘and only insofar as they are free’ (Foucault, 1982, p.790). Government of conduct is the structuring of the *possible* field of action of an individual, insofar as that individual is faced with a range of possibilities for action and must make choices. Thus, to analyse graduate employability through the lens of governmentality is not to speak of slavery, compulsion, destiny, programming, or other ways in which individuals’ conduct could be conceived of as externally determined. For instance, one cannot simply regard academics as mere mechanical extensions of their institutions, formed out of the institutional and sector-wide policy environment in which they find themselves. Rather, governmentality invites an analysis of academics’ relations to their disciplines, their employers, their students, their value systems and convictions, their own experiences and interests, the wider political, social and economic context, and how they might choose to act and respond in certain situations in the light of this range of factors. Indeed, Foucault argues that governmentality encompasses:

the range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. I believe that the concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others.
(Foucault, 1997, p.xvii)

As a consequence, governmentality as an analytical lens offers the possibility of exploring tensions that may arise between facets of graduates’ professional and personal situations, thus connecting the notion of graduate employability in its multiple forms with the question of individual agency. A wider focus on governmentality and governance therefore allows the analysis to move beyond the analysis of institutional rules towards a question of professional orientation, one which can potentially make important contributions to the understanding of the role of, and possibilities for, higher education in fostering the agency of the graduate.

Given that governmentality emphasises the freedom of the subject, another important implication arises: that of the possibility of individuals’ resistance to attempts to direct their conduct. Freedom, argues Foucault (1997), exists for the subject within a power relation inasmuch as the possibility of change occurs. For example:

When we deal with the government, the struggle, of course, is not symmetrical, the power situation is not the same; but we are in this struggle, and the continuation of this situation can influence the behavior or nonbehavior of the other. So we are not trapped. We are always in this kind of situation. It means that we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the

situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations.
But you can always change it. (Foucault, 1997, p.167; emphasis in original)

For Foucault, the impossibility of being outside of power relations implies the persistence of struggle, that is, a contested strategic relation between those who are in a relation of power. The possibility of changes of behaviour implies the continuity of struggle, and thus the continuity of the relation of power. Thus, total domination of one by another removes the possibility of the influencing of behaviour, and therefore marks the limit of power. As a consequence, the possibility of influencing changes of behaviour implies both the freedom of the subject and the possibility of resistance. Indeed, Foucault (1997) argues that resistance is a necessary condition of power relations. However, if power is creative and not merely a negative or constraining force, and resistance is a necessary precondition for the existence of power relations, then resistance cannot be only a negative reaction. To say no, argues Foucault (1997), is merely the minimum form of resistance; resistance is not just 'a negation but a creative process; to create and recreate, to change the situation, actually to be an active member of that process' (Foucault, 1997, p.168). Self-perception of employability, then, can be neither unfettered self-determination nor total surrender to a dominant other. Rather, it encompasses both the capacity to choose behaviours and attitudes that enhance employability and the possibility of rejecting such choices. This casts the individual as simultaneously agentive and susceptible to coercion in a multitude of ways.

A particular application of the technologies of governance, or conduct upon conduct, is described by Foucault (1995). He charts the emergence in the eighteenth century of what he refers to as new 'projects of docility' (Foucault, 1995, p.136), characterised by subtle, constant coercion as opposed to wholesale constraint; a focus on the efficiency and organisation of bodily movements and the processes of coercion, rather than an exclusive focus on the outcomes of control. Such techniques represented 'a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour' (Foucault, 1995, p.138). Such a way of rendering docility relies on constant coercion as opposed to individual interventions. Foucault finds a parallel in the measures to be imposed upon the outbreak of plague: constant surveillance, ceaseless inspection; '[t]he gaze is alert everywhere' (Foucault, 1995, p.195). In Jeremy Bentham's design for a hypothetical prison, the *Panopticon*, Foucault identifies that the major effect of constant surveillance was:

to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual

exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, 1995, p.201)

Like the residents of the plague-hit town, the inmates of the Panopticon become so used to being constantly watched – and thus at risk of punishment for any transgression at any time – that in time they become self-regulating; instead of the prison guards directly acting to regulate the conduct of prisoners, the prisoners exert a kind of regulating effect upon themselves. Thus the prison regime, as a technology of power (Foucault, 1988b) applied to the prisoner, seeks to inculcate discipline not through overt compulsion but through the prisoner becoming adjusted to keeping themselves in a state of constant imprisonment. The net goal of such a regime is to effect a lasting change in the conduct of the prisoner in such a way that the supervision of the prisoner does not rely on the prisoner being physically constrained. Instead, the prisoner must come to believe – and not able to verify - that he or she may be being observed at any given moment (Foucault, 1995). One might say that the regime of the prison, over time, becomes detached from the physical form of the prison. Upon release, the former prisoner takes it upon himself or herself to subconsciously re-enact the supervisory regime of the prison, resulting in a kind of self-regulated conduct. The power relation of the prison has thus become inscribed on the body of the prisoner (Foucault, 1995); physical confinement no longer becomes necessary for the effects of supervision to be felt.

One might object that this is a simplistic model of the governance of conduct. For example, it does not account for the possibility that individual prisoners may work out for themselves the basis of the panoptic regime. Indeed, it is reasonable to argue that the physical release from incarceration might signal to the prisoner a very real release from the supervisory regime, and thus the effects of the power relation established in the Panopticon would be lost. Yet if the stark difference in spatial confinement were to be removed from the model – indeed, if it were never to enter the individual's reckoning - we would be left with a system whereby every individual's conduct might be observed and evaluated at any one time. Where an individual's economic or societal security might be affected by such an evaluation, observable conduct becomes a viable object of individuals' self-regulation. For example, when using social media university students might be advised to maintain their professional identity and be visible for the 'right' reasons, as the following extract from a piece of guidance to students suggests:

Make sure nothing is visible that you wouldn't want employers to see when they search for you. Many professions such as nursing, teaching and law also have guidelines on the use of social media which emphasise the need

to behave professionally online. Have a look online for examples of guidance from the areas you're interested in. (Sheffield Hallam University, 2014, n.p.).

Here we see how social media might be interpreted as enabling the near-constant surveillance of conduct. The outcomes of such acts of surveillance are implied to have consequences for finding work in the first instance and, in the longer term, developing a sustainable career. The above example also alludes to systems of behaviours and practices that are specific to industries and professions. Thus, students are primed almost from the start to expect their personal conduct, and the way it is presented, to be a factor in their employability and their career prospects, for example by considering how theoretical employers might react to something posted to Facebook. This is not restricted to the specifics of one's behaviour; even the (mis)use of language might contribute to the formation of impressions of an individual (Scott *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, Woodley and Silvestri (2014) note the potential for content posted publicly to social media to breach legal, ethical and social codes, to damage trust between professionals and their clients, and to be used by recruiters as part of the vetting process. The implication is that students are not just expected to behave in a manner that befits the norms of a profession; students are expected to perceive themselves as future members of a profession and to project an image that indicates compatibility with the norms of that profession. This requires that students perceive their own conduct in relation to others' expectations. In theory, one need not be dismissed from a job or denied an interview in order to adopt such an approach. Thus, considerations of theoretical future employers' views might lead or encourage students to self-regulate the choices of conduct available to them – or, conversely, to rule certain career options in or out on the basis of their perceptions of their own conduct.

As Bandura (1997) notes, our opinions of what we can do set the range of options from which we choose. For the theoretical inmates of the Panopticon, the self-regulation rendered through the techniques of surveillance mean that recidivism is no longer a viable option. This has parallels for the notion of graduate employability. If graduates' employability is to be defined, at least in part, in terms of their self-perceptions, this offers two possibilities. On the one hand, and perhaps optimistically, employability might be associated with self-confidence and resilience, equipping students with the self-belief and character to cope in a world that might constantly call them to account for their worthiness for work. On the other hand, this opens up the notion of employability as a means of supervision of the individual; to instil in students notions of constant surveillance of their performance, a technique of rendering

docility through shaping students' self-perceptions. In this way, students come to internalise an exercise of management over themselves, taking it on and perpetuating it. Self-perception discourses of employability can then be read as inducements to docility, facilitating the adoption by graduates of particular habits, behaviours and perspectives.

At the heart of this thesis is the proposition that the term 'graduate employability' is a shorthand that masks a number of power-knowledge complexes; these have consequences for roles and practices in higher education. Foucault's notion of governmentality offers a useful theoretical basis for exploring the dynamics that this proposition implies. It is this that represents a distinctive and original contribution of this present study. Governmentality offers the possibility of analysing a social situation in terms of its emergence through resistance. In the case of graduate employability, this might bring to light the dynamics that emerge when notions of graduate employability come into contact with other facets of academics' professional lives. Such an analysis may open up space for inquiring into graduate employability as a site of creative resistance, exploring how the interactions between official policy, the actions of employers, academic activity and the enacting of students' lives give rise to multiple understandings of the notion of graduate employability. In turn, these factors become open to re-examination through recasting them not as monolithic notions that exist in isolation, but as mutually interdependent concepts that emerge as they are as a consequence of resistance.

2.5 Employability as graduate identity

The notion of graduate employability in terms of identity is a relatively new one. Such discourses have begun to emerge through, in particular, the work of Geoffrey Hinchliffe (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011). These discourses bring to the fore the relation between the claims to identity made by a graduate and the employer's (in)validation of those claims. Graduate identity thus suggests the significance of the ways in which students are made subjects through higher education. It suggests the value of investigating graduate employability in terms of judgement and evaluation and indicates a potential tension between graduates exercising their own judgements and reasoning regarding their own identities and the temptation to appropriate others' (e.g. employers') schemes of reasoning as their own. Ultimately this is not a question of freedom versus subjection, but of ways and means by which the employable subject might emerge through discourse.

Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) note that the 'conventional' approach to employability has typically been skills-led, something they refer to as the 'list approach' (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.566).

In this sense, what counts towards employability is represented as a list of skills, behaviours and personal attributes which are expected to be developed over the course of formal education. They identify two key problems with such an approach. Firstly, such lists almost inevitably encompass some attributes that are not priorities for employers, and can miss out some that employers particularly value. Secondly, there is a great deal of difficulty in arriving at an adequate list of attributes that all students should be expected to acquire. The judgement about what would be worthwhile to pursue depends both on the experiences of the individual student and the specifics of the occupation being considered. As a result, by inadequately testing what employers really think about employability, we are left with merely the outcomes of ‘skills-talk’ (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.566), out of which can be compiled ‘nothing better than an employer wish-list’ (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.567). In this sense they reject the notion of a discrete, universal set of employability skills, in contrast to the CBI (2009). This is because of the impossibility of adequately reflecting the perspectives of the whole range of employers.

As an alternative, Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) propose an approach to employability which they term ‘graduate identity’. This is a four-stranded concept comprising of values, intellect, social engagement and performance; these elements are believed to interweave in order to produce a composite identity. During the course of their studies, individual students’ identities are primarily formed through subject disciplines and wider student experiences. However:

once the student emerges out of university, her identity is no longer under her control. Emerging at last into the public domain, her identity as a graduate is shaped by social and economic processes that are not under her control. And the chief agent in shaping this identity—by virtue of economic power—is the employer. (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.565)

Thus graduate identity is something that is shaped and validated by external forces, notably through the economic power wielded by employers. Holmes (2001) argues that the concept of graduate identity sees the idea of the graduate as a sovereign self that acts freely and totally rationally being replaced by that of a social self that is positioned within a set of social relations and a moral order. Thus, while skills-led approaches assume the importance of individuals and their personal attributes, graduate identity incorporates a social dimension. It is an interactionist approach, in the sense that what matters is not so much the formal award of a degree but the extent to which graduates succeed in having their identity affirmed in relation to the social settings for which this is deemed relevant (Holmes, 2001). Hence, employers are in a position to validate, invalidate, negotiate or impose identities on graduates.

It is here that skills-led conceptions of employability reach their limits. Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) argue that employers think beyond what they call the ‘conventional skills discourse’ (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.575) in order to explore a broader range of graduate experience to assess their potential. Graduate identity is linked strongly to the idea of a graduate’s potential, or how the employer decides that a graduate is likely to fulfil particular requirements. The need to construct an identity encompassing values, intellect, social engagement and performance underpins the specific activities relating to employability (e.g. CV writing and interview performance). Thus the notion of graduate identity brings to the fore an important element of employability that is more abstract than the supposedly objective and measurable skills and behaviours accounted for in skills-centred approaches. The graduate identity discourse, for example, enables employability to be considered as an outcome of disciplinary study and not just as a discrete set of skills. Indeed:

Our studies suggest that universities and government would be better employed promoting student employability indirectly through the promotion of graduate identity and well-being (through the provision of opportunities for functioning) rather than directly through employability skills. (Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011, p.582)

The reference to ‘functioning’ here echoes Sen’s (1999) concept of capabilities, in the sense of having real opportunities to function as opposed to a generalised potential. Thus, the key to applying the graduate identity approach to higher education concerns ways of helping students to make their claims on their graduate identity (Holmes, 2001). Students, in order for their claims to be validated, ‘should seek to articulate what they claim they can do in terms that relate to the practices relevant to the occupational settings they wish to enter’ (Holmes, 2001, p.117). Thus it is not sufficient to demonstrate relevant knowledge, behaviours, attitudes and technical skills; the key is to present these in ways that resonate with and win the approval of gatekeepers to employment. Part of this involves developing fluency in the use of the vocabulary of skills and attributes that are relevant to the occupational settings in question. Making claims to employability through graduate identity thus requires a kind of ‘persuasive communication’ (Holmes, 2001, p.118), creating impressions as opposed to presenting detailed, objective evidence.

Employability as graduate identity thus rests on successfully passing an appraisal made by someone else. It is contingent on presenting oneself as a subject that corresponds to the expectations of those in a position to (in)validate that form of subjectivity. Ball (2013) describes subjectivity as the possibility of lived experience within a political and economic context that enables the (historically contingent) identities that we claim. To become a subject

is thus to be related to someone else through dependence or control, and/or to be tied to one's own identity through conscience or self-knowledge. Subjectivity is a site of power over us, and thus also a site of resistance and our struggle to be free. When employability is presented in terms of the validity (or otherwise) of the identities we present, then employability can be said to represent a process of subjection; we are being made subjects in particular ways. Ball (2013) draws on Foucault's notion of *assujettissement*, or the idea that there is no 'self' that is ontologically prior to power, no pre-formed subject upon which power can act. Thus, the very process of anticipating employers' expectations and presenting oneself for evaluation is a process of subjection through which students either emerge as 'employable graduates' or not, as the case may be. Viewed this way, the subjectivity associated with employability might appear to be to exchange freedom for the material rewards of the labour market. In doing so, our selves emerge in particular ways. It might even be argued that there is no such thing as the 'employable graduate' until that graduate begins their preparations to enter the labour market.

A parallel may be drawn with Foucault's (2010b) interpretation of Kant's notion of *tutelage*. Tutelage is 'man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another' (Kant, 2015, n.p.). Where this tutelage is self-incurred, argues Kant (2015), it indicates not a lack of ability to reason and use one's understanding, but a lack of courage to do so. Individuals can thus be said to be under a state of tutelage when they are capable of taking charge of their own conduct, yet for some reason do not do so. Where the conduct of such individuals is conducted by others, Foucault (2010b) notes, this is not an indicator of natural dependence, nor juridical or political dispossession of rights, nor of an illegitimate form of authority exercising its dominance. Rather, such individuals do not wish to conduct themselves and willingly allow others to do so. Kant (2015) suggests that taking the step of using one's own capacity to reason is perceived as a risk: 'quite apart from its being arduous [it] is seen to by those guardians who have so kindly assumed superintendence over them' (Kant, 2015, n.p.). Thus, it is easier and safer to allow others to make such judgements for us. Kant associates this self-incurred tutelage with being in a permanent state of childhood or immaturity, since:

It is so easy not to be of age. If I have a book which understands for me, a pastor who has a conscience for me, a physician who decides my diet, and so forth, I need not trouble myself. I need not think, if I can only pay – others will easily undertake the irksome work for me. (Kant, 2015, n.p.)

Note also that some of Kant's translators prefer the terms *nonage* or *immaturity* instead of tutelage. This condition of tutelage, argues Foucault, represents 'a vitiated relationship between the government of self and the government of others' (Foucault, 2010b, p.32). This relationship is vitiated with regard to the use that may be made of one's reason. It implies a sub-optimal return from the relationships between those who would guide or direct and those who are guided or directed. When we are in a state of tutelage, we do not devote 'our resolve, strength and courage to having the relationship of autonomy with ourselves which enables us to make use of our reason and morality' (Foucault, 2010b, p.33). Thus, a state of tutelage is characterised by a non-use of our own faculties; an unwillingness to think and judge for ourselves, or an ingrained fear of doing so. This implies a failure to overcome those obstacles to achieving independence of thought and freedom from the intellectual control of others that Kant (2015) associates with tutelage. Instead, we substitute the judgements and faculties of others for our own. Kant identifies three key authorities that act as sources of judgements that we tend to substitute for our own: the book, the spiritual director, and the doctor. It is the interplay of these three authorities in relation to ourselves that defines our dependence (Foucault, 2010b). Crucially, we place ourselves in states of tutelage when we confuse obedience with a lack of reasoning, and when we suppress what ought to be our universal (i.e. non-particular) use of our own reasoning (Foucault, 2010b).

The notion of tutelage can be related to the notion of graduate identity insofar as Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) designate the employer as the chief agent of shaping the identity of the 'employable' graduate. This connection hinges on the difference between 'public' and 'private' activity. For Kant's notion of tutelage, 'private' activity is that related to an individual's particular role in a given system (Foucault, 2010b). It is activity particular to a given situation, directed only at a specific set of others. By contrast, we engage in 'public' activity when we 'place ourselves in a universal element in which we can figure as a universal subject' (Foucault, 2010b, p.36); in other words, we address ourselves as a rational being to *all other* rational beings. By definition, if the assessment of a graduate's employability took place only within the narrow confines of the relationship between one graduate and one employer, then this would constitute private behaviour. However, in an era where graduate employability has become a strategic concern of universities, and when social media is increasingly used by recruiters as a means of evaluating potential recruits (e.g. Woodley and Silvestri, 2014), the projection of an 'image' of employability becomes something that transcends the particularity of relationships. Graduates, when encouraged to reflect the 'conventional' perspectives of employers through the way they present themselves, might in

effect be encouraged to substitute employers' reasoning, or others' perceptions of employers' reasoning, for their own. One might therefore argue that students, in the name of graduate employability, are being encouraged to enter into a state of Kantian tutelage in order to become the employable subject.

However, the connection between subjection and freedom is not quite as simple. Besley (2005) draws on Foucault's notion that specific 'truth games' have developed knowledge and techniques to enable people to understand themselves; she notes that, in his later years, Foucault's thinking shifted, from conceiving the relationship between subjectivity and games of truth from coercive or theoretical-scientific discourses towards emphasising games of truth as an ascetic practice of self-formation. In this sense, 'ascetic' means the exercise of self upon the self in order to achieve a transformation. This serves to position care of the self as a practice of freedom. However, a strange logic can arise here. Subjectivity is the site of power over us, and also of resistance and a struggle to be free (Ball, 2013). Technologies of power come to bear upon and constitute the self (Besley, 2005). Yet power can only be exercised over free individuals who have a range of possibilities of behaviour (Ball, 2013). So in order to exercise freedom through the care of the self, the self must be constituted through domination to some extent by others. Freedom must therefore be (partially) lost in order to be won. Furthermore, to lose freedom may be a deliberate exercise of freedom. Applying this to the notion of employability, the desire to become an 'employable graduate' may lead to a deliberate attempt to form oneself in accordance with the expectations of others.

Transformation of the self through subjection is therefore not merely a product of coercion or control, but as something that may be actively sought and freely entered into. This resonates with Foucault's (1988a) rejection of a conventional conception of power as being controlling, repressive and negative. To subject oneself, or be subjected by others, can therefore be thought of as a practice of freedom, particularly when the transformation achieved through education gives the individual a wider field of possibilities from which to choose. As Ball (2013) notes, this encourages us to move beyond subjection, discipline and normalisation in order to consider the truth of freedom and the freedom of truth.

2.6 Employability as a credential

Related to graduate identity is the idea of credentialism. Credentialism is the construction of barriers to entry (e.g. to a profession) through different forms of certification (Edwards, 2014). Discourses of employability based on graduate identity concern the ability of graduates to make successful claims to gatekeepers of employment that they are worthy of employment.

Discourses of employability based on credentialism switch the focus from the graduate to the gatekeeper and the various formal and informal credential systems that serve to regulate access to occupational settings. In this way, credentialist discourses of employability become as much a function of the popular reputation of the degree-awarding institution as of the ‘objective’ qualities of its graduates. Such discourses suggest the value of investigating how notions of institutional reputation come to bear on academics in relation to the outcomes obtained by their students.

What is consistently in contest is the ‘truth’ of the employable graduate, i.e. on the form of discourse of truth and the institutions through which it is produced (Foucault, 1980). It is in this vein that Foucault offers the following connection between individuals in their specificity with a prevailing regime of truth; here he uses the intellectual as his example:

It seems to me that what must now be taken into account in the intellectual is not the ‘bearer of universal values’. Rather, it’s the person occupying a specific position – but whose specificity is linked, in a society like ours, to the general functioning of an apparatus of truth. In other words, the intellectual has a threefold specificity: that of his class position... that of his conditions of life and work... [and] lastly, the specificity of the politics of truth in our societies. (Foucault, 1980, p.132)

Thus, the constitution of an individual recognised as an intellectual is an interrelation of social status, of the specific content and circumstances of his/her work, and of the prevailing conditions through which the ‘truth’ of the intellectual might be determined at any given moment. The notion of the intellectual is therefore not timeless or universal but emerges through the intersection of these three factors. It may be argued, then, that certain markers or indicators, when viewed in relation to the techniques of truth surrounding the employable graduate may serve to identify one as employable in comparison to those who occupy different social positions.

Here, Foucault offers a connection with Bourdieu’s (1998) conception of societies as social spaces, in which individuals occupy relative positions, existing and subsisting through the differences that can be described between them. The configuration of objective relations between the positions occupied by individuals constitutes a field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The distribution of positions within a field can be related to possession of economic capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992). The credentials that one can present thus represent a claim to a particular position. In terms of higher education, the most visible form of credential – and the one most likely to be relied upon by graduates, at least in the immediate aftermath of graduation – is the degree award. At its simplest, merely being a

graduate represents a form of credentialism. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) argue that degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills represents a central concept of graduate employability on the grounds that many graduate-level vacancies are open to graduates of any discipline. Furthermore, the mere fact of successfully completing a degree course is perhaps the most recognisable piece of evidence available to the employer of a graduate's potential to perform. A further example of credentialism relates to the reputation of the higher education institution or key components of that institution. Stenstrom *et al.* (2013), for example, argue that the reputation of the department in which a doctoral degree was pursued is a stronger predictor of employment success than either the reputation of the school as a whole and the individual accomplishments of the graduate, such that 'equally accomplished applicants for an employment position are not equal, apparently, if they graduated from differently ranked departments' (Stenstrom *et al.*, 2013, p.215). Such a dynamic suggests the emergence of a hierarchy of departments and institutions, leading to the identification of 'elite' institutions; Abramo and D'Angelo (2014) associate this with the fostering of competition between institutions.

Dunn (2014) draws a distinction between 'education-as-knowledge' and 'education-as-credential'. Education-as-knowledge refers to the absolute quality of education as a body of knowledge, whereas education-as-credential indicates the conferring of social advantage through the holding of qualifications. Where formal educational qualifications function as the primary form of credential, a credentialist discourse of employability might indicate that the most prestigious jobs would tend to go to the most highly qualified. Wolf (2002) offers a connection between credentialism and social mobility. Becoming a teacher has been regarded as the 'classic means of social mobility... This was even more true for women than for men (and is still the case in many developing countries today)' (Wolf, 2002, p.6). Lin and Lin (2011) characterise this as a demand-side phenomenon, noting that parents in Taiwan connect qualifications with social status, regardless of the (mis)match between education levels and job skill requirements. This suggests that educational credentials may be relevant to more than just an individual's position within a workplace setting; credentials seem to suggest an association between position in the labour force and position within society overall. In this way, employability can be associated with the opportunities available to graduates to occupy social positions.

Formal credential systems can be as simple as requiring a specific qualification in order to be considered eligible for a job. This may be supplemented by a wider set of criteria. For example, admission as a solicitor in England and Wales requires the completion of academic

and vocational training, the compliance with admission regulations and the meeting of a test of character and suitability (Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2014). Similarly, the Teachers' Standards for the maintained school sector in England require the award of Qualified Teacher Status through the demonstration of a range of skills, knowledge and behaviours (Department for Education, 2013). Teachers in the maintained sector in England must hold a first degree or equivalent qualification, whether granted by a UK or foreign institution (SI 2003/1662). While this particular example of credentialism is becoming less relevant with the conversion of schools in England to academy status (Department for Education, 2012), it is included here to illustrate a pervasive form of credentialism that has been in widespread operation in public life.

The 'relevant' credentials for an occupational setting can also be articulated informally. Using the example of the public relations industry, Edwards (2014) argues that the texts associated with an occupational or professional setting 'communicate powerful ideological messages about who does and does not belong' (Edwards, 2014, p.328). The disciplinary discourses that are created and circulated construct practice and identity in ways that produce a system of informal credentialism which contributes to occupational closure. The inherent tendency of occupational fields is therefore to exclude, rather than include, difference and diversity; this tendency can be difficult to challenge. This suggests a rather pessimistic perspective – that employability is a question of face-fitting, standing out from the crowd by identifying as 'one of us'. Depending on the predominant attitudes and discourses of the occupational setting, this may be entirely beyond the power of the graduate or higher education to change or challenge. This may be particularly so when informal credentialism is extended to a hierarchy of higher education institutions. Criteria such as being a first-class graduate from a Russell Group institution may represent an unspoken norm of the particular professional or industrial setting; the prevalence of such criteria may automatically exclude some graduates from some occupations at the point of accepting a place at university.

Discourses of employability grounded in credentialism have the potential to be detached from the 'realities' of the labour market. Lin and Lin (2011) argue that credentialism has the potential to cause what they call a problem of over-education, where degree-educated workers become unemployed or are forced to accept jobs that require fewer skills than they actually have. It might be suggested that expanding access to higher education, thereby increasing the number of graduates and thus diluting the value of a degree as a differentiator, might cause a society to become less focused on the value of education-as-credential. However, Lin and Lin's (2011) study does not support this position. Instead of credentialism

diminishing, attention has switched from the mere fact of being a graduate to the reputation of the degree-awarding institution.

Credentialism, then, serves as a sorting mechanism. Whether it is the employer who sifts applications looking for first class degrees from Russell Group institutions, or the university that demands a certain set of entry qualifications, at each step of students' journeys through higher education they are ordered and assigned to their places. A parallel might be drawn with Foucault's (2005) notion of the *historical a priori*, which O'Farrell (2005) likens to a table on which items can be sorted and ordered; it is the dimensions and characteristics of the table itself that suggests the possible ordering that might take place. The *historical a priori* is a 'cultural 'table-top' which allows orders to emerge' (O'Farrell, 2005, p.62). Foucault writes:

This a priori is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true. (Foucault, 2005, p.172)

In the credentials that lead to employment, at any given point in time, we might be able to discern something of the conditions that allow an idea of employability to emerge. Before the transition to a mass system of higher education, it might have been suggested that merely being a graduate marked one out from the vast majority of one's peers who were not. By comparison, the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) explicitly identified a role for higher education in promoting 'skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.6), thereby allowing a new way of sorting graduates according to the skills they develop - and by extension, privileging some degree subjects over others; and so a new table-top emerges that allows graduates to be ranked and sorted in new ways. The way in which credentialism plays out may therefore open a window on the historical conditions that have allowed discourses of employability to emerge.

Credentials can be used to assume a compatibility between one set of institutional values and another; in this way, they can act as a kind of passport from one social situation to another.

Mendoza *et al.* (2012) write:

Those who are located in close proximity within social fields are placed under similar conditions and subject to similar factors; therefore, they are likely to exhibit common dispositions and interests that translate into similar practices and representations. In other words, those in close proximity in social fields share the same habitus. (Mendoza *et al.*, 2012, pp.559-560)

In this way, credentials are assumed to be a representation of habitus in Bourdieu's (1998) sense of dispositions that are interpreted by others as signals of one's likely location in a social space. Participation in certain activities or possession of certain goods are associated with the occupation of certain positions within a given social system (Bourdieu, 1998); it is thus likely that the qualifications possessed by an individual act in a similar way. Having the 'right' degree from the 'right' university acts as a signal to the employer that they are likely to fit in, to share the ethos and values of their fellow employees. They act as signals that the prospective employee is likely to work well with their colleagues, be amenable to the instructions of the leadership and so forth. This application of credentials to employability relies heavily on those graduates from the 'right' universities being consistently and reliably effective as employees; this allows the selection on the basis of institutional credential to be held up as objective and meritocratic, and not merely a reproduction of the social status quo. Yet the claim to meritocracy of such an approach to employability seems to rely heavily on universities and their feeder schools exercising meritocratic admissions systems. As such, the less meritocratic the university entrance process, the less meritocratic the notion of employability as defined by credentials. Considering employability to be a form of credentialism thus might allow 'illusory' notions of meritocracy to be dispelled; in this sense, employability is revealed to be a sorting mechanism that is based on assumptions made about graduates' qualities according to proxy indicators. It opens up a means of critiquing the perceived stratification of institutions and their graduates. This project offers the possibility of interrogating such notions of meritocracy by locating them within the relations of power that exist around the university student. It has the potential to open up new possibilities for inquiry into those relations by offering an account of their emergence in the context of the United Kingdom. In doing so it offers the potential to reframe the 'problem' of the stratification of higher education institutions and the 'common currency' of the term 'university'.

2.7 The futility of models of graduate employability

The preceding five types of discourse indicate that employability is far from a simple concept. While there is potentially merit in all of these perspectives, no single perspective adequately deals with the complexity of what allows a graduate to transition successfully into working life. As such, none of them are entirely useful on their own as guides to action for staff and students in higher education. In light of this, there have been attempts to bridge this complexity by proposing holistic models of employability. This section outlines some of the key attempts to create models of graduate employability in the context of the United

Kingdom. It argues that such models signal to students and higher education staff the kinds of conduct and personal qualities that are compatible with certain notions of the employable graduate, and sets out why this thesis does not propose a new model of employability.

Knight and Yorke (2002) attempt to go beyond skills-led approaches by proposing what they call the USEM account of employability. USEM represents understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs and metacognition. They argue that skills-driven curricula typically privilege knowledge and skills at the expense of self-efficacy and reflection. Based on the view that employers are broadly satisfied with graduates' disciplinary skills but less so with their generic attainments, USEM brings these more generic attainments closer to the foreground. The USEM model holds that employability and good learning are highly correlated (Yorke and Knight, 2006). In particular, the promotion of complex outcomes of learning are emphasised as the distinguishing character of learning in higher education. Yorke and Knight (2006) hold complex learning to have four characteristics: the mastery of large amounts of material that is abstract and sometimes contradictory, along with the adoption of more sophisticated understandings; the necessity of sustained practice over a long time; the need for tacit knowledge and practical intelligence alongside academic intelligence; and its non-determinate nature. A concern to promote graduate employability is thus a concern for the promotion of achievements that are manifestations of complex learning. This stands in contrast with the 'key skills' agenda which, it is argued, has been received as 'narrowly conceived, relatively mechanical, and inimicable to the purposes of higher education' (Yorke and Knight, 2006, p.567). USEM thus attempts to offer an account that is 'distinctive, compatible with what many universities advertise in their mission statements, and practicable' (Knight and Yorke, 2002, p.264).

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) argue that there are four key elements to any model of employability. Firstly, it needs to have value in informing the planning of programmes and structured interventions. Secondly, it must be easily explainable to students, parents and academics. Thirdly, it must have value in knowledge transfer activities, for example from university to businesses. Fourthly, it must be adaptable for use with groups other than students and new graduates, for example career changers or those facing redundancy. While noting the extent to which it has been addressed by scholarly work on employability, they argue that Knight and Yorke's USEM model does not provide the ability to explain to non-experts (particularly students and parents) what is meant by employability. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) propose what they call the CareerEDGE model, which connects a number of fundamental skills, knowledge and experiences with a layer of self-reflection, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. The model assumes that each component is absolutely essential,

such that one missing element will considerably reduce a graduate's employability. Perhaps the most notable feature of this model is the packaging of 'degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills' (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007, p.28) – the major focus and content of students' university experiences - as but one factor among several. Furthermore, the model implies only an indirect connection between subject knowledge and employability. Employability is instead generated through a layer of mediating processes including reflection and evaluation, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. These appear to echo what Foucault calls:

Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988b, p.18)

According to this model, then, promoting employability through higher education rests to a not insignificant extent on the ability of the university to facilitate its students in creating coherence and order out of the milieu of their experiences. This is a very deliberate activity that is aimed at inducing students to transform themselves into employable graduates. What is contested are the ways in which this transformation can and should take place, and the criteria by which happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and so forth can and ought to be judged.

Jackson (2014) proposes a model of undergraduates' competence in employability skills, derived from both literature of stakeholder perceptions of graduate performance in certain skills and 'conventional wisdom, the latter particularly in regard to the included demographic variables' (Jackson, 2014, p.224). The model assumes these to be independent variables; these were measured through self-reporting by students. In this sense it appears to resonate with self-efficacy discourses of employability. Interestingly, the inclusion of demographic values such as sex, age and continent of birth is an attempt to introduce finer-grain contextual dimension to employability, something which generally appears to be lacking in the literature on employability. Sex is included to explore suggestions that females report greater skill development as undergraduates, while continent of birth is related to suggestions that international students rate their competency levels lower than locals. Jackson (2014) argues that the study 'reaffirms the collective importance of life spheres on undergraduates' perceived competence in certain employability skills' (Jackson, 2014, p.236), perhaps implying that the development of graduate employability is not solely driven by the formal educational setting. Further, in suggesting that competence in certain employability skills aids academic

development, Jackson argues that this model supports Knight and Yorke's argument that the divide between academic and employability skills is imaginary.

In contrast to the CareerEDGE model (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007), Jackson's (2014) model views employability less as a product of metacognition than as a sum total of one's life experiences to date. There is no set of processes mediating between knowledge, experience and employability; instead, the emergence of employability for the individual has more in common with Bourdieu's notion of habitus as 'embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history... the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu, 1992, p.56). In this sense, recognising the existence of employability skills in oneself requires becoming aware of one's habitus and the context out of which it is formed. Furthermore, Jackson's specific emphasis on employability skills, as opposed to an abstract concept of employability, suggests that it encapsulates a human capital discourse of employability. Thus, reflecting on one's employability skills through the lens of Jackson's model might involve recalling instances where skills relevant to an employment context have been performed. The outcome of such reflection might be to position employability as a concept that enables graduates to transition from one set of life experiences (dominated by formal education) to another (dominated by work).

Integrated models of employability carry with them an interesting ethical dimension. Assume, for the sake of argument, that such models are promoted with the best of intentions – for example, to increase a student's chances of leading a life they have reason to value, or to enhance the opportunities of those from less advantaged groups to participate effectively in the labour market. Implementing a holistic model of employability may represent 'a strong commitment to emancipation while relying on often very directive, precise and hierarchically structured methodological measures and guidelines' (Quaghebeur *et al.*, 2004, p.154). In other words, by enshrining a set of values in an approach that is common to the university, one is essentially advancing the freedom of the student by channelling and guiding their development. This suggests that, implicit in each overall model of employability, is a concept of what the roles of the teacher and student ought to be. There is a certain irony in the idea of an emancipated, employable graduate whose conduct is strongly regulated by a discourse of employability that implies limits or boundaries to the forms that emancipation can take. As Quaghebeur *et al.* (2004) argue: 'Taking participants seriously, giving them a voice, is never completely neutral, but always also indicates boundaries— designed by the participatory process—delimiting and determining the voice that can be uttered' (Quaghebeur *et al.*, 2004, p.160). As such, even where a model of graduate employability aims at increasing the

effective choices in conduct open to graduates, they are nonetheless grounded in some conception of what an ‘employable’ graduate looks like. Therefore, they represent a process through which the conduct of the graduate can be governed. Such overarching models of employability do not offer a values-neutral idea of the employable graduate; they do not produce a blank canvas on which a thousand pictures can be painted. Quite the opposite – they signal very clearly where the components of employability are to be identified in the words and actions of students; by extension they imply how they are to be pursued.

As a consequence, to present a model of employability as a mere technical response to a problem of ways and means is to divest graduate employability of its disciplinary potentiality and its historical specificity. It is to indulge in what Foucault (1984a) calls as ‘an exclusive concern for utility’ (p.76) without acknowledging ‘knowledge as perspective’ (p.90). As a result, through neglecting those historical twists and turns, those intersections of events and circumstances that signify the emergence of a specific configuration of the idea, models of employability misrecognise their location within relations of knowledge and power and thus become mere abstractions. They are thus destined to become reduced to mere apparatus, and cannot fulfil the promise of becoming comprehensive, timeless approaches to graduate employability. For higher education to propose a ‘better’ model of employability as a response to some crisis in the relation between education and the economy, then, is to abandon the potential of ‘a plurality of resistances’ (Foucault, 1978, p.96) that might precipitate a principled and agentive engagement with the debate.

2.8 Graduate employability as deliberate strategy

This survey of academic literature challenges the idea that employability is something simple, straightforward and singular. On the face of it, all of the discourses described seem to be concerned with the transition from higher education into employment. Yet each one focuses on and emphasises a distinctly different set of factors, some of which appear to be lacking or even absent in others. At this point, an important question to address is: does the term ‘employability’ represent a distinct, unified concept waiting to be identified and described, or might it be something more differentiated – perhaps deliberately constructed and reconstructed over and over again, produced in a given context?

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2010a) explores four bases on which the unity of familiar concepts such as medicine, economics and grammar might be founded. Firstly, that

different statements formed a group if they referred to the same object. Secondly, that statements could be grouped according to their form and type of connection. Thirdly, that a group of statements is defined according to the system of permanent and coherent concepts involved. Fourthly, that the grouping of statements could be made according to the identity and persistence of themes. However, in testing these hypotheses, Foucault (2010a) encounters numerous challenges: a multiplicity of objects, series full of gaps, formulations too heterogeneous to be linked together coherently, concepts that differ in structure and are applied in different ways. In short, none of these hypotheses appeared to offer permanent, coherent, undifferentiated concepts. Indeed, on the permanence of a thematic:

What one finds are rather various strategic possibilities that permit the activation of incompatible themes, or, again, the establishment of the same theme in different groups of statement (Foucault, 2010a, p.37)

What appeared to be significant was not so much the relations between statements, but the way in which these different elements of a concept were dispersed – the gaps, the distances between them:

Hence the idea of describing these dispersions themselves; of discovering whether, between these elements, which are certainly not organized as a progressively deductive structure, nor as an enormous book that is being gradually and continuously written, nor as the *oeuvre* of a collective subject, one cannot discern a regularity: an order in their successive appearance, correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, a reciprocal functioning, linked and hierarchized transformations (Foucault, 2010a, p.37)

Foucault thus offers an alternative possibility for a research methodology: instead of seeking to identify and formulate a positive, unified concept through a system of linkages, commonalities and continuities, one can instead work in the opposite direction. A concept can be described through its discontinuities and its dispersions:

Such an analysis would not try to isolate small islands of coherence in order to describe their internal structure; it would not try to suspect and to reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of division. Or again, instead of reconstituting *chains of inference* (as one often does in the history of the sciences or of philosophy), instead of drawing up *tables of differences* (as the linguists do), it would describe *systems of dispersion*. (Foucault, 2010a, p.37; emphasis in original)

Such an approach might allow a concept to be chronicled in its complexity, defined by its disunity, through what Foucault refers to as ‘discursive formations’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.38) – regularities between dispersions of objects, types of statement, concepts or thematic choices.

Such regularities might appear as ‘an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.38). The elements of these systems can be said to be subject to ‘rules of formation’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.38), which are the conditions of existence, coexistence, maintenance, modification and disappearance of a discursive formation. So might the concept of graduate employability be made up through a multiplicity of discursive formations, each subject to a set of rules of formation, with discernible limits? To test this, one must attempt to discover and define a distinct set of conditions of existence for each discursive formation, that which account for the formation of concepts. This is the broad thrust of Foucault’s archaeological approach. Mahon argues that ‘archaeology treats concepts as elements dispersed throughout discourse that are ordered and whose relations are governed by systems of rules peculiar to the type of discourse in question’ (Mahon, 1992, p.117). Thus, Foucault’s archaeology rejects the assumption that concepts are objects that act as the organising principles of discourse; rather, such objects are formed *through* discourse. Deleuze offers an explanation of Foucault’s method: ‘the words, phrases and propositions examined by the text must be those which revolve around different focal points of power (and resistance) set in play by a particular problem’ (Deleuze, 1999, p.17). To use Deleuze’s example, the question of sexuality in the 19th century is pursued through the words and phrases used in the confessional. Likewise, the concept of graduate employability might be at first approached through the texts produced at its particular points of resistance, such as the university as an institution, government policy, employers and their representatives, students who exercise choices between institutions and courses, and academics who control the content and methods of the education that they offer.

Regarding the formation of objects of discourse, Foucault (2010a) begins by identifying three factors that must be identified. Firstly ‘we must map the first *surfaces* of their *emergence*’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.41; emphasis in original) – in other words, where conceptual codes and types of theory might be designated and analysed. A skills-led approach to employability might include the interactions between employers and universities and the activities of employers’ representatives among its surfaces of emergence; employability-as-employment, by contrast, might suggest the university as a player in a competitive market as the locus of its analysis. Secondly, ‘[w]e must also describe the authorities of delimitation’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.41) – who or what gets to state the boundaries of, name and establish the object of a discourse. The emergence of a skills-led approach to employability might imply the authority of the employer to name the skills and attributes that represent employability, or the authority of the university to compile and prioritise them and decide how they are to be pursued.

Thirdly, ‘we must analyse the *grids of specification*’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.42; emphasis in original) – the systems by which different versions of a concept are described and derived from one another as objects of discourse. In the case of employability this might include considering the idea of the graduate in all its complexity, the subject discipline as a set of values and content, or the employee in relation to the employer.

Furthermore, there is the task of describing ‘a group of relations established between authorities of emergence, delimitation and specification’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.44); in the case of criminality, Foucault gives as examples the relation between the authority of medical decision and the authority of judicial decision. Such relations are established between ‘institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.45). It is these relations that enable objects to appear and their differences and dispersions to be articulated. In the case of employability, a particularly complex set of relations needs to be charted and unpicked. To take one example, the graduate identity approach to employability advanced by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) suggests a relation between the graduate’s authority to define and present themselves as an ‘employable graduate’ according to their judgement, and the authority of the employer to affirm or disaffirm the graduate’s claimed identity. Skills-led approaches, by contrast, suggest a relation between the authority of employers to define what they need from their graduate recruits and the authority of universities and departmental leaders to define what is worth teaching and learning. These are not the limits of the relations that could be established and articulated, but they point the way to the possibility of a rich and detailed analysis.

It is perhaps in this complex group of relations that the most illuminating insights might be found. Quaghebeur *et al.* (2004) reflect on a tension that arises in human development projects, namely that projects directed at improving the lot of a community – aiming at their emancipation and expanding of their opportunities – can rely on ‘very directive, precise and hierarchically structured methodological measures and guidelines’ (Quaghebeur *et al.*, 2004, p.154). Thus, one can be presented with access to ‘better’ outcomes at the expense of being constrained in how one might actually achieve them. Education, argued Warnock (2005), is unique in that it is necessarily directed towards the future. Though she was writing specifically about school-aged children, employability might indicate some currency in this sentiment for higher education. The concept of employability might embody some sense of concern for the actual achievements of students once they have handed back their cap and gown. If so, it remains to be decided whether the means of achieving these future goals are to be achieved is

significant. This hints at a tension between a graduate's perceived success, as affirmed by those in positions of power over them, and a graduate's freedom to achieve in ways that are personally satisfying. The methodology suggested by Foucault may help to crystallise this tension in a way that opens up the possibility of alternative solutions.

Another tension arises in the role of the higher education teacher. It is perhaps tempting to portray employability as an external, instrumental, political-economic agenda that is anathema to academic freedoms and the rigours of the academic discipline. Parker (2003) expresses such sentiments:

The social, political and institutional constraint that most inhibits the way I work? The all-prevailing model of the university as a roll-on-roll-off skilling factory and of anybody challenging that model as rather amateur, rather blinkered clingers to a past Golden Age. (Parker, 2003, p.529)

Parker expresses frustration about her job of education being somehow recast as a quality control exercise, and wonders why higher education teachers have never responded to the skills agenda by saying 'that is not what we do' (Parker, 2003, p.530). Such is a (rather strong) example of the strength of feeling that can be expressed; this seems to posit a direct conflict between the goals of employability and the ideals of higher education – and so the battleground is set. Yet this does not represent the only possible set of positions that could be taken; university teachers are not simply *either* dominated instruments of an economic agenda or independent defenders of the 'real' values of higher education. Jameson *et al.* (2012) identify the potential for a middle ground. They advocate academics 'taking possession of the situation' (Jameson *et al.*, 2012, p.34) of an external pressure to suit economic and political demands; taking opportunities to apply critical thinking to practice has the potential to help preserve academic freedoms. By mapping the web of relations that characterise the concept of employability, it may be that a broader range of potential positions can be identified that allow university teachers to escape from such a black-and-white mode of thinking. This might enable academics to shape a new discourse on employability that preserves and defends what is most cherished about higher education without ignoring economic facts that, in words of John Dewey that are still relevant almost a century after they were written, 'do not cease to operate because we refuse to note them' (Dewey, 1926, p.156).

However, perhaps the most pertinent tension in the role of higher education in fostering employability is between two dynamics: to care for one's students, to enable them to flourish, to increase the range of positions, behaviours, modes of thinking and opportunities available to them, to reduce their dependence and increase their freedom; and to control them, to

mould them, shape them as graduates – employable graduates – according to the imperatives and prerogatives of others with which they will almost certainly have to engage and negotiate. This is fundamentally a moral dilemma. At its heart is a duality in the role of the university teacher, both as an expert exercising authority to (in)validate certain ways of thinking and being, and as a guide through the student's formative journey from one state of being to another. Both roles carry different, potentially contradictory, imperatives – the expert to control, the guide to enable. Freire expresses a similar contradiction, and a hope for its resolution, when he writes:

By denying both the pedagogy of hitting and of permissiveness, let us hope that a new democratic practice will take root, one where authority does not surpass its limits and drown freedom nor is nullified by hypertrophied freedom. Let us hope instead, that by limiting freedom we will limit authority. (Freire, 1996, p.57)

Freire suggests a reciprocity between freedom and authority, and thus between care and control. Employability, positioned as part of the transition between education and employment, can be a useful locus for exploring this reciprocity, this tension. Thinking in terms of the knowledge-power relations that enable certain discourses of employability to appear and play out can help to unravel the complexities underlying this tension. Perhaps, echoing Freire's words, such an exercise may open up new grounds for thinking about the work we do in higher education, for rethinking what is taken for granted – not to deny the employability debate, but to actively shape it. However, this project does offer the possibility of reframing some pertinent and live debates regarding the relation of higher education to graduates' lives and the wider economic and political context. In doing so it has the potential to problematize concepts that might otherwise be treated as natural or fixed; it has the potential to mark out as discursive some concepts that were previously held to be non-discursive.

Thus, the very concept of employability is unmasked as an exercise in knowledge-power relations. It may then be proposed that the five discourses described here are not merely the expression of an original meaning, but as grounded in specific conditions of relation between higher education and others. To uncover and restore to the record those historical conditions that have enabled different discourses of employability to emerge thus requires the rejection of 'the sovereignty of a timeless idea' (Foucault, 1984a, p.91). leading to the pursuit of what Foucault (1984a) calls interpretations:

But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations (Foucault, 1984a, p.86)

It is therefore not sufficient to problematise discourses of graduate employability as mere accidents of history; the possibility emerges of such discourses being component of deliberate strategies to mould and shape the idea of graduate employability, and thus of the mission of higher education.

2.9 Conclusion

Graduate employability, far from being a singular and unified concept, is a more complex notion that emerges through discourse. This is fundamental to the significance of this work. In drawing on the ideas of Foucault and others it has suggested that these discourses of employability have certain implications for individuals in higher education. In outlining these apparently different discourses it has identified two key gaps in the literature: a lack of a historical explanation for the emergence of these discourses; and the absence of explanations of the effects these discourses have on the role of the university. As such, it identifies the two key original contributions to knowledge of this project. This chapter has also indicated the potential of reading graduate employability in terms of relations of power; doing so opens up space for responding to the practical and ethical issues that this analysis suggests. As a result, this project has the potential to offer an understanding of graduate employability that enables a wider range of questions about higher education to be identified. In challenging the assumption that graduate employability is a fixed, uncomplicated notion, it raises the possibility that other aspects of the higher education environment might also not be as fixed and uncomplicated as they might otherwise appear.

3. Towards a Foucauldian genealogy of graduate employability

This chapter sets out and justifies a research methodology centred upon Foucault's concept of genealogy. It demonstrates the relevance of Foucault's conceptual toolkit to the analysis of graduate employability, and addresses the practical and ethical dimensions of a genealogical analysis of higher education policy. In this way it establishes how this research goes beyond previous approaches to the analysis of graduate employability.

Foucault himself offers the following as a characterisation of his work:

I wouldn't want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality. I don't try to universalize what I say; conversely, what I don't say isn't meant to be therefore disqualified as being of no importance. My work takes place between unfinished abutments and anticipatory strings of doubt. I like to open up a space of research, try it out, and then if it doesn't work, try again somewhere else. (Foucault, 1991, pp.73-74)

The premise of this project is that the concept of employability is not a fixed idea, but a discursive one emerging through the intersection of knowledge and power. These discourses are socially constructed and dependent on the social, cultural and historical contexts that make their emergence more likely. It is in the interplay and productive effects of these discourses that the emergence of different notions of higher education can be examined. This will be achieved through analysis of a range of sources that address the relation between higher education and the wider society in the United Kingdom. The higher education environment in the United Kingdom has undergone significant change over the course of the last century. Key policy developments – such as the establishment of the civic universities in the late 19th century, expansion in the wake of the Robbins Report, or the conversion of polytechnics to university status in the 1990s – have reshaped the higher education landscape. Such changes have brought into question the purpose, value and goals of higher education. At each stage, the relationship between a university education and the future life prospects of its graduates has been transformed. It is therefore likely that a new discourse – or, more probably, set of discourses – of graduate employability in relation to higher education has emerged at each stage. This project therefore does not look for a flowing narrative, nor does it attempt to propose a monolithic idea of employability. Instead, it is concerned with the individual points of emergence, the discontinuities, the breaks – not signposts on the motorway, but the emergence of entirely different journeys. Echoing Foucault (1991), it makes

no claim to totality, but seeks to open up the discursive analysis of graduate employability as a field of study.

Key to a coherent analysis is a clear conceptualisation of the problems to be addressed. Garland (2014) argues that 'much of the critical efficacy of Foucault [sic] genealogies is attributable not to his historical analyses but instead to his initial explanation of the problem to be explained' (Garland, 2014, p.377). An example is offered by way of illustration. In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995), Foucault juxtaposes an account of the execution in the mid-18th century with a timetable for a prison for young offenders in the early 19th century. This technique allows Foucault to introduce the premise of the shift in the object of punishment from the body to the soul, which leads to his intent to chart the emergence of 'the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules, from which it extends its effects and by which it masks its exorbitant singularity' (Foucault, 1995, p.23). Foucault then states the basis for his research:

by an analysis of penal leniency as a technique of power, one might understand both how man, the soul, the normal or abnormal individual have come to duplicate crime as objects of penal intervention; and in what way a specific mode of subjection was able to give birth to man as an object of knowledge for a discourse with a 'scientific' status. (Foucault, 1995, p.24)

Thus, Foucault locates the study of techniques of power as enabling an analysis of how different configurations of concepts such as the 'abnormal individual' create the conditions for specific forms of subjection, and thus disciplining through various techniques of power, of the individual.

This present project starts from the premise that employability is not some natural, empirical concept that is easily definable and measurable. Rather, like Foucault's conception of penal leniency, it can be conceived as a technique of power, caught up in a conflict between the imperatives of education and academic disciplines, the interests of universities as institutions, the hopes and ambitions of students, the demands and expectations of employers, and the particularities of government policy with respect to higher education and the economy. The goal of the project is thus to show how various relations of power give rise to historicised discourses of employability. This points to a network of interests – national, institutional, personal, economic, social, educational - that characterise the disciplining of higher education at particular times. By reconstructing the historical, contextual nature of graduate

employability, new possibilities for the interrogation of higher education's relation to the employability of its graduates might be identified.

3.2 Foucauldian genealogy as a research method

This section discusses Foucault's notion of genealogy. It argues for the selection of genealogy as the key approach to responding to the project's research questions.

If graduate employability in its present forms is a relatively recent notion, then writing its history is not a mere matter of looking back into history to find it. Rather, the focus must shift away from the hunt for a pure, pre-formed concept in order to access the conditions that have enabled graduate employability to emerge in the forms that it appears to take. In the first of his lectures given at the College de France in 1983, Foucault (2010b) offers an exposition of his study of madness that is at once beautifully clear and highly illuminating. Rather than considering madness to be 'an unchanging object throughout history on which systems of representation with variable representational functions and values have been brought to bear' (Foucault, 2010b, p.3), Foucault set about analysing the concepts of madness in three ways. Firstly, madness is analysed as a cultural experience from which different forms of knowledge had emerged. The study of the *forms* of knowledge, or the practices that enable certain bodies of knowledge to be, supersedes the study of the *content* of knowledge. Secondly, madness is analysed as a set of norms against which both 'deviant' and 'normal' behaviour could be identified. This was not a question of analysing the norm itself, or power as an object, or even institutional forms of domination. Rather, Foucault (2010b) is concerned with analysing the *exercise* of power, for example the ways in which the conduct of individuals is conducted by others. Thirdly, the concept of madness is analysed as constitutive of a certain way of being for the 'normal' subject as compared with the 'mad' subject. This entailed a shift away from analysing the subject itself, towards the analysis of 'forms of subjectivation through the techniques/technologies of the relation to self' (Foucault, 2010b, p.5). Through these shifts in the focus of analysis, Foucault opens up new approaches to conceiving of concepts that seem, at first glance, to be fixed features of our shared existence.

Walters (2012) identifies three modes (or styles) of genealogy: genealogy as the tracing of descent; genealogy as re-historicisation or the production of counter-memories; and genealogy as the recalling of forgotten struggles and subjugated knowledges. While these do not represent the full extent of how genealogy might be applied, Walters's classification does represent a useful way of unpacking and bringing some methodological structure to a concept that 'defies any attempt at neat encapsulation' (Walters, 2012, p.114). Genealogy as descent

is the tracing of multiple pathways through which certain ideas or concepts might have emerged. Likening genealogy as descent to the tracing of a family tree, Walters (2012) argues that its role is to ‘ponder over that tangle of bloodlines with its play of conjurations, the intersection of lives and events that culminate to produce you and your immediate family’ (Walters, 2012, p.117). Tracing the descent of a concept is to identify the specificities and contingencies that have intersected to form a concept or practice in a particular form. In this sense it is a process of developing ‘highly detailed histories’ (Walters, 2012, p.118), distinguished by a high degree of specificity that enables a debate to move beyond the discussion of homogenised processes. Walters (2012) argues that this style of genealogy can help to detect subtle shifts in logic, and to access specificities of concepts, systems and contexts. As a result it lends itself to comparative analysis (Walters, 2012) inasmuch as its focus on specificities allows for meaningful comparisons and contrasts to be drawn.

Genealogy as counter-memory sets out to unsettle established concepts by removing them from their usual frames and placing them in new series (Walters, 2012). It is characterised by reading the logic of a concept against another, unfamiliar concept. The example that Walters (2012) gives is the reading of new theories of geopolitical regionalisation against theories of imperialism, rather than the more usual interpretation in terms of neo-liberalism. This style of genealogy has the potential to offer new perspectives on existing concepts by ‘testing’ them in new circumstances and from other perspectives. Given that this style of genealogy operates on the level of concepts, it is less focused on small details than genealogy as descent. As such, it relies on concepts being reasonably coherent and internally consistent in order to form the basis for analysis – there must be a discernible, describable logic to a concept that can be tested against other concepts or contexts. By contrast, this project begins from the premise that the notion of employability does not represent a single concept with a well-defined logic, but is a common term applied to a number of different concepts. To undertake genealogy as counter-memory requires as a starting point that these different concepts of employability are clearly defined and are able to be distinguished from one another.

Genealogy as the recalling of forgotten struggles is the attempt to reveal the conflicts between perspectives that occurred at various times in the emergence of a concept. It ‘refuses to read the fact of the victory of the ultimate winners backwards into history, making it an explanation for their eventual success’ (Walters, 2012, p.134). From this perspective, uncovering forgotten conflicts and debates in order to chart the emergence of a concept may be a means of challenging a dominant status quo. It is an approach that makes visible groups and other collectives as actors (Walters, 2012). It is thus concerned with foregrounding a range of

perspectives and motivations and connecting these with the development of the concept in question. By delving into this intersection of perspectives, and also interests, one might interrogate a concept by questioning simplistic or surface readings. Furthermore, Walters (2012) argues that this style of genealogy reminds us that ‘there is always... an element of drift between the conditions and strategic purposes that surround the birth of a particular practice, and its present use and meaning’ (Walters, 2012, p.139). In this mode, genealogy is concerned with breaks in meanings of concepts from one time to another, or from one context to another. For example, such an approach might be used to argue that employability, in the context of UK higher education, may be concerned with more than getting students into work; interrogating the conflicts and forgotten meanings that have come into play at various points in history then offers the possibility of multiple and alternative understandings.

These modes, argues Walters (2012), are not mutually exclusive, nor are they water-tight compartments. Rather, they exhibit significant overlaps and similarities. Saar (2002) notes that all genealogies involve a structural reflexivity, or a systematic criticism and questioning of patterns of interpretation of one’s own culture. In this sense they are means of attempting to step out of dominant perspectives by deliberately examining ideas from other (perhaps subjugated) perspectives. As Saar (2002) argues, this means that genealogy as a form of criticism can only be self-criticism – the starting point is always oneself, one’s own cultural milieu. This consists of ‘installing a devaluating, delegitimizing vocabulary within genetic descriptions of existing norms and values’ (Walters, 2012, p.237). All three of Walters’s (2012) styles of genealogy offer routes towards this self-criticism. In the case of genealogy as descent, it is in identifying specificities, contingencies and fine details. Genealogy as counter-memory is the juxtaposing of familiar concepts against ideas with which they are not normally associated. Genealogy as forgotten struggles does so by positioning a dominant perspective as but one perspective that has emerged from a range of other possibilities, thus dismissing the temptation to regard the present situation as an inevitability.

3.3 Practical considerations arising through Foucauldian genealogy

Producing a genealogy is, perhaps obviously, an exercise in examining and (re)interpreting historical records. This implies a heavy reliance on written documents as the primary means of accessing what has been said about higher education. Indeed, Foucault characterises of genealogy as ‘patiently documentary’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.76) and reliant on large amounts of source material. In the case of graduate employability these might include academic texts, government policy documents, the policies and other materials of universities, histories of the

university (in general) and universities (in particular), and other records of day-to-day life in universities. Olsen (2012) likewise characterises document analysis as reliant on a large amount of text, along with background knowledge of language, history, and local milieus, norms and idioms; such work calls for careful and principled selection of material, and an explicit recognition and treatment of the particularities of the environments out of which they emerge. Best (2012) draws a distinction between the manifest meanings of words identified in a text and their latent ideological meanings. As a result, to work merely at the level of the words expressed in a text risks engaging in what Best calls '*repetition speculation*... in which meaning is assigned to key words with no account of how the meaning is arrived at' (Best, 2012, p.187). To avoid this, texts selected for this project will be justified on the basis of how representative they are of the 'mainstream' of the situation being described. In practice this means preferring contemporary, primary sources as opposed to secondary, synthetic analyses. However, where a secondary source is used (due, for example, to the non-availability of primary sources), care must be taken to justify its inclusion on the basis of the sources on which it draws and the particular perspectives that it implies.

A further consequence of the possibility of pluralism of meaning and interpretation inherent in such a process is that 'reliability is much less of a value in its own right than one might expect' (Olsen, 2012, p.81). In particular, to regard a notion as discursive is to reject the suggestion that it exists prior to discourse (Foucault, 2010a). Thus, the production of a genealogy is not an exercise in producing an ever more generalizable or scientifically reliable definition of a concept, but an ever more detailed illustration of the circumstances and contexts in which different configurations of that concept might have emerged. What is of interest are the 'systems of dispersion' (Foucault, 2010a, p.37) that might be associated with these different configurations. Such an approach offers a defence against what Best, in relation to biographical research, calls 'over-interpreting respondents' accounts by imposing meanings and motivations that may not be present in the original life story' (Best, 2012, p.169). This is achieved by placing each part of the analysis clearly in its own historical context. It is these processes by which different configurations of a concept emerge that offer opportunities to critique the present situation, rather than the transposition of one set of meanings from one context to another.

Given that such a range of documentary evidence exists and is likely to come into play, a key question is how to logically organise the findings of this large-scale documentary analysis. One approach would be to divide the history of UK higher education into several distinct phases that represent distinct events in which the relation between university education and

progression to work can be interrogated. It could be argued that discontinuities might be identified between the prominent discourses of each moment, and that these can offer insight into the consequences for academics. In this way, these phases would offer starting points for analysis. This approach likens the history of higher education to the study of geology: 'Strata are laid down at different times, in differing ways, and for different purposes, but once there are irremovable' (Watson, 2014a, p.1). The implication here is that each stratum, linked to a particular phase of history, coincides with a particular set of discursive formations that can be interrogated in isolation. Just as geological strata exhibit clear boundaries and discontinuities, so too can historical strata. The task becomes one of describing and interrogating these strata in order to produce new insights.

However, to presuppose such a correspondence between historical era and discursive formation risks falling back into a 'traditional' approach of writing history as a consistent narrative, one which assumes that *A* leads to *B* leads to *C* and so forth. To make this assumption as the basis of a research methodology would be to miss what Veyne (1984), one of Foucault's close collaborators, argues makes Foucault's genealogies distinct:

The Foucault-style genealogy-history thus completely fulfils the project of traditional history; it does not ignore society, the economy, and so on, but it structures this material differently – not by centuries, peoples, or civilizations, but by practices. The plots it relates are the history of the practices in which men have seen truths and of their struggles over these truths. (Veyne, 1984, p.181)

Thus, a Foucauldian genealogy is not *primarily* concerned with describing what happened at a particular time or in a particular place; it is not the story of how one era gave way to another, nor does it put into sequence how phenomena are experienced at different points in the past. Rather, it is this focus on practices as the key organising principle that constitutes a subtle, yet significant, difference. Foucault (1990), in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality Volume 2*, describes the methodological journey that he embarked upon following the completion of the first volume. His original intention had been to chart a history of the term sexuality 'in order to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyse the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated' (Foucault, 1990, p.3). However, in determining the need for a more thorough analysis of desire and the desiring subject, Foucault concluded that such an analysis needed to take precedence over the more straightforward historical survey that he had formerly planned. Thus the 'games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject' (Foucault, 1990, p. 6) became central to

Foucault's approach. The practices, not the periods, became the organising principle for his work.

Reliance on a metaphor of geological strata, then, would fail to respond to one of the major motivations for this project – the sense that the term *graduate employability* has become taken-for-granted in contemporary discussion. Instead, this project will attend to the complexity and diversity of practices (conceived of at the level of policy, not of day-to-day activity by individuals) that are argued or assumed to characterise higher education's relation to the economy, without assuming the existence of a coherent historical narrative that runs like a thread through the fabric of higher education. By foregrounding the employable graduate as an object of knowledge made possible in different forms through certain practices related to the notion of employability, the temptation to attempt an inventory of history (Veyne, 1993) can be avoided. The particular eras and concepts that form the basis of the analysis are those 'points where the past masks the genealogy of our present' (Veyne, 1993, p.227). The principal challenge with an investigation of employability is that it is apparently *nowhere* in the historical record; its genealogy is masked by virtue of it not having been written yet. It is a concept that seems to have appeared, unheralded, applied in a variety of different concepts and meanings, with its own particular effects on the life of higher education. The process of unmasking lies, therefore, not in describing different strata of history, but in showing that there are distinct boundaries – breaks, gaps, fissures – that separate different discursive formations from one another. To extend the geological metaphor, it is to look beyond the rocks themselves to the geophysical conditions that allow different strata to be laid down.

Of course, none of this is to say that eras, geographies and peoples are not useful categories of analysis. The study must be grounded and limited somehow, both to offer a coherent and meaningful analysis and to keep it within the realms of manageability. Nor does the primacy of practices assume that there is no coincidence between these categories of analysis; it may turn out that an entire discourse of employability can be attributed directly to one particular phase of the history of higher education. Rather, it is a way of avoiding the mistake of treating a concept as a universal constant (Foucault, 1990), or of being fixated with objects as opposed to the practices of which they are projections (Veyne, 1984). The *modus operandi* of this project is to get beyond the broad-brush definitions of employability identified in the literature review in order to say something about the practices that each discourse of employability implies.

3.4 Foucault's conceptual toolkit

This section discusses in more depth the methodological instruments (Vakirtzi and Bayliss, 2013) offered in Foucault's body of work and argues for their relevance to the present project.

3.4.1 Archaeology as a precursor to genealogy

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2010a) describes four principles of his particular form of archaeological analysis. Firstly, archaeology is the identification of discourses themselves, not the 'thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses' (Foucault, 2010a, p.138). Secondly, archaeology aims to define discourses in their specificity, not to trace the 'continuous, insensible transition that relates discourses, on a gentle slope, to what precedes them, surrounds them, or follows them' (Foucault, 2010a p.139). Thirdly, archaeology is concerned with identifying types of rules for discursive practices that run through bodies of work. Fourthly, archaeology is the systematic description of discourses, not the attempt to recapture what was wished for or aimed at when it was expressed through discourse. Archaeology, in seeking to do no more than describe regularities and differences, is non-interpretive (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). Furthermore, it is non-anthropological in that it focuses on statements and visibilities, setting aside the search for the authors of statements (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). In these terms, archaeology does not set out to offer an explanation of why certain discourses are what they are. Instead, its goals are to establish relations between statements, the rules by which statements can be repeated, positions that are established between the subjects of discourses, the places in which objects are designated and acted upon, the institutions which acquire authority and set limits to discursive practice, and the systematic ways in which phenomena are made visible (Kendall and Wickham, 1999).

In this sense, a work of archaeology can be a precursor to, or the foundations of, a genealogical analysis. Indeed, Foucault (2010a) clearly signals such a direction in the latter stages of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. He argues that the technique of archaeological description can, in the case of the analysis of the political behaviour of a society, break with the positivistic descriptions of social behaviour:

Instead of analysing this knowledge – which is always possible – in the direction of the episteme that it can give rise to, one would analyse it in the direction of behaviour, struggles, conflicts, decisions and tactics. One would thus reveal a body of political knowledge that is not some kind of secondary theorizing about practice, nor the

application of theory. Since it is regularly formed by a discursive practice that is deployed among other practices and is articulated upon them, it is not an expression that more or less adequately ‘reflects’ a number of ‘objective data’ or real practices. It is inscribed, from the outset, in the field of different practices in which it finds its specificity, its functions, and its network of dependences. (Foucault, 2010a, p.194)

Thus Foucault demonstrates how an archaeological description of a concept opens the space for its analysis in terms of particular sets of discursive relations, and hence as ‘the formation and transformations of a body of knowledge’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.194). It is this shift to the genealogical that is of most significance for this present research in that it enables a break with approaches to analysing graduate employability that presume it to be a timeless or values-neutral concept.

3.4.2 Foucault’s Nietzschean genealogy

Garland (2014) argues that, beginning with *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault breaks with his earlier archaeological work ‘with its structuralist overtones and its stress on discontinuity’ (Garland, 2014, p.371) in favour of the concept of genealogy. While the goal of archaeology is to show structural order, differences and discontinuities, genealogy seeks to show how the contingencies of descent and emergence continue to shape the present (Garland, 2014). While *The Archaeology of Knowledge* arguably signals the possibility of such a genealogical analysis, to consider Foucault to be breaking with his earlier work is in itself significant as it indicates the realisation of such work. Thus, to consider Foucault’s later work as representative of a distinct approach offers access to a rich seam of analytical concepts that are central to this present research.

In his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Foucault offers an account of genealogy of which Rabinow remarks: ‘Its importance, in terms of understanding Foucault’s objectives, cannot be exaggerated’ (in Foucault, 1984a, p.76). Here, Foucault identifies in the works of Nietzsche an approach to history that rejects the search for origins (encapsulated in the German word *ursprung*) in favour of an approach based on tracing *herkunft*, or descent, and *entstehung*, or emergence. In doing so, he presents a treatment of history that resists the temptation to construct history as ‘an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.81), or to take refuge in the comfort of an affirmative narrative. Instead, we are offered something altogether more unsettling.

The concepts of descent and emergence are central to Foucault's reading of Nietzsche.

Descent refers to 'affiliation to a group, sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition or social class' (Foucault, 1984a, pp.80-81). Yet the study of descent is not the search for those factors that are unique to a group or concept. To study the descent of Welsh people, for example, would not be an attempt to identify those distinguishing factors that are exclusive to Welsh people; it would not be the search for an essence of Welshness. Rather, it would attempt to describe the intersections of 'subtle, singular and subindividual marks' (Foucault, 1984a, p.81) that might enable the identification of a distinct, historicised conception called Welshness. It is 'to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us' (Foucault, 1984a, p.81). In these terms, genealogy would seem to reject the suggestion that ideas are underpinned by eternal truths or universal constants; rather, who we are and what we know are contingencies, or the products of events or (un)happy accidents. As a consequence, genealogy does not promise the comfort of firm foundations. On the contrary: 'it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself' (Foucault, 1984a, p.82). To chart a genealogy is thus to challenge as contingent and unstable what has been taken for granted as consistent and firm. It is characterised by taking aim at ideas that have hitherto gone unchallenged. It raises objections to claims that we *just know* what something means. By applying this concept of genealogy to the study of employability, this project must necessarily break down ideas about employability that might be held to be natural or beyond question.

Emergence (*entstehung*) denotes 'the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage, each in its youthful strength' (Foucault, 1984a, p.84). The metaphor of an actor leaping into centre stage is illustrative. A leap is sudden and dramatic; it is a movement from one point to another that apparently leaves no trace. A walk may leave footprints, whereas a leap takes one by surprise; one cannot necessarily follow the path of a sudden leap. The task of genealogy is thus to propose the trajectories of such emergences. The emergence of a concept is not the final moment in a historical development (Foucault, 1984a); genealogy thus avoids the temptation to view the manifestation of an idea as a culmination, or the realisation of some fundamental purpose. Instead, 'they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations' (Foucault, 1984a, p.83). The genealogy of an idea is therefore concerned with re-assembling these interplays of forces. In doing so it reveals the space in which 'the endlessly repeated play of dominations' (Foucault, 1984a, p.85) takes

place, manifested in its systems of rules, rituals and procedures. As a consequence of there being an endless play of dominations, there is no equilibrium point to be found in the past, present or future of a concept. Humanity engages in an on-going game of challenging and replacing one set of rules with another, in which individuals compete for control over these systems of rules ‘so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules’ (Foucault, 1984, p.86). It would be a mistake to limit the interpretation of this to conflicts for political leadership. Rather, Foucault is suggesting that a continuous contest for ownership of certain concepts or ideas takes place. A second consequence is that points of emergence represent ‘substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.86) of the rules of formation of a concept. Because genealogy has relinquished the idea of universal truths, all that we are able to trace are these points of emergence and the possibilities by which ideas might be called true. Genealogy is thus concerned with charting breaks with previous meanings, of detailing the conflicts and differences that give rise to new meanings. It is this turning of attention away from the pursuit of universal truths and towards the contingencies of particular circumstances that gives this present research its critical force; it is this which enables a break with the analysis of graduate employability as a singular, unified concept in favour of the analysis of the emergence of its different configurations.

3.4.3 Genealogy and the use of history

In the works of Nietzsche, Foucault identifies three ways in which genealogy attempts to use history. Foucault writes that ‘genealogy returns to the three [Platonic] modalities of history that Nietzsche recognized in 1874... But they are metamorphosed’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.97). The first modality –history as reminiscence or recognition – is transposed into parody. It is to recognise the ‘identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.94) as a form of masquerade. Genealogy does not treat the present as an echo of the past, nor does it seek in the past the essence of our present identities. By examining the past, we are not seeking to identify prototypes of employability or enduring factors that underpin a modern conception of employability. Rather, we are exposing the multitude of possibilities that might be identified, giving access to the ‘intensities and creations of life’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.94). In doing so we cease to venerate established ideas as monuments of truth. Instead, we caricature them; we identify in them distinctive features and specificities that might have been masked by our experiences of them as a whole. These features are those that we draw into view, through which we put into question the basis upon which claims to truth are made.

The second modality – history as a series of continuities – becomes the dissociation of identity. Foucault writes: ‘The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.95). Instead of seeking the continuities in which our present is rooted, genealogy uses history to ‘reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.95). This implies that what we might call identity is more like a particular state of being, a contingency of the conditions under which it emerges. Foucault describes this as ‘a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the power of synthesis’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.94). Thus we are challenged to disrupt established notions of identity, to unmask ourselves in order to interrogate the circumstances in which our identities were made possible. It is the dissolution of conceits, enabling a re-reading of our present through an interrogation of our past.

The third modality – the critique of injustices of the past in terms of the ‘truth’ of the present – becomes ‘the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.97). The search for knowledge, argues Foucault (1984a), does not culminate in the achievement of universal truth. Instead, it creates risks, breaks down defences, dissolves unities; the will to truth ‘loses all sense of limitations and all claims to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.96). Genealogy, in examining the past, leads to a reconceptualisation of the present. By searching the past for truth we are not merely improving our conceptions of the present, we risk the destruction and replacement of the conceptions and ideas we hold dear – including our conceptions of ourselves. It represents an abandoning of the search for universal notions of truth, instead treating as contingent all claims to truth and knowledge. In this sense it also holds the possibility of becoming an ethical project, for example by revealing as discursive those conceits through which our agency might be limited – thus holding the possibility of a regaining of agency.

Genealogy, then, attempts to use history in deliberate ways. It rejects the idea that the past can somehow indicate the essence of the ideas of the present. It rejects the search for continuities and progressions. It rejects the examination of the past in terms of what we today deem to be true. Instead, it sets out to reveal the complexities and multiple possibilities that the past might present. In doing so it puts everything at stake – even our apparently solid identities. It treats the present not as the concluding chapter of a historical narrative, but as a temporary phase – an emergence from a complex intersection of factors. Foucault (1995) illustrates this approach in *Discipline and Punish*, characterising a conventional reading of the

history of punishment as ‘a quantitative phenomenon: less cruelty, less pain, more kindness, more respect, more ‘humanity’’ (Foucault, 1995, p.16). By contrast, he introduces the notion of a more abrupt change, ‘a displacement in the very object of the punitive operation’ (Foucault, 1995, p.16). According to Foucault (1995), the object of punishment shifted from the body to the soul. To emphasise that this is a significant shift, and not merely a progression or evolution, Foucault characterises it as ‘an important moment’ (Foucault, 1995, p.16), having ‘opened up a new period that is not yet at an end’ (Foucault, 1995, p.16). It is ‘the end of a certain kind of tragedy’ (Foucault, 1995, p.17); not merely the next act or a new play, but an entirely new genre. For Foucault, the change in the object of punishment represented a break from what had gone before, not merely a continuity. Foucault’s history of punishment is therefore not a narrative – a coherent story leading up to the present day – but a documentary of discontinuities whose effects can be felt in the present day (Foucault, 1995). In the case of this present research, Foucault’s approach implies the necessity of escaping from the charting of ‘the’ story of graduate employability. Instead, by emphasising the dissociation of what were previously held to be unshakeable continuities, the research is able to problematize what might otherwise be considered to be uncontroversial. Foucault’s approach therefore enables a level of criticality in the analysis of policy that exposes as deliberate strategies those which might otherwise have been regarded as natural consequences.

3.4.4 Three perspectives on genealogy in practice

To produce a genealogy of graduate employability is not a straightforward task of reading the concept back into the historical record. The review of the literature has identified at least five distinct configurations of the concept of graduate employability in the present-day academic and policy literature; each of these point to different contexts within the history of higher education, different sets of power relations and so forth. As such, their interrogation might necessitate the application of different approaches, or modalities, of genealogy. The three modalities that Foucault (1984a) identifies can imply different practical applications in research. Andersson (2013), citing William Walters, notes three styles of genealogy: genealogy as descent; genealogy as reserialisation and countermemory; and genealogy as the retrieval of forgotten struggles and subjugated knowledge. These may be applied as discrete approaches, or combined into a ‘multifaceted research method’ (Andersson, 2013, p.67). While these styles of genealogy have already been outlined, what follows are some examples of these three styles in practice, and an argument for their combination as an analytical approach.

Genealogy as descent could imply the investigation of the social conditions and processes that enable certain discourses to become dominant; Andersson (2013) compares this with family history research and the search for ancestors by piecing together relationships and contexts. This appears to be closest in spirit to the importance that Foucault (1984a) placed on the Nietzschean concepts of *entstehung* and *herkunft* – the emergence and descent of ideas from particular social and historical contexts. What is particularly significant is *how* certain ideas were produced through the interaction of social and historical contexts. This distinguishes genealogy from the mere recording and sequencing of historical acts and facts. Hultqvist (1998) exemplifies this approach in his genealogy of the preschool child in Sweden. He argues that the preschool child as an object of educational discourse is a product of ‘ever-changing rationalities for government’ (Hultqvist, 1998, p.96), namely an interaction between social-liberalist approaches to welfare and certain notions of what is natural and normal in terms of child development. Furthermore, Hultqvist (1998) ascribes to these changing rationalities of government changes to notions of the nature of the child. Such an approach would enable this project to locate different notions of graduate employability within distinctly different social-political conditions that might be related to other major events or developments of a given period.

Genealogy as reserialisation and counter-memory is the re-ordering of historical events ‘grounded on regimes of truth rather than chronology’ (Andersson, 2013, p.66). This approach challenges the notion of the present as proceeding in a linear fashion from the past. The effect of accounting for the past through regimes of truth (Foucault, 2008) – in other words, what counts as truth given certain social conditions – is to offer a different perspective on the emergence and development of certain concepts. Jones (1990) argues that ‘the genealogy of the teacher is characterized by discontinuity’ (Jones, 1990, p.57), as opposed to a smooth transformation from disorganised, ad-hoc schooling to the emergence of the professional teacher in the state school. Jones (1990) identifies different images of the schoolteacher, from the ‘suspicious figure that requires continual examination within an examining technology’ (Jones, 1990, p.75), through a moral exemplar, to an ideal parent qualified to examine and advise the urban family. These images of the teacher represent regimes of truth, not just of the teacher and the school, but of society and the urban family. By re-serializing the emergence of the urban teacher in these terms, Jones (1990) challenges the idea that the urban schoolteacher emerges ‘unproblematically to civilize the dangerous and perishing classes of the urban slum’ (Jones, 1990, p.57). In doing so, he opens up a perspective on British society’s attitude and approach to the ‘problem’ of the urban poor. This emphasis on

discontinuity, as opposed to smooth transition, enables a genealogy of graduate employability to question existing narratives about the emergence and development of the present system of higher education in the United Kingdom. In doing so it enables different accounts of the emergence of aspects of the present system, thus questioning the apparent unity of terms such as 'university'.

Genealogy as the retrieval of forgotten struggles and subjugated knowledges is 'a reminder of the possibility of thinking in a different manner, a reminder of other truths' (Andersson, 2013, p.67). It relies on Foucault's (1984a) understanding of emergence not as the final outcome of a historical development, but as "the current [episode] in a series of subjugations" (Foucault, 1984a, p.83); genealogy in this sense seeks 'to re-establish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations' (Foucault, 1984a, p.83). For example, Ball (1990) argues that a rise of management in education is 'part of a "radical right" thrust to gain closer and more precise control over the process of schooling' (Ball, 1990, p.155), and that management represents a key mechanism for the 'reform' of schools and the disciplining of teachers. Such a line of argument opens up an alternative perspective on the question of school improvement. Rather than taking for granted that the system of inspection and judgement of schools is unproblematically focused on improving outcomes for children, one might instead interrogate the ideological underpinnings of policy for schools. For example, the UK government's 2010 *White Paper for Schools* stated:

[We will] ensure that schools below the floor standard receive support, and ensure that those which are seriously failing, or unable to improve their results, are transformed through conversion to Academy status.
(Department for Education, 2010, p.14)

This particular policy aim might be interrogated by examining the interplay of interests, activities and ideological concerns that brought the concept of the Academy to prominence in the UK's political debate on education. This might be juxtaposed with a consideration of what 'standards' refer to, with its connections to national economic performance, international prestige, public accountability and so forth. Such an approach might bring to light other perspectives on, and ways of thinking about, the leadership of schools in relation to educational outcomes. The reintroducing of hazardous plays of dominations (Foucault, 1984a) through a genealogy of graduate employability could be achieved through identifying and interrogating the various social forces that might be present at any given moment; Tamboukou calls these the 'complex and multifarious processes that surround the emergence of the event' (Tamboukou, 2016, p.23), where an event prompts an investigation of how, not why, things

happen. Thus, by reiterating a range of forces and processes at work in a given social setting, genealogy offers accounts by which the apparent fixedness of present understandings of graduate employability might be plausibly put into doubt.

Following Andersson (2013), this present project proposes to combine these three perspectives on genealogy. In interrogating the different conceptions of employability identified in the literature review, it will offer an account of the contexts that enabled these notions to come to fruition. In so doing it will open up possibilities for re-telling this part of the history of UK higher education in the emergent ‘regimes of truth’ that can be identified in each concept. Finally it will offer an account of the interplays of power relations that have produced the status quo, and thus also the possibilities for thinking differently that might emerge as a result. As a consequence, it is hoped that the project will enable ways of addressing some of the tensions that the term *employability* can reveal. It is to be hoped that combining these three perspectives on genealogy will help to avoid the trap that Foucault (quoted in Ball, 1990) identifies that:

It is necessary to pass over to the other side – the other side from the ‘good side’ – in order to try to free oneself from these mechanisms that have made two sides appear, in order to dissolve the false unity of this other side whose part one has taken. (‘Non au Sexe Roi’, interview with Michel Foucault, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, March 1977)

The danger Foucault alludes to is the temptation to universalise from one’s own situated perspective. In resisting this temptation, the task of genealogy is to enable concepts to be investigated from other perspectives. Investigating the *how* of production through discourse, the alternative categories through which the emergence of a concept can be traced, and the location of an emergent concept in the interplay of dominations, thus offers an approach that compels one to not just step out of one’s own perspective, but to actively step into another perspective. In doing so, the ‘false unity’ of a position might be dissolved through what Foucault refers to as ‘progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation’ (Foucault, 1991, p.77). The risk of applying only a narrow understanding of genealogy to research is the risk of replacing one ‘false unity’ with another – of failing to adequately show ‘passing events in their proper dispersion’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.81), and instead claiming that a partial re-interpretation of history represents a universally *better* re-reading of history. Such an approach would not only lack credibility, but would also be on the margins of honesty. Thus, the central task of this project – to chart the genealogy of a discursive notion of employability – may never be thought of as totally complete. However, what such an analysis does produce could clearly enable new and productive ideas.

3.4.5 Graduate employability and the ‘shift to the outside’

This section outlines a key methodological principle of Foucault’s genealogical projects: the triple displacement from the institutional perspective (Foucault, 2009). It argues that Foucault’s triple displacement allows for an analysis of graduate employability that moves beyond the functions and activities of the university and enables a reconstruction of the matrix of power relations that relate to the notion of graduate employability.

As suggested earlier in this thesis, different notions of graduate employability are shorthand for the exertion of a range of effects, interests, strategies and so forth. Not all of these can be explained purely in terms of the functions and activities of a higher education institution. Thus, arguably the most important contribution that Foucault’s genealogical approach offers to this project is to enable the discussion of graduate employability to move beyond the practices of the higher education institution. The literature review has identified a tendency in the literature on graduate employability to focus on the functions and practices of universities, with a consequent lack of attention paid to the wider context in which the notion of graduate employability is located. However, by tracing the genealogy of graduate employability one is attempting to reconstruct an entire matrix of power relations or ‘social force[s] producing the real’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.25); as a result, it is important to be able to shift away from a purely institutional perspective.

Foucault (2009) sets out three approaches to moving a genealogical analysis outside of the institution. Firstly, Foucault (2009) argues that we should begin not from the basis of the institution, its internal structures and organisation, but from a more general and external project. This allows the institution to be understood in terms of a concept that can be directed towards a population as a whole. For instance, the notion of graduate employability may be approached not merely from the basis of the internal functions of the university, but from external concepts - perhaps national economic competitiveness, or the ability of individuals to lead a life that one has reason to value. Such a shift enables a concept to be grounded and understood ‘on the basis of something external and general’ (Foucault, 2009, p.117); in turn, this opens the possibility of relating the notion of graduate employability beyond the simple measurement of graduate employment, and thus allows for a greater depth of interrogation.

Secondly, Foucault (2009) advocates a shift from examining the outcomes of an institution’s expected functions towards examining the relations of its functions to a wider set of strategies and tactics. In the case of graduate employability, we are to be concerned not with how successful universities are at equipping its students with work-relevant skills, but how this

teaching of graduate skills supports a wider set of strategies and tactics related to the external concepts indicated earlier. Such a shift in perspective allows for the dispelling of understandings that mask the interplay of power relations, for example by reducing graduate employability to either a matter of labour market success or individual application. In doing so it allows for an interrogation of the motives of such actors as students, academics, employers and government personnel in determining what higher education's relation to the notion of graduate employability could be. It also offers a basis on which the project's claims to truth might be made, by arguing for a more complex reading of the 'reality' of graduate employability that incorporates a wider range of factors. Indeed, Tamboukou (2016) goes further than this, arguing that: 'It is within the dynamics of intra-activity that meaning is enacted and particular types of knowledge emerge, while matter is not static or just a condition; it is rather an active agent in the process of materialization' (Tamboukou, 2016, p.31). This implies that the 'reality' of graduate employability is to be located in the interacting of the various actors involved, and that it is impossible to artificially separate the notion of graduate employability from prevailing social and political conditions.

Foucault's (2009) third shift to the outside involves rejecting the evaluation of an institution's practices in relation to a given object of knowledge. Rather, we are to be concerned with 'grasping the movement by which a field of truth with objects of knowledge was constituted through these mobile technologies' (Foucault, 2009, p.118). Thus, 'graduate employability' and the 'employable graduate' are not pre-existing things; rather, we are interested in the ways in which the relations between institutional practices and external projects enable different conceptions of graduate employability to come about. This rejection of pre-existing notions means that practically every relevant concept becomes open to question. As a consequence, Foucault's third shift to the outside enables the project to focus not only on institutional activities and the wider environment in which they are located, but also enables the gaze to turn on our conceptions of higher education itself.

In summary, Foucault's triple displacement enables an interrogation of graduate employability that allows for simplistic readings to be disposed of, for motivations and intentions to be questioned, and for that which was formerly considered stable to be put into question. As a consequence, it requires the notion of graduate employability to be interrogated from multiple perspectives. This will inevitably result in a re-examination of some apparently stable or sacred notions such as higher education, the academic and the student. Indeed, through reconstructing the matrix of power relations that come into play, one is immediately prompted to regard with suspicion the idea that there could be a 'pure' notion of higher education that

exists independently of discourses of graduate employability. The impossibility of being outside of such power relations (Foucault, 1997) implies that the direction of analysis must be towards offering an understanding of the interaction of power relations and to propose the effects of these relations.

3.4.6 Principles and pitfalls of Foucault's 'method'

This section will consider a number of challenges that can arise in relation to Foucault's methodological toolkit. It will consider the consequences of these difficulties for the research project, and suggest how they might be addressed through the methodology.

Kendall and Wickham (1999) suggest a number of principles to be held in mind when attempting to apply Foucault's approach to history. Firstly, one should look for contingencies instead of causes. To look upon an event as a contingency is to imply that 'the emergence of that event was not necessary, but was one possible result of a whole series of complex relations between other events' (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.5). That is not to say that precisely anything could happen at a given moment; rather, the particular combination of circumstances of that moment enabled certain things to happen with a greater likelihood than others. However, just because a certain response to a given set of circumstances may be more likely than others, there is no good reason to assume that such a response is inevitable. Thus, we need to break with the habit of looking for causal links (Kendall and Wickham, 1999).

Secondly, one should guard against a tendency to progressivism. Foucault's histories are ones in which history never stops; the present should not be seen as a culmination of history at some settled or enlightened position. Foucault writes: 'Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination' (Foucault, 1984a, p.85). Thus, history continues from emergence to emergence, requiring a record of the 'singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality' (Foucault, 1984a, p.76). Letting go of a tendency to progressivism means not reducing the history of an idea to a linear narrative that 'reveals our progressive drive towards enlightenment' (Fadyl and Nicholls, 2013, p.25). However, even though adopting a Foucauldian approach means not letting history stop (Kendall and Wickham, 1999), continual history is not the ultimate aim of applying Foucault's concepts. Koopman and Matza (2013) argue that, while disturbing the foundations of what seems natural is an important implication, it is not the only implication, nor is it the most important: 'To suggest that it is amounts to transcendentalising Foucaultian method, as if the point of critique could only be to

demonstrate some more general condition that holds for all historical constructs' (Koopman and Matza, 2013, p.834). This positions genealogy not as inherently constructive or inherently destructive, but as a means of clearing space for fresh thinking. Consequently, while genealogy can never chart a utopian future, it may set the scene for renewed intellectual engagement with what was previously assumed to be settled.

Discussing his approach to producing *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1991) argues that the target of his research was not to question prisons as institutions, but imprisonment as a process, 'the hypothesis being that these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances... but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and "reason"' (Foucault, 1991, p.75). Foucault's goal appeared to be not merely to undermine the certainties of convention or self-evidence, nor merely to deconstruct social institutions and ideological positions. Rather, Foucault adopted what Koopman and Matza (2013) characterise as a 'relentlessly empirical' approach, the 'empiricism of looking, observing, perceiving, receiving, and above all experimenting' (Koopman and Matza, 2013, p.838). It is to gain a sense of the limiting conditions of our present (Koopman and Matza, 2013) – to offer a richer, more detailed understanding of the ways in which our present has come to be. Therefore, genealogy is not an exercise in the wanton destruction of historical monuments, but must be linked to a creative and constructive goal. In the case of this project, that goal is encapsulated in the research questions; these essentially delimit the scope of the project and direct it towards a constructive outcome as opposed to a destructive one.

Thirdly, guard against the temptation to universalise. Foucault argues that 'the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes' (Foucault, 1984a, p.87). In doing so, we reject a tendency to base our judgements on universal truth, and thus avoid the temptation to claim a suprahistorical perspective – or 'apocalyptic objectivity' (Foucault, 1984a, p.87). Indeed, Cooke (1994) argues that we cannot achieve a perspective for fully knowing our historical limits because we do not have access to an independent reality or a transcendental subject that can act as a point of reference. In applying Foucault's techniques we are acknowledging the impossibility of a complete perspective on history. Foucault (1991) refers to a process of 'eventalization' (Foucault, 1991, p.77), or treating a practice as an event as opposed to an institutional fact or ideological effect. Events are thus treated as located within 'a "polyhedron" of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite' (Foucault, 1991, p.77). Research thus proceeds by gradually unpacking ever greater levels of

detail, without ever assuming that there is a complete picture to be created. The opportunity that this project presents is to add detail to the notion of graduate employability in a way that, as a premise, rejects the idea that the notion represents some universal or suprahistorical idea. Indeed, the methodology has been chosen in order to reintroduce a historical dimension that is, at present, not readily discernible.

Koopman and Matza (2013) warn against making a straightforward application of Foucault's ideas, for example by treating Foucault's historically derived and highly specific concepts as universal categories. For example, Foucault's notion of biopower ought not to be treated as a totalising or global theory of power, yet a 'careful interrogation of the specificities of biopolitical assemblages' (Koopman and Matza, 2013, p.821) enables a means of coming to terms with concepts such as personalised genetics. In a similar vein, Koopman and Matza (2013) criticise the work of Giorgio Agamben in particular for an over-application of Foucault's highly specific and historicised concepts. The implication is that Foucault's work ought not to be used as a cookie-cutter or as a grand methodological handbook; rather, one must clarify the different senses in which a work claims to be Foucauldian (Koopman and Matza, 2013). One must also be conscious of the limits of Foucault's (or anyone's) concepts so as to avoid the temptation to force historical evidence to fit the concept. To treat Foucault's concepts as transcendental and monolithic would seem to contradict the very goal of writing a genealogy. Instead, what is of interest here are the analytical approaches that Foucault took; it is these that will give yield in response to the central research questions.

Similarly, one must suspend one's instinct to apply second-order judgements to history. To attempt to avoid applying second-order judgements, i.e. those that are not genuinely one's own, is to refrain from granting to any aspect of an investigation a status which draws its authority from another investigation (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). As Cooke (1994) notes, this implies a certain similarity between Foucault's methods and grounded theory analysis. Glaser (1992) warns against imposing a preconceived structure on an act of social research, or attempting to second-guess the direction that an analysis might take; such an action would effectively close off certain possibilities of interpretation from the data, and thus also the possibilities for new theory that these might enable. The early premise of grounded theory analysis was that theory could and should be stimulated by, and grounded in, empirical research (Dey, 2004). Such approaches require of the researcher... 'a disposition to "discover" ideas in data without imposing preconditions' (Dey, 2004, p.80). Setting aside – at least for part of the study - the instinct to read the data through the lens of an external set of theory should allow for the emergence of a broader range of theoretical possibilities.

Avoiding second-order judgements might imply exercising a certain scepticism regarding political judgements. Kendall and Wickham (1999) draw a distinction between two concepts of classical Greek scepticism. Academic scepticism, ‘built around the proposition that we cannot know anything’ (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.10) and Pyrrhonistic scepticism, ‘based on the proposition that we cannot know anything, *including the fact that we cannot know anything*’ (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.10; emphasis in original). Pyrrhonistic scepticism implies the moving away from the affirmation or denial of any given proposition (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). To illustrate this process in action, Foucault (1986) begins *The History of Sexuality Volume 3* with this description of Artemidorus’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

Of all the texts that have survived from this period, it is the only one that presents anything like a systematic exposition of the different forms of sexual acts. By and large it does not make direct and explicit moral judgments concerning those acts, but it does reveal schemas of valuation that were generally accepted... The book by Artemidorus thus constitutes a point of reference. It testifies to a perenniarity and exemplifies a common way of thinking. For this very reason, it will allow us to measure what may have been uncommon and in part new in the work of philosophical and medical reflection on pleasure and sexual conduct that was undertaken in the same period. (Foucault, 1986, p.3)

This passage offers some insight into Foucault’s approach. An analysis of Artemidorus offers Foucault a foundation, largely free of second-order judgements, upon which an analysis of the contingencies surrounding pleasure and sexual conduct can be based. By acting as a point of reference it enables Foucault to separate the contingencies of history from the contemporary moral, ethical and political evaluations that might otherwise have been reflected in his analysis. Foucault has attempted to avoid assuming the past to be either inferior or superior to the present, instead aiming to describe the past in its own terms. In considering *The Interpretation of Dreams* to be a text that is largely free from direct judgement about practices, Foucault is able to claim it as a reference point for his analysis. In the case of this project, finding documents relating to higher education that are free from judgements may be difficult. Personal memoirs, for example, imply a certain position-taking, as do records pertaining to specific organisations and institutions. Instead, effort must be made to identify and address judgements within texts, thus invoking a kind of scepticism that both fails to accept the perspectives of authors at face value and avoids the search for truth or falsehood in any given perspective. Such an approach would be consistent with the goal of restoring, through genealogy, a sense of the contestations and points of resistance that enable certain configurations of the notion of graduate employability to be.

Foucault's ideas rely on a conception of the subject as being a product of discourse, similar to Hinchliffe and Jolly's (2011) argument that a graduate's identity is primarily shaped by social forces over which the graduate has no control. This suggests a further risk associated with the application of Foucault: that the productive quality of power might be privileged, leading us to consider subjects and concepts as 'mere' outputs which individuals have no role in shaping. This might lead one to ignore the possibility of individuals' agency in shaping themselves and their discursive environments, thus offering a simplistic reading of the emergence and effects of the concept of employability. Best (2013) cautions against such an approach when he writes:

Knowledge is never simply the product of an ideological stamp, dominant ideology, perspective of a dominant group, a reflection of the social structure, a product of symbolic violence or reducible to power relations or structural effects. Knowledge is plastic and pliable in the hands of the human agent. (Best, 2013, p.2)

To fall victim to such a pitfall would be to misinterpret Foucault's notion of power. Power, in Foucault's (1978) terms, is not shorthand for 'institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state' (Foucault, 1978, p.92), nor 'a mode of subjugation that has the form of the rule' (Foucault, 1978, p.92), and is not 'a general system of domination exerted by one group over another' (Foucault, 1978, p.92). Rather, power comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1978); it may manifest itself in institutions, structures, governments and so forth, but in essence it is expressed in the whole multiplicity of relations in a given area. To take the example of higher education, the notion of power would thus encapsulate *everything* said and done by individuals and institutions that can be logically related to higher education. By definition, this would imply that the roles that individuals can be said to occupy are simultaneously products of the system of power relations within higher education and active in the production of that system of power relations. Logically, to ignore the possibility of individual agency in such a system of power relations would contradict the basis of Foucault's notion of power. A Foucauldian analysis of power relations therefore requires a very careful and deliberate representation of power relations in order to encompass this multiplicity of relations. This would avoid the temptation to resort to simplistic analyses grounded in subjugation, restriction and dominance. A consequence for this project is the need to avoid the temptation to speak in abstract terms of the 'student', the 'academic' or the 'employer' as if these were stable concepts in themselves. Instead, as acknowledged in the literature review, these are contested notions. In turn, the genealogical approach outlined here offers the opportunity to critique those notions.

3.5 Sources of evidence

This section discusses challenges and issues surrounding the selection of sources of evidence for the genealogical research. Genealogy has been characterised as patiently documentary and reliant on large volumes of source material (Foucault, 1984a); by ‘documentary’, Foucault refers to charting not just what is said, but how it is said, where it is said, in what context it is said and so forth. Cohen et al (2007) describe historical inquiry as an act of reconstruction in the spirit of critical inquiry that is designed to achieve a faithful reproduction of a previous age. The goal of a Foucauldian genealogy is not merely to describe what occurred in previous times, but to enable the generation of new understandings from historical sources. Hence, a Foucauldian genealogy is faithful to the past not because it merely describes the past in ever greater detail, but because it seeks to restore to the historical record what has become hidden. Foucault’s (1984a) characterisation of genealogy as the examination of the emergence and descent of concepts is not a search for “successive configurations of an identical meaning” (Foucault, 1984a, p.86); tracing the genealogy of ‘graduate employability’ through history is therefore not a process of sifting material to look for those elusive, hidden particles of the concept. It is not the “slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin” (Foucault, 1984a), but a series of interpretations which Foucault characterises as:

the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules (Foucault, 1984a, p.86)

The genealogy of ‘graduate employability’, then, is to be interpreted through a variety of materials that may offer access to those systems of rules that may have been enacted at various times in the sphere of higher education. It is an act of reconstruction in that the historical record is being re-assembled in order to propose ways in which this series of interpretations might be hypothesised.

Tamboukou (1999) argues that key to Foucault’s genealogies is the inseparability of truth from the processes of its production. Thus, instead of testing the objective truth of a given discourse, one is concerned with examining ‘which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure’ (Tamboukou, 1999, p.202). This suggests that the central task of genealogy is to reassemble the practices and conditions that might have enabled different discourses to emerge. By implication, the range of potential sources that could shed light on such practices and conditions is large – particularly when, as Tamboukou (1999) argues, there is no essential,

natural or inevitable way of grouping or classifying people. The inseparability of truth from the processes of its production thus implies the futility of maintaining a rigid, *a priori* approach to organising and classifying sources. Nevertheless, it is necessary for practical purposes to ensure that the analysis remains both focused and manageable. One might therefore usefully begin from the project's hypothesis about graduate employability, namely that it is shorthand for a number of knowledge-power constructs (or discourses) that emerge from relations of power in social situations. The relevant relations of power, it is proposed, are between academics and their disciplines, their students, their employing institutions, and external groups that claim a stake in defining what graduate employability is or ought to be. These external groups include politicians, government officials, employers and their representatives or collectives, and the general public.

Having identified the potential range of sources, a scheme for their interrogation presents itself. Firstly, the possible configuration(s) of graduate employability implied in the source will be identified. This in itself is a preliminary and tentative act. Foucault writes: 'The analysis of lexical contents defines either the elements of meaning at the disposal of speaking subjects in a given period, or the semantic structure that appears on the surface of a discourse that has already been spoken' (Foucault, 2010a, p.48); this stage therefore cannot suffice as an analysis of discourse, yet it indicates where the discursive practices relating to graduate employability go beyond mere designation (e.g. Foucault, 2010a). Secondly, an assemblage of relevant social, political and economic forces will be identified in order to 'cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning' (Foucault, 1984a, p.80). Thirdly, larger 'projects' will be identified within which the situation being interrogated can be located; these are the 'external and general' (Foucault, 2009, p.117) bases upon which the analysis can be grounded. Fourthly, the interaction of the various forces (e.g. Tamboukou, 2016), related to these larger 'projects', will be interrogated in order to propose a way in which the relevant understanding(s) of graduate employability might emerge. Finally, the relevant problematics for present-day higher education that these processes imply will be identified.

In order to avoid presenting the history of higher education as a chronological progression culminating in the higher education sector of the present day, five policy documents relating to higher education in the United Kingdom will be analysed. This enables the notion of employability to be engaged with in a historicised way, resisting the temptation to resort to grand abstractions and universal categories (Rabinow, 1984). Thus, the primary focus of the analysis will be on original policy texts and media articles contemporary to the relevant policy debates. Where secondary or retrospective sources are used, care will be taken not to read

the past through the lens of subsequent events. Sources that are contemporaneous to the events they purport to describe offer a way of accessing the discussions and debates that occurred at a given time. These have the advantage of offering the closest approach to the voices of those involved in the play of dominations (Foucault, 1984a) that characterise the emergence of differing interpretations of a concept. Many of these may be partial viewpoints or may be freighted with particular interests, which might imply a deficit of objectivity. However, if Foucault (1984a) is right that the systems of discursive rules with which a genealogical analysis is concerned have no essential meaning, then what matters is to investigate what is *actually* said and done, rather than to be concerned with the search for sources that most objectively represent the past. To be concerned primarily with objectivity implies the search for precise meanings that are prior to a concept, something that Foucault (2010a) rejects. Nevertheless, as works that have been produced and disseminated, the range of sources suggested here represent the playing out of discourses, and thus are significant at least because they represent ideas that were actually expressed.

Foucault (2010b) illustrates this approach when charting the notion of parrhesia: 'I will take an average text, if you like, an average case, an average example of *parrēsia* [sic] from almost exactly mid-way between the classical age and the great Christian spirituality of the fourth to fifth century C.E., in which we see this notion of *parrēsia* at work in a traditional but very well-defined field of philosophy' (Foucault, 2010b, p.47). Foucault is attempting to access practices of parrhesia through the analysis of discursive practices and forms of veridiction. In doing so, he sets out his rationale for choosing a particular text upon which to base his analysis. Firstly, he has claimed to select an 'average' text – not an exception, not an outlier, but one which is implied to offer a 'typical' illustration of social practices. Secondly, he has located his study in a particular period of time; he can thus claim that his conclusions are particular to a society and age, rather than general or transcendent. Thirdly, he has chosen a 'traditional' and 'well-defined' field in which to locate the study; he is not opening up a new field of study, but applying a new mode of analysis to an existing object of academic attention. In doing so, Foucault can claim to engage in a reconstruction of the conditions of the past despite not having direct and unfettered access to the ideas of individuals apart from the author of the work in question. This enables an interrogation of a system of relations between knowledge and conditions that enable an original perspective on the concept in question.

The discourses of employability already identified offer starting points and indications as to where inquiries might be made. However, the key themes that might emerge from the genealogical analysis cannot be predetermined. Glaser warns of the problem of 'forcing on the

data a preconceived problem that ought to take the data apart and give yield' (Glaser, 1992, p.25). This is associated with the 'opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p.4), of which Glaser and Strauss (1967) provide two examples. The first is the retrospective adding of pre-conceived theory to attempt to explain research findings. The second is the application of research findings as examples to support pre-determined theoretical structures. In neither case is theory derived from research; rather, theory exists prior to the act of research, and the relationship between the theory and the research is purely instrumental, concerned with what one can do for the other. Grounded theory, by contrast, makes explicit the connection between the theory and the process through which it is generated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The identification of key themes from this project, and consequently the substantive theories generated about graduate employability and the role of the academic, cannot be produced by applying the discourses of graduate employability directly to historical sources.

Nor is it sufficient to try to read back the discourses identified in present-day academic literature into the analysis in order to provide historical support for those discourses. Indeed, Foucault argues that: 'Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason' (Foucault, 1984a, p.96); there is a certain inevitability in the reflexive and reciprocal relation between research, theory and knowledge that cannot be acknowledged by taking a methodological pastry-cutter to history. As a result, this project will treat all theory as provisional, emergent and indicative, and will aim to illustrate the relations between theory and research. In a sense, the process of writing a genealogy will be as much a case of interrogating the theory using historical sources as interrogating the sources using history. Nevertheless, a starting point or premise must be chosen from which the analysis may proceed, even though this does not imply a determining of the whole direction of the analysis. The discourses tentatively proposed in the literature review represent such a starting point, but it is through the analysis of the five situations from the history of higher education described earlier that the re-theorisation of graduate employability at which this project aims will emerge.

3.6 Truth and validity

The preceding discussion regarding the selection of sources for a genealogy brings into focus questions of truth and validity. This section will consider the relation of notions of 'truth' and 'validity' to the present project. It will discuss the possibility of Foucault's genealogical

approach enabling new knowledge with application to the ‘real world’. In doing so it will consider the challenges posed by the notions of truth, objectivity and acceptability of claims to truth. It will argue that Foucault’s genealogical approach does indeed allow for the possibility of objective truth. Genealogy, conceived of as an examination of the way relations of power form, connect and transform in relation to things other than themselves (Foucault, 2009), maintains the possibility – the necessity, even – of an external reality upon which a claim to knowledge might be founded.

Foucault (2009) describes genealogy as the process of identifying the way that relations of power form, connect, develop and transform on the basis of processes that are other than the relations of power. Here, Foucault gives the example of military discipline: the genealogy of military discipline is not to be seen as a consequence of the dominance of the state, but in relation to problems of populations, commercial networks, technical developments and so forth. Thus, the notion of genealogy implies the possibility and necessity of things that could not be regarded as power relations. For example, one might imagine that the development of workable firearms, related to the spread of the concept of gunpowder from China to Europe, might have enabled a different approach to military discipline than that demonstrated in armies of earlier ages. However, this does not imply that the development of firearms was itself a product of power relations. This seems to suggest that the ability to describe the genealogy of a concept relies on the existence of a realm of things that cannot be described in terms of power relations. Knowledge of this realm would seem to be necessary to the grasping of the genealogy of a notion.

Foucault’s methodological approach has been characterised as implying that there is no single ‘truth’, in that all knowledge is constructed, is transient and is closely associated with power (Miró-Bonet *et al.*, 2014). Truth is therefore inseparable from the circumstances in which it is produced. Han (1998), by comparison, argues that Foucault admitted the possibility of objective truth, though the truth-value claims that could be made for a proposition were not relevant to his archaeological approach:

The bracketing of all normative judgements, which is the initiatory act of archaeology, is not in itself a *denial* of the possibility of a norm. On the contrary, it only makes sense as a *bracketing* by assuming that there is indeed a norm, but that, methodologically speaking, it should not be taken into account. (Han, 1998, p.81; emphasis in original)

One may consider, as Miró-Bonet *et al* (2014) do, that the particularities of knowledge may well be constructed, transient and contingent. Yet one of the key premises of this project is

that knowledge-power exerts a productive effect; identities, truth and concepts do not exist external to discourse. Therefore, the whole assemblage of discourses, power relations and so forth that are present represent perhaps as close as one may get to an objective reality – however transitory this reality may be. Indeed, in the context of this project it is this assemblage of discourses that is the relevant object of research; it is this contingency that has made us what we are (Foucault, 1984b), and so the focus of one's attention ought to be on the historical conditions that enable productive discourses to take form. As a result, we might be justified in bracketing out the possibility of the objective truth of a given discourse on the grounds that the content of the discourse matters less than the fact that it is a discourse that is demonstrably relevant to the social situation in which we are interested.

To bracket out the possibility of objective truth of a discourse is not an uncontroversial position. Touey (1998) notes that Foucault's historicising of human nature problematizes the project of Enlightenment. Enlightenment relies on 'the possibility of a depth-conception of what human beings are... or what they could or were meant to be' (Touey, 1998, p.84). Foucault's critical project, by contrast, seeks an escape from the search for formal structures with universal value, so as not to deduce the limits of what we can do from a conception of what we are (Foucault, 1984b). However, Touey (1998) argues that Foucault's project, in rejecting universalisms, leaves little firm ground on which one might identify what parts of ourselves we are capable of going beyond. Since the grounds for critical thought are historicised and particular, they are necessarily fluid and 'must be discovered and rediscovered in the specificity of the situation... and so could never be anything but shifting and elusive' (Touey, 1998, p.96). As a result, by bracketing out the possibility of the objective truth of a discourse we are essentially limiting our scope for claiming that critique has value beyond the analysis of a specific situation.

A way of escaping this dilemma may be to focus attention to the social processes that exert a moderating effect on the notion of truth and what can be accepted as true. By questioning the social processes by which ideas are deemed acceptable, one might find grounds in which to make a productive critique that has application beyond the description of the specific situation. Disciplines, argues Foucault, establish limits of truth through controls over the production of discourse. Thus, instead of considering the conditions of the possibility of truth of a proposition in isolation, Foucault introduces the concept of acceptability (Han, 1998) – the conditions of possibility of truth according to the standards of the particular rules of discourse. Consistency with the particular rules of discourse is necessary for a proposition to even be a *candidate* to be judged true. As a result, statements that might have a valid objective claim to

truth might, if they fall foul of the rules of the discipline, be considered inadmissible. Foucault writes: ‘It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is “in the true” only by obeying the rules of a discursive “policing” which one has to reactivate in each of one’s discourses’ (Foucault, 1981, p.61). This might imply that individuals engage in a kind of self-censorship driven by a desire to have oneself and one’s ideas deemed acceptable by others. Controversial ideas might then be deliberately suppressed out of fear of reprisal. Indeed, Touey (1998) argues that Foucault himself must have accepted the limiting and empowering presence of institutions with which he engaged as the conditions of possibility of his own discourse; Foucault, of course, was an employee of one institution or another throughout his academic career. A less sinister interpretation would be that a highly influential set of rules of discursive policing would limit the likelihood that an ‘unacceptable’ position would ever occur to one. This would not be out of fear of reprisal, but that one would simply not be aware of the possibility that such ‘unacceptable’ ideas might be thinkable. The focus of such research would be to explore the ways in which different conditions of acceptability might arise; it is the study of such processes that becomes generalizable beyond the immediate situation.

The concept of acceptability presents a dilemma: given that the rules that govern a discourse effectively set limits (deliberately or not) on what sorts of propositions might be judged to be true, how is it possible for a piece of original research to challenge the rules of discourse and still make claims to truth? This is an important consideration for this study, given that the premise is that the concept of graduate employability is produced differently through different discourses. The possibility exists for certain discourses to rule out the possibility of truth of some conceptions of graduate employability. If the methodological approach of this project were to be limited purely to a Foucauldian archaeology, then the fact that claims to objective truth are essentially set aside as methodologically irrelevant (Han, 1998) would leave this dilemma unanswerable. It could certainly not be resolved by appealing to a measure of objective truth. Genealogy, conceiving of history as an ‘endlessly repeated play of dominations’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.85), essentially makes the question of conflicting rules of discourse the central feature of the research. The task of genealogy is not to evaluate claims to truth, but to chart the interplay of dominations that enable certain conditions of truth to predominate at a given moment. Genealogy is thus the investigation of history to provide clues as to why our present discourses are as they are (Fadyl *et al.*, 2012). Given that disciplines essentially set the boundaries of what may be considered true, then the outcomes of a genealogical analysis need to be read alongside a further body of theory in order to make

claims to truth for the propositions it contains. One of the outcomes of such a piece of research might therefore be to test the limits of a disciplinary boundary, potentially offering new grounds on which claims to truth might be made.

If the prior discussion challenges the notion of truth, then the notion of objectivity is brought into even sharper focus. Objectivity, argues Haraway (1988), is a ‘curious and inescapable term’ (Haraway, 1988, p.575). In rejecting both a highly essentialist view of reality and a radical social constructivist interpretation, Haraway identifies a key challenge:

I think my problem, and ‘our’ problem, is how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, *and* a non-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness.
(Haraway, 1988, p.579; emphasis in original)

In other words, the challenge is how to say something *better* about the world that allows for multiple interests and accounts of multiple constructions of reality without either advancing a fixed, essentialist view of the world or embracing a strong relativist position. Yet Haraway’s position is, arguably, underpinned by a relation to some objective external reality, something that exists as a common ground between (or even encompassing) historical contingencies and approaches to knowledge-making. Thus, while the notion of objectivity might be inescapable, and the notion of a ‘real’ world equally inescapable, what remains open to contestation are our claims to make sense of our experiences of that reality. However, this then brings into question how any new claims to understanding might be evaluated. Gorard and Taylor (2004) identify in so-called postmodern accounts of knowledge the impossibility of direct access to a reality outside of discourse; such approaches conceive of research purely as the deconstruction of meaning. If this were to be the case, then an implication is that all that can be positively known is how a discourse comes to form objects of knowledge, or what Foucault (2009) refers to as ‘fields of truth’. There could be no possibility of claiming new insight into the partially-shared real world identified by Haraway (1988). Such research would be restricted to the description of specific actions or expressions, devoid of the potential to speak to other situations. In short, there would be no possibility of research problematizing the present, as Foucault sets out to do (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983) – nor of having much in the way of practical application. As a consequence, questions of relevance of research findings to objective reality cannot be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. To do so would leave such a

research project foundering, unable to secure an anchorage for itself other than in its own internal consistency.

Haraway's solution to this challenge is to look to 'partial, locatable, critical knowledges' (Haraway, 1988, p.584), grounded in certain positionings, that are not presented as alternatives or as mutually exclusive. Such knowledges are not to be conflated with claims to some grand narrative; rather, one must be able to identify the boundaries and limits associated with such claims to knowledge. Rather than pursue a grand 'theory of everything' regarding a particular notion, Haraway's response implies making very specific and delimited claims to knowledge in relation to a 'real' world. Objectivity is to be found in the specifying and locating of our claims to knowledge, through which we 'become answerable for what we learn how to see' (Haraway, 1988, p.583). As noted earlier, Foucault's notion of genealogy appears to rely on the existence of a realm of 'things' that are not products of power relations, such that the genealogy of a concept can only be grasped by relating the relevant power relations to things that are not the products of power relations. To account for a genealogical analysis of a notion must, then, involve a relation to some non-discursive externality. It is in this relation that the value claims of a genealogical analysis can be grounded.

Gorard and Taylor (2004) warn of a pitfall in the application of 'big' theories, or the adulation of great thinkers, whereby a tendency emerges to argue *for* great ideas rather than testing them. In such cases, our capacity to be objective and answerable for our perspectives is put under threat. The template for critique, it is argued, becomes 'here is the evidence, here is the explanation, and here is its similarity to the writing of the great thinker' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p.157). In some cases, grand ideas can be left apparently unhurt even by evidence that appears to directly contradict the theory (Gorard and Taylor, 2004), for example when theory is used merely to provide researchers with 'something more epistemologically secure than mere ungeneralized observations' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p.159). An alternative would be to investigate how theory can be used to interrogate data *and* how data can interrogate theory. Rather than affording grand theories a privileged position, a more reflexive and reflective discussion might seek to call into question the value of the theory that has been applied as a starting point. Indeed, prejudged stances may help to determine the nature of the questions to be asked, but ought not to be allowed to predetermine the answer (Gorard and Taylor, 2004).

A significant challenge to applying Foucault's genealogical toolkit involves commitment to certain intellectual traditions. Gorard and Taylor (2004), in arguing that 'quality research

should inevitably lead us to *question* existing theory rather than set out to protect it' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p.150; emphasis in original), point out a problem of theory acting as a paradigm. Considering theory to be a paradigm can result in the equating of the logic of designing a study with the method of collecting data, along with an automatic commitment to a certain kind of truth (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). This might imply difficulties in gaining acceptance in accordance with prevailing sets of discursive rules. For example, a study that relies on an interpretive approach to the analysis of data might have difficulty gaining acceptance in an environment that places greater value on positivist claims to knowledge. Similarly, Gorard and Taylor (2004) argue that notions of responsible publicly-funded social science mainly represent a request for empirical evidence and reasoned research; thus, the role of theory in research can be constrained by prevailing conceptions of what 'truth' ought to look like. This also implies a further danger – that of contriving the study to fit a preferred methodology or popular notion of truth. As a consequence, this project will be clear about the bases on which it makes its claims; this will be an approach that suffuses the analysis, rather than as a purely methodological consideration.

Indeed, Foucault's (1981) conception of being 'in the true' (Foucault, 1981, p.61) serves as a caution to any researcher who may be tempted to stray beyond the conventionally accepted boundaries of a discipline. Foucault gives the example of the biologist Gregor Mendel who, in '[constituting] the hereditary trait as an absolutely new biological object' (Foucault, 1981, p.61), created the foundations of what would (after Mendel's death) be called the science of genetics. By the conventions of biological science of the time, though, Mendel's work seemed to be beyond the realms of acceptance. Perhaps his mathematics-based methodology was beyond the comprehension of the contemporary audience whose acceptance would have mattered most, as Hackett *et al.* (2006) suggest. By being outside of 'the true' of contemporary biological discipline, Mendel became 'a true monster' (Foucault, 1981, p.61), one whose methods and findings required a significant shift in the conventions of biology in order to appear correct. The reasons why this might have been so are beyond the scope of this thesis; as Reese (2009) cautions, it is unwise to impose modern and contrived controversy upon Mendel in assessing why his ideas gained much greater credibility after his death. Nevertheless, by accident or design, Mendel's propositions did not gain the widespread acceptance among his contemporaries that might have granted him widespread recognition during his lifetime. Thus, if Foucault's (1981) interpretation is true, it warns of the unhappy fate that might befall the researcher whose work appears to defy disciplinary categorisation. It also serves to illustrate that the rules of discursive policing identified by Foucault (1981) can

change, even though change may be slow. While such rules may govern acceptability in the moment, one may thus argue that the boundaries of disciplinary convention are themselves contingent.

This places a spotlight on research, and the standards by which the outcomes of research are to be evaluated. It might be argued that research is a process given form and meaning by disciplines, with their associated ontological and epistemological positions. This may be primarily a social process. Pring (2004) argues that different social groups see the world differently in important ways; these ways are ‘embodied within a language and thus is inherited by those who learn that language’ (Pring, 2004, p.236). Those that learn a language inherit, to a greater or lesser extent, some characteristic ways of perceiving the world. The language associated with a discipline and its community of practitioners can thus indicate a system of ideas of what counts as knowledge. Galt Harpham (2015) characterises disciplines as essential tools for organising knowledge, or ‘realistic concessions to human finitude’ (Galt Harpham, 2015, p.236) – a phrase that perhaps implies an inherent need to apply structures and bounds to what counts as knowledge. Moreover, disciplines may play a role in enabling innovation and new ideas; Galt Harpham (2015) argues that disciplines ‘create zones of freedom between the tombs where the standard rules do not apply’ (Galt Harpham, 2015, p.236). In this sense, the presence of disciplines and conventions allows the unconventional and novel to be readily identified. Conversely, the absence of clear markers of knowledge might render it impossible to determine what represents ‘new’ knowledge and what does not.

The difficulty with this argument is that it does not respond to the problem of acceptability of new ideas highlighted by Foucault (1981). Just because one can distinguish between the novel and the conventional, this does not mean that the novel will be afforded acceptance. Where one combines research methods that represent different ways of perceiving the world, one is in effect entering into a dialogue between disciplines, a dialogue which carries at any given moment both the potential for innovation and the risk of rejection. Advancement of knowledge at the boundaries of discourse can be argued to be a strategic process, as opposed to a straightforward fact-checking exercise. Foucault (1978) argues against the straightforward playing off of one discourse against another; rather, we are to imagine a multiplicity of different discursive elements brought into play in connection with particular strategies. The intervention of Gregor Mendel’s ideas can thus be said to exist in relationship with the ideas of his contemporaries; together these formed a ‘distribution’ (Foucault, 1978, p.100) of ideas spoken and not spoken, of things required and forbidden, the social and institutional contexts of the day and so forth. As such, a discipline does not so much act as an arbiter of what is

truthful and what is not, but as a set of positions which occupy specific relationships with other ideas. What counts as knowledge is thereby evaluated through 'a strategic model, rather than the model based on law' (Foucault, 1978, p.102). Gregor Mendel's ideas could therefore be regarded as a strategy whose time had not yet come during his lifetime.

The difficulties encountered by Mendel point to a tension between the concepts of acceptability and validity. Mendel, it might be supposed, operated in a professional environment that made value judgements about knowledge in positivistic terms; for his contemporaries, validity represented a boundary between truth and non-truth, representing a correspondence criterion of true knowledge (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). This could be argued to be core to the conventions of the discipline in which Mendel and his contemporaries operated. As long as that correspondence criterion held true, then the conventions of the discipline acted as a sound guide to validity – and thus also reliability. Yet if Mendel's peers considered that his work fell on the wrong side of that boundary – irrespective of whether a correspondence with an observable reality was demonstrated – then one is led to question the correspondence between acceptability (in terms of disciplinary conventions) and validity (in terms of truth). Denzin and Lincoln (2002) note the difficulty that this correspondence relation of validity and truth presents when considering a postmodern or constructivist standpoint on reality, particularly when qualitative – and not quantitative – data is in question. Their response is to work from a broader conception of validity that brings to the foreground coherence and pragmatic conceptions of truth, as opposed to strict correspondence with an external reality. This leads to a shift in emphasis from verification to falsification; validity is no longer about making claims to objective truth, but in making *defensible* claims, the worth of which might be judged in different terms:

Method as a truth guarantee dissolves; with a social construction of reality, the emphasis is on the discourse of the community. Communication of knowledge becomes significant, with aesthetics and rhetorics entering into the scientific discourse. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002, p.308)

A consequence of Denzin and Lincoln's argument appears to be that the rigour of method becomes secondary to the ability of a claim to withstand interrogation. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the fine detail of the arguments expressed and the ways in which they are expressed. The idea of the 'discourse of the community' seems to imply an emphasis on what is said, by whom, how, and in what context; the goal becomes a description of the realities that are created and the processes by which they are created.

However, Bergman (2008) argues that to embark on research is to imply the existence of a knowable external reality. On this line of thinking, to make any claim as a result of research is to make a claim to in some way know this reality. Thus, to propose one's work as better than what has gone before, one must be claiming that one's work corresponds with an objective reality. This project begins from the assertion that employability is entirely discursive - an assumption that might appear to contradict Bergman, in that there is an implication of a constructivist approach to what counts as truth. Regimes of truth are produced through discourse and are not eternal and given. However, Foucault's (1995) assertion that there is no knowledge that does not presuppose and form power relations does not in itself imply the absence of knowable things. Indeed, if one were to focus an inquiry not on the correspondence of a certain discourse with reality, but on the processes that lead to the predominance of certain discourses, then the question of validity (in terms of correspondence with an objective reality) becomes irrelevant. Indeed, Han (1998) argues that, for Foucault, such questions of correspondence with reality were methodologically irrelevant. What can be identified and described are the power relations themselves and the processes that go on within them; it is against these observations of social processes that claims to knowledge can be made. The validity of such claims can thus be enhanced through a process of adding greater detail, or what Foucault (1991) refers to as necessarily incomplete saturation. As Bergman (2008) notes: 'using data of different types can help us both to determine what interpretations of phenomena are more and less likely to be valid and to provide *complementary information that illuminates different aspects of what we are studying'* (Bergman, 2008, p.32; emphasis added).

It may be tempting to consider that the application of different types of data represents a form of triangulation, yet this would be a rather simplistic interpretation of the term. Best (2012) outlines three forms of triangulation, based on the trinity of methodology, participants and researcher; in Best's scheme, triangulation requires the variation of one of these factors while controlling the other two. Denzin (in Bloor and Wood, 2006) identifies four kinds of triangulation: data triangulation, using different data sources to investigate the same object; investigator triangulation, using multiple researchers; theoretical triangulation, involving the use of multiple theoretical perspectives in the same study; and methodological triangulation, using different methods to investigate the same object. The present project assumes the necessity to call on a wide range of data sources, including primary sources or those contemporary to the events being described, and secondary sources or later syntheses of contemporary sources. These will have been produced at different times, by people with

different social positions, for different purposes and aimed at different audiences. There will inevitably be a process of comparing the ideas presented through these different sources; in Denzin's scheme this corresponds with data triangulation as opposed to the methodological and researcher triangulation proposed by Best (2012).

In the case of this present research, triangulation is primarily a means of illuminating different aspects of the same object(s) of research; it is less a test of validity and reliability than a means of achieving progressive saturation. To achieve this progressive saturation means restoring to the debate various dimensions and interplays of positions (e.g. Foucault, 1984a). Triangulation as an activity then becomes an exercise in the adding of perspectives. For example, one might triangulate an interpretation of a given university's employability strategy document by introducing perspectives from a government white paper on higher education and from an employers' representative organisation's research findings on workforce skills. This would allow the emergence of a certain sense of graduate employability to be dislocated from the institutional perspective and placed within a wider set of interactions. This is an act of triangulation by offering a means of identifying where these different perspectives confirm and/or contradict one another (e.g. Best, 2012), thus leading to a fuller account of the processes at work.

The notion of triangulation, however, should not be taken to imply a disposition to truth that is grounded in a positivistic conception. The objective is not to pursue understandings of graduate employability that are better representations of a concrete reality; to do so would be to engage in a hunt through 'the great mythical book of history' for 'lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place' (Foucault, 2010a, p.128). Rather, to triangulate in this case is to attempt to constitute the focus of study from multiple points (Flick, 2007). It is therefore an essential step in accessing the archive, which Foucault (2010a) defines not as a collection of inert statements but as a system of statements. To triangulate is thus to pursue not external reliability but internal consistency.

3.7 Challenges emerging from previous approaches to researching employability

The previous chapter has outlined a number of lines of inquiry regarding employability that have appeared in the academic literature. These approaches indicate a number of methodological challenges which are of relevance to this present project.

3.7.1 Power differentials

Discussing the study of autism, Vakirtzi and Bayliss (2013) write: ‘Those who do not speak in the way power requires are subjected to minority positions which are devalued. Such positions are normative’ (Vakirtzi and Bayliss, 2013, p.369). Here, the ability to use language in an ‘acceptable’ way is related to the social status that an individual might hold. Furthermore, what counts as ‘acceptable’ depends on the relative position of the individual in the first place – adults, for example, are measured by higher standards than pre-school children. Similarly, what counts as an ‘acceptable’ combination of personal qualities, skills, attributes and so forth to qualify one for employment might be argued to be a normative judgement, and one that Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) imply lies in the hands of the employer. If this is true, then employability is a concept that is bound up with questions of power relations, social organisation and historical context. Again, this calls into question the claims to universality of any one ‘model’ of employability, and hints at the impossibility of reducing employability to a concise definition that is also useful. It also implies that employability is a concept that only makes sense when considered with reference to power relations and social and historical context. In order to say something meaningful about employability, a research approach is needed that encompasses the contextuality, historicity and power differentials implied therein. Note, however, that this concept of power implies dominance and authoritativeness; it hints at the notion of repressive power that Foucault (1978) was at pains to set aside. A careful application of Foucault’s notion of power and resistance might enable an escape from such top-down analyses of power relations, though institutions and processes of dominance may still be relevant as part of such an analysis.

3.7.2 Different conceptions of employability

Taking into account a broader view of employability than graduate employability, Moreau and Leathwood (2006) argue that the term ‘employability’ represents a shift of discourses of the construction of the worker. This has involved a move away from a systemic view of the labour market towards a focus on the individual’s qualities; thus, employability has become an individual problem. Such a shift is echoed in work that emphasises the importance of human capital (e.g. CBI, 2009; Tan, 2014). By contrast, lines of inquiry that focus on employability in terms of graduate identity (e.g. Hinchliffe and Jolly, 2011) emphasise both the possession of certain qualities, which lead to the formation of a graduate’s composite identity, and the power of the employer to shape and (in)validate that identity. Such concepts sit between pure supply-led and pure demand-led approaches to conceptualising employability. The presence of

different approaches to the concept of employability should, for the moment at least, cast doubt on claims to universality of any one line of inquiry. As an object of research, employability seems less like a coherent concept than a space of possibilities out of which any number of conceptions might emerge. What is missing from the academic literature is an approach to researching graduate employability that encompasses this space of possibilities without attempting to reduce the concept to a synthetic model (see e.g. Knight and Yorke, 2002; Jackson, 2014); it is this gap that this project aims to fill.

3.7.3 Knowing and disclosing oneself

Approaches to researching graduate employability that rely on methods such as interviews, questionnaires and personal narratives encounter challenges associated with knowing and disclosing oneself. Bandura (1997), for example, proposes a connection between individuals' self-efficacy beliefs and their likely ability to perform. Similarly, de Vos and Soens (2008) hypothesise a positive relationship between career self-management behaviours and perceived employability, and that career self-management behaviours mediate the relationship between career attitude and perceived employability. These hypotheses were tested via a questionnaire issued to 297 employees, from which a stratified sample was selected for analysis. This approach relied on the ability of questionnaire respondents to respond accurately and truthfully to a Likert-style questionnaire. Peterson (2000) suggests a number of potential problems that such an approach may encounter. First is the problem of sufficient knowledge of oneself: 'Rare is the individual who can answer what are essentially fact questions about the future, such as the price of red durum wheat in two years or whether La Niña will return in the next decade' (Peterson, 2000, p.20). De Vos and Soens (2008) invited participants to respond to questions such as 'I believe I could easily obtain a comparable job with another employer' (de Vos and Soens, 2008, p.452). Arguably, making such statements requires individuals to make a connection between a conception of their past and a prediction of their future. The best that one is likely to be able to do is express an opinion; how much significance can be ascribed to such responses is another question altogether.

Secondly, there is the problem of personal significance of the question being asked: 'Contrary to what many researchers or research sponsors might think (or desire!), much of what is investigated is not significant to study participants' (Peterson, 2000, p.20). Obtaining meaningful responses to questions such as 'I have obtained a better insight into what I find important in my career' (de Vos and Soens, 2008, p.452) seem to rely on respondents themselves assigning importance to their careers. What if, for instance, a respondent is simply

working to live, and does not consider it important to build a career? What if a respondent's knowledge of what is important to their career is faulty? Such questions are not easily answerable through a research method that relies on self-knowledge and honest, accurate disclosure. One cannot reasonably take into account through research design the entire range of possible interpretations and responses that research subjects might make. Some hypotheses might therefore be unknowingly closed off as a consequence of research design.

Thirdly, respondents may not be able to answer a research question because they are not aware of the answer. Questions relating, for example, to individuals' behavioural motives might require knowledge beyond individuals' thresholds of awareness (Peterson, 2000).

Responses to questions such as 'I make contacts with people who can influence my career' (de Vos and Soens, 2008, p.452) may not reveal why individuals choose to associate with certain people. Do such people really influence respondents' careers, whatever form such influence might take, or do they help to satisfy some other form of psychological need? Such questions also presuppose that associating with certain people can result in a (positive) effect on one's career, or that respondents even know what this might look like in practice.

Fourthly, to take a particular case: respondents to questionnaires may choose to interpret questions in such a manner that they can answer them (Peterson, 2000). In situations where the researcher retains the monopoly of interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), this can lead to a discontinuity between the researcher's original intention, the interpretation that the respondent makes of the question, and the interpretation that the researcher subsequently makes of the respondent's interpretation of the original question. This would seem to present difficulties in justifying any meaning that might be inferred from such data.

None of these problems imply the impossibility of valid or reliable knowledge being obtained from research methods that rely on self-knowledge and honest, accurate disclosure. Such methods still have the potential to produce meaningful knowledge. However, they do point to the need to take other approaches to the same domains of research:

One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation. And one has to bear in mind that the further one breaks down the processes under analysis, the more one is enabled and indeed obliged to construct their external relations of intelligibility. (Foucault, 1991, p.77)

Thus, research methods predicated on self-disclosure can only take a study so far. The premise of this study is that employability, far from being a simple and isolatable concept, is bound up in a complex web of relations. As such, an approach to research is needed that goes

beyond the opinions and perceptions of individuals. Instead, a framework is needed to piece together the external relations of intelligibility that the concept of employability implies. The Foucauldian genealogy advanced in this work may help to address such concerns by illustrating a richer picture of the contingencies and contestations that precipitate the emergence of different understandings of the term ‘employability’. In doing so, it offers a theoretical framework that would enable further lines of inquiry that would directly address the present-day challenges experienced by academics who teach in higher education institutions. Such an approach might also contribute to the interpretation of data gathered through interviews, questionnaires or other forms of self-disclosure, thus providing grounding for future empirical studies into graduate employability.

3.8 Genealogy as ethical research

Notwithstanding that this project makes no claims to definite and complete knowledge of social reality, this project is still an act of research. As such, the researcher bears a ‘continuous moral responsibility’ (Ryen, 2011, p.421), adopting an approach that recognises ethical matters as contextual and situational (Ryen, 2011). Scott (2009) argues that ‘the question of ethics in the context of Foucault’s thought is at once a question of knowledge’ (Scott, 2009, p.350). The interdependence of power and knowledge implies ‘combinatory events that bring things together in certain ways’ (p.350), serving for example to regulate and subjugate human behaviours. It is through the work of describing these interdependencies of knowledge and power, and relating them to the social world, that the ethical dimensions of this project can be explored.

Scott (2009) identifies two senses of ethics in Foucault’s work. Firstly, genealogy as the identification of subjugated knowledges and the production of alternative discourses brings into question established, dominant and taken-for-granted positions. In this sense, the mere conducting of a genealogical project could be said to be ethical because of the possibilities for challenge, liberation and transformation of social orders that it might imply. Such a project also offers an ethical response to the dilemma identified through Foucault’s (1981) notion of being ‘in the true’, whereby researchers may engage in self-regulating behaviour in order to gain acceptance for one’s ideas and thus, deliberately or subconsciously, close off some lines of inquiry. By presenting a piece of research as underpinned by an ethical imperative, a defence of novel or controversial ideas might be offered through pursuit of goals that are more important or further-reaching than respecting the conventions of a particular community. Genealogy as a technique implies ‘going against the grain’, and thus offers the

potential, for example, to make voices heard that are typically excluded through dominant discourses. Similarly, an explicit ethical contribution may be effective in shifting the boundaries of disciplinary discourse, thus furthering the scope of knowledge of that particular discipline or intellectual community. In this sense, genealogy is ethical in that it prepares the ground for new knowledge by offering the possibility of new understandings of familiar concepts.

Secondly, a piece of genealogical research may be ethical in that it constitutes 'a work on the self by the self' (Scott, 2009, p.362). The outcomes of a genealogy might offer both the researcher and the reader an opportunity to deliberately affirm or challenge their personal and professional ways of knowing and being or some other aspect of their lived experience. For Foucault, care of the self does not constitute a search for new rationalities, but the discovery of the limits of rationalities (Scott, 2009). In this sense it is ethical because of the opportunities for self-transformation and to experience 'freedom in which transformative opportunities present themselves' (Scott, 2009, p.363). Indeed, Foucault characterises genealogy as 'risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge' (Foucault, 1984a, p.97). Thus, to engage in a piece of genealogical research is to put one's own sense of being at risk; it is to be open to being troubled by what one might encounter along the way. There is a certain irony in this particular project, conducted as it is by an academic-in-development whose very professional identity is still emerging and whose position in the academic community is still less than secure. This entire project could thus be interpreted as an exercise in self-(re)creation, where the researcher may be as much transformed through the act of research as the research is formed by the researcher's actions. A piece of genealogical research is therefore ethical insofar as it creates opportunities for experiencing freedom at one's limits; it should not simply aim to replace one dominant discourse with something else but should aim to open up spaces in which individuals (including researchers) might deliberately engage with questions of who they are and how they relate to a shared social world.

A further dimension of ethicality can be inferred. Just as an act of work on the self is ethical in itself (Scott, 2009), and that such an activity puts one's own subjectivity at risk through the pursuit of knowledge (Foucault, 1984a), this project actively calls into question the notions of the employable graduate and the academic. It does so by rejecting the reduction of graduate employability to an undifferentiated, uncontested technical concept that is external to higher education. In doing so it brings into play the possibility that the present environment for higher education is not an external imposition that acts in opposition to some 'pure' notion of

academic life, but is an outcome of processes of resistance: ‘mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds’ (Foucault, 1978, p.96). In proposing the dynamics of these resistances, one is essentially dispelling any assumption that the ‘problem’ of graduate employability can be ‘solved’ once and for all through a technical diagnose-and-fix response through the curriculum and teaching. By doing so, necessary jobs of work are identified in addressing some of the challenges of present-day higher education – perhaps relating to questions of gender, race and class in addition to teaching and learning. As a result, the comforting unities of idealised academic life, graduate employability and the employable graduate are put into doubt. In this sense it is an ethical work.

Ryen (2011) raises the notion of researchers’ moral responsibility in complex realities, arguing that the debate ‘should be grounded on a critical meeting of philosophy, epistemology and research practice’ (Ryen, 2011, p.421). Failing to grasp the complexity of research ethics not only risks capturing what is special about qualitative research, but is also immoral in itself (Ryen, 2011). The premise of this project implies what Ma (2012) refers to as a normative world view, focused on our understanding of what is proper, good, right and wrong within a social context. This points to a risk in the application of Foucault’s genealogical approach. Though genealogy understood as the recalling of forgotten struggles (Walters, 2012) can serve to reveal voices and viewpoints that were initially excluded, there is the associated risk that such an approach can be subverted in order to pursue overtly political goals. This could manifest itself in the promotion of an alternative reading of history to the effective exclusion of historically dominant perspectives. This would effectively replicate the injustices that such a project might claim to address. The notion of complex realities offers a way of guarding against this trap. A commitment to the representation of complexity, rather than an explicit commitment to making visible what was once invisible, nonetheless enables multiple perspectives to be portrayed. The key ethical question is then not one of what is to be included and excluded, but how competing positions are to be evaluated and addressed. While it would not be ethical to misrepresent or ignore what is held to be the ‘normative reality’ (Ma, 2012, p.1862) of a cultural group, neither would it be appropriate to discard potentially valuable lines of inquiry over concerns about group cohesion or acceptability. This is particularly so where an emergent line of inquiry might have the potential to say something beneficial for the particular circumstances being studied. The challenge, then, is to find a

language through which potentially difficult or unsettling ideas can be expressed in a way that engages, rather than alienates, the intended audience.

3.9 Method

Taking all of the above into account, this section proposes an approach to interrogating the policy documents. The approach taken to interrogating the policy texts seeks to find indicators of the conditions that might enable one or more type of discourse of graduate employability to emerge. Following Foucault (2010b), this rejects the idea that graduate employability is “an unchanging object throughout history on which systems of representation with variable representational functions and values have been brought to bear” (Foucault, 2010b, p.3). Rather, the focus shifts to the minutiae of words, practices and day-to-day activities that can be interpreted as indicators of how policy may have been deployed as a means of guiding the conduct of others (Foucault, 1982).

The data interrogation is split into two phases. Firstly, the policy text itself is analysed, following Tamboukou’s (2016) approach of allowing oneself to be immersed in the ideas present. Indeed, it is through this process of immersion and telling that a story emerges, since ‘the story becomes in the process of being narrated’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.33). To narrate the story of a policy text is not a matter of decoding and translating as if there were some essential, fundamental truth buried in the syntax. The meanings of a story must necessarily be created in the process of its narration and its reading, just as Tamboukou (2016) notes that meaning is mutually formed through the relation between the narrator or reader and the content. This suggests two consequences. Firstly, that meanings are made through the interpretation of the text of a policy through the act of reading and retelling it; and secondly, that the mere act of writing a genealogy from a given policy document is never the final step in its interpretation. What can be said, however, is that the policy text may be argued by the narrator to present a number of key themes or possibilities for its interpretation. In the present case, the policy text is framed in the context of the types of discourse of graduate employability identified earlier: gaining employment; human capital; self-perception; graduate identity; and credentialism. Extracts from the policy text that deal directly with the relation between higher education, the economy, employers and the lives of young people are taken, and these are coded in terms of emergent themes. An indication is then given of whether the themes identified through the text appear to facilitate or mitigate against the five types of discourse.

The approach to coding taken here reflects Yanow's (2000) notion of interpretive policy analysis as 'one that focuses on the meanings of policies, on the values, feelings, or beliefs they express, and on the processes by which those meanings are communicated to and "read" by various audiences' (Yanow, 2000, p.14). In these terms, extracts from policy documents represent 'artifacts that are significant carriers of meaning' (Yanow, 2000, p.72) for those communities with which the analysis is concerned (in this case, politicians, students, employers and higher education professionals). As a consequence, a text's meaning resides 'not exclusively in the author's intent, in the text itself, or in the reader alone – but is, rather, created actively in interactions among all three, in the writing and in the reading' (Yanow, 2000, p.17). Coding extracts from policy texts as a step towards the making of meaning is thus an act of negotiation between the writer, reader and other potential readers (as part of the interpretive community around the text). Thus, coding for meaning-making is not simply a matter of superimposing an analytical framework onto a piece of text and counting the instances that appear to reflect certain themes, though this represents a useful point with which to begin the analysis. Rather, it is an iterative process that is interested in tracing the regularity and patterns of logics being deployed that indicate tactical elements operating in force relations (Foucault, 1978). Therefore, while the frequency by which a certain idea is visible in the text may give an indication of its relative importance, of more significance to the genealogical analysis are the connections between the different ideas and how they are employed in the context of the policy text and the debates within the relevant interpretive communities. As a consequence, coding is part of that process of meaning-making, and thus a neat distinction between descriptive coding and interpretive coding cannot easily be drawn.

The second phase follows Tamboukou's (1999) argument that, in producing a Foucauldian genealogy, one is concerned with examining 'which kinds of practices tied to which kinds of external conditions determine the different knowledges in which we ourselves figure' (Tamboukou, 1999, p.202). Tamboukou's (2016) notion of the primacy of the narrator in the formation of meaning does in itself suggest a risk – namely that the narrator's own assemblage of experiences, perspectives and so forth exerts such an effect on the making of meaning that the meanings proposed become intensely personal. Given that Tamboukou acknowledges 'the Nietzschean insight that truth cannot be separated from the procedures of its production' (Tamboukou, 2016, p.21), a Foucauldian genealogy as a means of analysing history cannot be reduced to a researcher-centric act of interpretation that is divorced from any recognition of the modes of meaning-making contemporary to the events being studied. It is therefore necessary to introduce additional source material that moderates and limits the possibilities

for meaning-making in a way that connects the analysis with the ways in which the policy might have been interpreted at the time. This is particularly important if, as Tamboukou (2016) argues, ‘genealogy is concerned with the processes, procedures and apparatuses, whereby truth and knowledge are produced, in the discursive regimes of modernity’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.21). In order to locate the policy text more concretely in the conditions of the time, a search of *The Times* (London) digital archive for the terms ‘higher education’ and ‘university’ was conducted. A similar process is then undertaken: extracts of articles are selected that deal directly with the relation between higher education, the economy, employers and the lives of young people; emergent themes are then identified that may indicate facilitation or mitigation against certain types of discourse of graduate employability. The relevance and value of *The Times* as a corroborating source is addressed later in this chapter.

This two-stage process enables, firstly, an identification of ‘the elements of meaning at the disposal of speaking subjects in a given period, or the semantic structure that appears on the surface of a discourse that has already been spoken’ (Foucault, 2010a, p.48). In this case, the analysis indicates the discourses of higher education already being deployed by government and representatives of higher education institutions, interest groups and others. Secondly, the identification of key themes from the policy and media extracts enables a cultivation of ‘the details and accidents that accompany every beginning’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.80), or an assemblage of the relevant social, political and economic forces of the time. Thirdly, the identification of themes across both the policy and the media extracts opens the way for the identification of larger ‘external and general’ (Foucault, 2009, p.117) projects to which the notion of graduate employability can be related.

Such an approach draws on Ball’s (1994) two perspectives on the analysis of policy: the analysis of policy as text, and the examination of the production of truth and knowledges through policy ensembles. Firstly, the process taken here makes it possible to ‘relate together analytically the ad hocery of the macro with the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of the *ad hoc* social actions: to look for the iterations embedded within chaos’ (Ball, 1994, p.15; emphasis in original). This is the analysis of policy as text, an attempt to escape from a dependence on the fixed meanings of words and to relate these to the wider context in which the text was formed, to explore the allegiances and points of conflict that might have emerged in the course of the production of the policy text. In this way, analysis of policy as text offers the possibility of accessing what Foucault calls ‘the

ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask' (Foucault, 1980, p.82).

Secondly, such an analysis opens the way for this particular policy document to be related to other policies of the time, thus going beyond the immediate objects of policy and coming to terms with the complexities that characterise the policy environment. Ball (1994) argues that 'we need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a *production* of "truth" and "knowledges", as discourses' (Ball, 1994, p.21; emphasis in original). Note that Ball switches the emphasis from individual policy documents to ensembles or collections of documents; in this way he widens the understanding of policy from written texts to include processes and outcomes – what is said and done as well as what is written. To engage with policy as discourse thus also requires going beyond the immediate objects of policy and coming to terms with the complexities that characterise the policy environment. We are, argues Ball (1994), 'enmeshed in a variety of discordant, incoherent and contradicting discourses' (Ball, 1994, p.21), hence to engage with policy as discourse is to acknowledge the tensions and conflicts that characterise the playing out of discourses. We are thus faced with the impossibility of deducing a simple chain of events that leads to the production of stable truths. Instead, in engaging with policy as discourse we are presented with a tangled, messy picture that is characterised by conflict, opposition and discord. It is through these conflicts, tensions and oppositions that certain possibilities for the truth of a notion become more probable than others; it is these interactions of social forces that produce configurations of the 'truth' of an idea, and these 'truths' are rendered more or less stable by the introduction of further discursive tensions. The task of analysing policy as discourse is thus to chart and reconstruct this messiness in a systematic way in order to escape from a tendency to reduce policy to the deceptive order of a simple story.

Taken together, Ball's (1994) two perspectives on policy enable the construction of a genealogy of a particular policy that takes us towards Foucault's conception of genealogy:

What emerges out of this is something one might call a genealogy, or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts. And these genealogies, that are the combined product of an erudite knowledge and a popular knowledge, were not possible and could not even have been attempted except on one condition, namely that the tyranny of globalising discourses with their hierarchy and all their privileges of a theoretical *avant-garde* was eliminated. (Foucault, 1980. p.83; emphasis in original)

Hence, a genealogy of a policy requires the de-privileging of overarching or totalising discourses and the rejection of the search for the authoritative or authentic positions of their prime movers. However, to produce a genealogy of a policy is not necessarily to reject the content of previous interpretations; it would be better to say that a genealogy re-opens the possibility for new conceptualisations. In this case, the production of a genealogy asserts that there is still more that can and should be said about the effects of a policy. In essence, a genealogy ‘entertain[s] the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects’ (Foucault, 1980, p.83). While Foucault takes aim here at what he sees as a tendency of a science to monopolise what counts as knowledge, one may make the same claim more generally with regards to the interpretation of a particular policy or policy ensemble; in the contested terrain of the exposition and enactment of policies it would be as well to guard against the claims of one interpretation or another to be the ‘one true’ reading of a policy. Instead, we are prompted to look for the effects that contestation and different interpretations may have had – it is these that represent the ‘real’ effects of policy for the purposes of this research.

At this point it is useful to establish the role of *The Times* as a means of extrapolating those ‘real’ effects of policy. Hilliker (2008) notes the significance of mass media in ‘educating the general public on endless subjects’ (p.261) and the role of mass media in contributing to processes of socialisation. For example, Hilliker’s study of the reporting of grief identifies *The New York Times* as a ‘newspaper of record’, a ‘popular newspaper with worldwide coverage’ (p.261). However, while Hilliker (2008) acknowledges its ‘reputation as a national newspaper in the United States’ (p.265), the basis for this reputation - and hence its justification as a ‘newspaper of record’ - is not explored explicitly. Indeed, the selection of *The New York Times* appears, in this case, to be justified in terms of its wide circulation and hence large readership. This notion of broad reach of both coverage and readership is significant given the importance Hilliker (2008) ascribes to journalists in not merely reporting social norms but influencing how we think. Thus, news journalists are argued to engage in a process of constructing social norms - they are ‘major contributors to the body of knowledge’ (Hilliker 2008, p.273) not just in terms of volume but also content. Journalists are both witnesses to events and part of an interpretive community, receiving and responding to cues regarding appropriate content and styles of reporting (Alrebh, 2015). One might therefore argue that the particular perspectives or positions taken by individual news journalists, collective

positions taken by publications, their owners and/or financial backers are also significant considerations. It may also be relevant to question whether the interplay between the positions taken by publications and the perceptions of positions taken by their target audiences represents a methodologically significant influence on the interpretation of a newspaper as a genealogical source. Thus, using only one newspaper may represent a limitation to identifying the regularities of public discourse.

The question of proximity of a particular journalist or publication to an event or set of events may also be significant. Alrebh (2015), in the case of Saudi Arabia between 1932 and 1953, works on the premise that few people would have had direct access to the country during that time period. Hence, the interpretations generated by the press would take on particular significance, both through the scarcity of competing interpretations and the perspectives by which journalists themselves may have been influenced. Journalists covering Saudi Arabia at that time ‘would have to take shortcuts to understand the area, as it is assumed that their cultural background concerning Saudi Arabia and movements in the country would be limited’ (Alrebh, 2015, p.193). These journalists’ perspectives, argues Alrebh (2015), may have represented what he refers to as an Orientalist tradition in Western reporting - for example where a comparison between a Muslim and Christian group is made that ‘takes into account utterly no sense of the differences in historical authority of either faith or any of their sects’ (Alrebh, 2015, p.193). Alrebh (2015) therefore locates a potential source of disconnect between newspaper reporting and notions of objective truth, thus casting into doubt any claims for the validity of a source in terms of the ‘objectivity’ of its reporting. Instead, newspaper reports can be thought of as part of a contest to establish meaning or understanding of a given notion (Foucault, 1984a). The cultural situatedness of reporters of events may serve both to offer new perspectives on readily accessible matters and offer perspectives on relatively inaccessible matters. In doing so they may replicate or challenge shared perspectives; by implication they are never neutral reporters of bare facts but are active in contests for the establishment of meaning through discourse. Claims for the relevance of a particular source (be it a publication or individual writer) to a genealogical analysis ought therefore to be made in terms of its location within the discursive contest of the time - just as Alrebh (2015) draws out the significance of a pervasive Orientalist tradition in the reporting and non-reporting of Middle Eastern matters and links it to the establishment and reinforcement of the authority of the Saudi monarchy. The implication for this present research is thus to be alert to the ways in which the relevance of *The Times* is grounded in its

proximity to the political and economic debates and institutions of the eras in question and the particular perspectives that may emerge through its journalism.

Hence, while there may be limitations in the use of a single newspaper as a historical source in terms of reflecting the breadth of discursive engagement in the context of an entire society, this difficulty is not one of objectivity but of proximity. What must be established for the present study is that *The Times* is sufficiently embedded in the discursive interactions connecting government, higher education and the economy in order to give access to processes that enable the emergence of notions of graduate employability. If stories guide thought and give it political orientation (Tamboukou, 2016), then the construction of stories or narratives around aspects of education policy – particularly where such policy is emergent – inevitably becomes enmeshed in the formation and emergence of object(s) through policy. This becomes possible when the traditional notion of causality is abandoned in favour of what Tamboukou (2016), after Barad, calls ‘intra-action’:

Causality as a relation presupposes pre-existing entities that act upon each other being constituted as causes and/or effects. In the absence of separability among the components of the phenomena, intra-actions between them become agentic forces through which the components become determinate within the conditions of the phenomenon that they are part of. (Tamboukou, 2016, p.31)

Media reporting of a given policy debate may therefore be regarded as being among the components of that policy process, particularly given Ball’s (1994) distinction between policy as text and policy ensembles as the sites of production of truths. Crucially, such media narratives also emerge as a consequence of the playing out of policy; they are not merely reports of the formation of policy, nor are they external interventions that act on policy to produce its artefacts in certain forms. Rather, a relation of interdependence exists between the formation of policy, the formation of its objects, and the formation of media narratives. These are inseparable from the discursive emergence of graduate employability. It is therefore this inseparability which gives a media source its significance in terms of the analysis of policy. Such a media source may ‘carry alive its turbulent histories’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.46) and ‘create new meanings from the connections they make’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.46). Such a source gives access to a set of processes that are part of the emergence and descent of a concept.

For the present project, then, *The Times* must be argued to be sufficiently engaged in, or illustrative of, the relevant discursive contests in order to adequately ground the analysis in

something greater than the policy text. This justification can be made on a combination of grounds. *The Times* can be justified as a significant source through its widespread readership, as Alrebh and Ten Eyck (2014) do in their study of the coverage of Saudi Arabia between 1927 and 1937. In other contexts, the significance of *The Times* has been argued for in terms of being a ‘quality’ publication in terms of its ‘tone’ or the perceived intelligence of its coverage (e.g. Shaw, 2007). Similarly, Davis and Wansink (2015) justify the choice of *The Times* in their study of the coverage of obesity through an appeal to a notion of influence, while noting that it is not fully representative of the United Kingdom. Still others associate *The Times*’s social significance with the profile and political leanings of its owners, as Thompson (2006) does in his profile of Viscount Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* in the early years of the 20th century. Such lines of argumentation offer an explicit connection between a publication and the formation of perceptions of individuals, institutions and issues. The effects of such a connection are illustrated in Northcliffe’s relation with government during the First World War, as Thompson argues:

Well aware of his unique position, Northcliffe made his press support available to the British government, but at a price—a place in deciding the life and death issues involved in winning the war. The politicians paid this levy only grudgingly and in the end withdrew as quickly as possible from what they considered something of a partnership with the devil. Asquith failed to come to an arrangement with his chief newspaper critic, but his successor, Lloyd George, was much more canny in his relations with the press. This was in part by necessity, as the Welshman was a premier without a party and the press formed one of the pillars which kept him in office. (Thompson, 2006, p.123)

Thompson’s argument connects the personal profile and perspectives of the owner of *The Times* with the discursive contest over issues key to the conduct of war; in broader terms, this is argued to have supported the political fortunes of the prime minister of the day. Northcliffe’s *Times* can therefore be regarded as active in the interplay of knowledge and power that represents a Foucauldian discursive formation. Such a line of argumentation embeds *The Times* within the discursive contest of the moment, and thus justifies it as a means of grounding a genealogical analysis of government policy in the First World War. By 1985 *The Times* was in the ownership of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, whose closeness to the prime minister of the day has been noted, even going so far as to indicate his influence over policy decisions (Gaber, 2012). McKnight (2009) characterises Murdoch’s publications, notably the *Sunday Times*, as ‘[shaping] the parameters and the political climate’ (McKnight, 2009, p.766), though suggesting that Murdoch regarded himself as something of a rebel ‘against a

dominant intellectual and political orthodoxy' (McKnight, 2009, p.765). Such a characterisation of Murdoch – as both an elite influencer and agent of change - enables his publications to be located centrally within debates and discursive contests concerning relations between government and matters of national significance. It is argued that the relation of government policy to higher education and the economy represents such a domain.

It might also be argued that a genealogical study does not attempt to encompass the whole of a society but can be bounded to a narrower realm. Foucault (1978) alludes to this when he writes of the analysis of sexuality in terms of power: 'It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization' (Foucault, 1978, p.92). The reference to a given sphere of power relations is significant. It alludes to a sense in which certain power relations might be delimited, not necessarily in their effects but in the proximity of force relations that 'are always local and unstable' (Foucault, 1978, p.93). This is an assumption of locality that prevents the analysis proceeding from an assumption of a given 'over-all unity of a domination' (Foucault, 1978, p.93). If this is to be the case, then the selection of a particular source for analysis must be justifiable through some notion of proximity to the realm in question. For example, if the question is about the interplay of dominations between higher education, government and employers, then a publication that is widely read and engaged with by those individuals who are 'in play', so to speak, might represent an objectively better source than one that is somehow at a greater distance to the participants in the discursive contest (for example a local newspaper or publication focused on one sector of business). Thus, Hilliker's (2008) notion of a 'newspaper of record' offers grounds on which *The Times*, with its connections to the heart of the social and political conditions of the United Kingdom, may be justified as offering a window into the spheres of power relations in question.

3.10 Conclusion

The central proposition of this thesis is that graduate employability is a concept that is entirely discursive, that is, a power-knowledge relation that is contingent on specific contexts. These multiple discourses of employability enable different configurations of the notion of what it means to be an employable graduate, with differing consequences for the practice of academics. Thus, by tracing the emergence of these discourses through the history of higher education by analysing the relevant contexts and conditions, graduate employability can be analysed as outcomes of resistance. These mechanics of resistance then open the possibility

that the role of the academic is itself an outcome of resistance. Furthermore, by rejecting the simple distinction of graduate employability as an undifferentiated, technical notion that is external to higher education in favour of a reading grounded in a Foucauldian notion of discourse, this project is in itself an act of resistance. Foucault's genealogical toolkit offers an approach to tracing the emergence and distinctiveness of these discourses of employability. It suggests the possibility of questioning the apparently firm foundations upon which the concept of employability has been claimed to be built, in a way that might offer a richer and more detailed understanding of the present. Because employability is proposed to be an entirely discursive concept, the project almost inevitably leans towards epistemologies that are interpretive, constructivist and naturalistic. This is in contrast to the positivist epistemologies that imply absolute, transcendent truth. Nevertheless, it does not propose that all interpretations carry equal weight, nor does it reject the idea that there is a knowable reality; to do so would be to abandon any possibility of claims to better knowledge.

4. A Foucauldian genealogy of graduate employability

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a genealogy of the idea of graduate employability in the United Kingdom. It uses five key national government policy texts relating to the relation between higher education to describe the *wirkliche Historie* (Foucault, 1984a) of what has shown to be a multifaceted and often elusive concept. The analysis presented here covers a period of a little less than 60 years, beginning with the era of expansion of higher education in the 1960s and ending with the key higher education policy text of the Cameron government. Throughout it offers what Foucault (1984a) refers to as an *historical sense*, which he characterises as:

a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses; that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements – the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past (Foucault, 1984a, p.87)

This chapter challenges the suggestion that employability is *simply* this or that. Given the diversity in conceptualisations of graduate employability already identified in the academic literature, this chapter offers a reading of policy that indicates potential points of emergence of these different conceptions. In doing so it opens up a space for debate over graduate employability in terms that go beyond questions of curriculum and institutional practice. Instead, it offers the possibility that questions of graduate employability can be framed as historically-situated and enmeshed in tensions between prevailing ideas. The five policy texts to be analysed are: the 1963 report of the Committee on Higher Education chaired by Lord Robbins; a 1976 report by the House of Commons Select Committee on Higher Education known as *University-Industry Relations*; a Command Paper published in the era of the second Thatcher government, entitled *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*; the first major set of policy proposals from Blair's New Labour government of 1997-2001; and the 2016 proposals on the governance of higher education from the Cameron government.

However, it must be noted that this chapter does not attempt to rescue any lost conceptions of graduate employability for application in the present day. In discussing his two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explicitly rejected any suggestion that his works offered alternative solutions to contemporary problems of sexual ethics:

I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raided at another moment by other

people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that's the reason why I don't accept the word *alternative*. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques* (Foucault, 1984c, p.343)

This distinction between the histories of solutions and problems is significant in that it points to both the limits and the possibilities of interpreting a genealogy of an idea. The present project offers potential ways of conceptualising the emergence – not the origins - of particular configurations of an idea, yet it does not test the value of these different configurations. Genealogy thus cannot offer access to the past in order to find an ‘ideal’ response to policy drives towards graduate employability. We cannot address the present by plundering the past. Instead, by attempting to show the historical conditions that made the emergence of certain configurations more likely than others, it points to the possibility that the ‘problems’ of graduate employability in the present might be constituted as historically situated. In this sense it raises the dangers present in the reduction of graduate employability to any given formulation, makes the possibility of such a reduction present and visible, and creates the grounds for a reformulation of the terms of contemporary debate. It therefore enables a rejection of a simplistic choice between responses to policy grounded in classical notions of the university (where the search for truth and the evaluation of culture) and pragmatic approaches (where service to society takes precedence) (Docherty, 2011). We are thus offered possibilities of new terms of debate.

4.2 University expansion and the employable graduate: the case of the *Robbins Report*

Higher Education: report of the committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the chairmanship of Lord Robbins (hereafter the *Robbins Report*) (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) represents one of the most significant points of emergence in the history of higher education in Britain. In particular, it brought to the fore the relation between higher education and the wider economic needs of the country. Shattock (2014) notes that ‘its statistical analysis and detailed recommendations made it possible for the first time to talk about a UK system of higher education’ (Shattock, 2014, p.123). Stevens (2004) characterises the report as prompting a change in direction in higher education, contrasting Robbins’s background in economics with what he calls ‘the Newman vision’ (Stevens, 2004, p.23) of the pursuit of a good general education. By implication, the direction promoted by Robbins was that of higher education being oriented towards addressing the key economic challenges of the nation.

Holmwood (2012) notes that the expansion of higher education recommended by Robbins had not only an economic rationale, but that it also held the promise of ‘social and political value in contributing to culture and an inclusive democracy’ (Holmwood, 2012, p.12). Ainley (2014) argues that the committee’s recommendations reached beyond the realm of higher education in that it ‘officially juked the previous tripartite selection by supposedly “scientific” but by then discredited IQ-testing of Platonic types of gold, silver and bronze children’ (Ainley, 2014, pp.225-226); thus, the effects of the *Robbins Report* might be seen even in compulsory education. Still others credit Robbins with bringing universities into the political and public debate over education (Willetts, 2013), with prompting ‘explosive’ (Rée, 1964, p.94) growth in the number of university places, and with justifying such expansion ‘first on the grounds that higher education was a means *inter alia* to economic ends’ (Pratt, 1992, p.33; emphasis in original). The significance ascribed to the *Robbins Report* to the development of higher education in the United Kingdom is therefore not in doubt; it has become a potent source of grand narratives that have been invokes in conceptualising the development of higher education in the United Kingdom.

This section argues that the *Robbins Report* represents an intersection of the economic, political and social conditions of Britain in the immediate post-war period within the context of the higher education sector of the day. In this sense it represents an act of governance, making universities a legitimate target of the exercise of conduct upon conduct (Foucault, 1982). It will propose that the intersection of ‘core’ concerns of higher education institutions with broader economic and social considerations has enabled the emergence of an idea of graduate employability grounded in the notion of gradateness. As will be argued, despite Robbins’s desire to preserve the diversity and distinctiveness of different institutions, his appeal to broader, universalising objectives for higher education effectively made this impossible. Instead, it paved the way for the pursuit of an ideal of gradateness that transcended particular interests. The leading role conceived for universities in Robbins’s vision of higher education (Stevens, 2004) has enabled the graduate of the ‘traditional’ university to become the template for graduates of all institutions; thus, graduates’ claims to gradateness can be evaluated in the light of overarching ideals of what a graduate might be. Nevertheless, in emphasising the role of higher education in addressing the economic challenges of the future, while characterising as impossible the prospect of planning higher education accurately on the future needs of the economy, the *Robbins Report* represents a twofold act of resistance. On the one hand, the committee resists the restriction of higher education to a preparation for academic life. On the other hand, the committee resists the proposition that

higher education might be reduced to mere preparation for future occupations. In this way, a distinct notion of graduateness can emerge: the graduate who possesses a good general education, is intellectually adaptable, and is able to address the practical and prosaic challenges of the real world. This can be read as a notion of employability as graduateness in the sense that graduates are to be able to engage with the complexities and indeterminacies of a changing world.

A total of 70 extracts from the *Robbins Report* were identified. These were extracts that speak in some way to the circumstances that might enable certain ideas of graduate employability to emerge. Each was assigned a code in relation to the five types of discourse of graduate employability previously identified. From this initial analysis, the first thing to observe is that around half of the extracts selected implied in some way a human capital notion of employability, while seven per cent appeared to mitigate *against* such an idea. This in itself suggests an inherent tension over the way in which employability might be conceived from a human capital standpoint. A similar tension is noticeable regarding the question of credentialism; again, the implication is not whether employability can be conceived in terms of graduates' credentials, but on what basis.

As a second stage of analysis, 91 thematic codes were identified from the *Robbins Review*; these were grouped according to their central theme. Eleven instances of codes relating to the economic context of the time were identified, followed by eight codes relating to international competition and the UK's place in the world. Other themes frequently appearing included ideas relating to the skills and qualities of graduates, the rising number of graduates in the UK workforce, the notion of excellence in higher education, the demand for graduates, and the distinction between higher education and vocational training. A range of other codes connected ideas of multiple ends of education.

The codes identified suggest a strong emphasis on the relation between higher education and the economy, argued by the committee to have been a somewhat neglected area (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). Also visible is a sense of a rising demand for graduates, particularly with respect to international competition and the UK's place in the world. Certain extracts also indicate a desire to preserve the distinctiveness of higher education by distinguishing it from mere preparation for work, thus emphasising higher education's importance as a route to employment without subordinating it to economic demand. Graduate employability is thus locatable in an overall context of the distinctive contributions of individuals that have undergone a distinctive kind of education. It is therefore not just a

question of the acquisition of human capital and its transformation into economic activity, but the fostering of a distinctive form of human capital grounded in the distinctive value of higher education. As will be argued, this represents an attempt to discipline the soul of British higher education.

4.2.1 The Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

To begin the process of reconstructing the ‘social force[s] producing the real’ (Tamboukou, 2016, p.25) in the context of the *Robbins Report*, it is helpful to begin with the appointment of Robbins and his committee. The form of words adopted by the Treasury in February 1961 is as follows:

The First Lord states to the Board that he proposes to appoint a Committee to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise, in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution. (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.iii)

The terms of appointment indicate clearly the motivations of the government of the day. That the statement above makes reference to ‘national needs and resources’ points to a rationale for reviewing the provision of higher education that is grounded firmly in economic concerns. Furthermore, the fact that the committee was appointed not by the Ministry of Education but by Her Majesty’s Treasury, on an instruction from the Prime Minister, indicates that the inquiry was, at its heart, not a narrow matter of educational policy but central to government strategy. Its explicit focus on the principles that might guide the long-term development of higher education points to a connection with the fundamental economic governance of the state. The impetus for the review was thus directed towards the outcomes of higher education – a concern with ends as well as means. This is of significance given Simon’s (1946) characterisation of universities as ‘one of the few remaining examples of almost complete *laissez-faire*’ (Simon 1946, p.32; emphasis in original); at the time of writing, Simon (1946) notes that governments had at no time taken action impacting upon universities as a whole. The *Robbins Review* thus represents one of the earliest attempts by government to intervene in the organisation and provision of higher education on a systemic, national scale.

In this context the remit given to the committee is reflected in Foucault's (2009) conception of governmentality. Couched as it is in terms of offering advice, rather than making determinations, it is not an exercise in direct rule, constraint, repression, or laying down the law. Instead, if it is to be considered as one of the earliest attempts by central government to address the university sector as a whole, it is an attempt to address the relations of power between government and the largely autonomous universities. In doing so it moves consideration of the patterns of full-time university education away from the practical concerns of the universities themselves and into the wider context of national needs and resources. It thus enables universities to be located in 'a general economy of power' (Foucault, 2009, p.117), whereby the university is deprivileged as an object of analysis. The deployment of national needs as part of the assemblage associated with the exercise of power draws the analysis away from the particularities of relations between individual universities and the state. As a consequence, it enables the consideration of the operation and outcomes of the university sector within 'the constitution of fields, domains, and objects of knowledge' (Foucault, 2009, p.118), a precursor to the emergence of configurations of concepts such as the 'academic' or the 'employable graduate'.

The committee thus attempts to bring universities, which hitherto 'were more or less independent of the state' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.4) under the gaze of government, and therefore to create a legitimate space for the exercise of governance. Given Simon's (1946) characterisation of government's traditional approach to higher education as largely non-interventionist, when the Committee chooses to draw parallels between the work of the committee and the consequences of the 1944 Education Act this is more than a rhetorical device:

Thus it has come about that, seventeen years after the passing of the great Education Act of 1944, which inaugurated momentous changes in the organisation of education in the schools, we have been asked to consider whether changes of a like order of magnitude are needed at a higher level.
(Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.5)

At the time of the introduction of the 1944 Act, Rab Butler MP, then President of the Board of Education, stated that the Act 'completely recasts the whole of the law as it affects education' (HC Deb 19 January 1944, c209). Batteson (1999) argues that the 1944 Act heralded a shift in governmental attitudes to school-age education, leading to a 'changing role from critic to constructor' (Batteson, 1999, p.12) for the Department for Education; this shifting role of government implies a move towards a more overt form of governance of education. If governance, in Foucault's (1982) sense, implies structuring the potential range of choices of

action so as to make some outcomes more likely than others, then Batteson's (1999) reading of the 1944 Act indicates the adoption of a more active role for government in structuring the field of possible action of those involved in the organisation and provision of school education. Importantly, Batteson (1999) points to the intersections of the traditional autonomy of senior civil servants, entrenched preferences for selective schooling systems among government decision-makers and an economic discourse of post-war reconstruction on limited resources as providing the conditions out of which 'a particular character of schooling emerged' (Batteson, 1999, p.14). This may be interpreted as an act of governance in the sense that the possibilities for the organisation and provision of school education were guided by principles and interests over and above those of educators.

In drawing a comparison with the 1944 Education Act, the Committee positions its task as being of similar historical magnitude. That this was recognised at the time of writing indicates that the work of the committee was not merely a narrow technical task. Indeed, one might then read the terms of reference of the committee, specifically its references to patterns of full-time higher education and potential modifications in arrangements for its planning and coordination (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) as a precursor to an act of governance. In this sense, the *Robbins Report* is not merely the academic community defending and justifying its own position in the face of a growing trend towards instrumental attitudes towards education, as Barnett's (1999) reading suggests. There is clearly more to it than that. Its very origins – commissioned by central government and overseen by the Treasury – locate it as emerging from similar kinds of social-economic-political discourses from which Batteson (1999) argues that the 1944 Act emerges. Yet neither is the *Robbins Report* an overt instrument of centralised government planning. The dominant voices within the report are clearly university academics, though to say that this represents *the* voice of the academic community, as Barnett (1999) suggests, is perhaps taking the argument too far. Rather, the *Robbins Report* represents an act of governance of the university sector by those whose professional interests go beyond the narrow interests of individual institutions. In this sense, the intersection of social forces out of which the *Robbins Report* emerges cuts across individual institutions, academic disciplines, professional and commercial fields, and notions of the relation between government and wider society.

In exploring these intersections, it is useful as a starting point to examine the composition of the committee. This offers an indication of the academic, social and commercial context in which the review was conducted. The committee comprised of eminent members of the education community in the United Kingdom at that time; some had previously held roles as

advisors to government, some were serving or former university academics, some had taught in state and independent schools. This was clearly no committee of pure academics; while many of the members had professional connections to higher education, their combined interests cut across the spheres of education, government and industry. This combination of interests was personified by the committee chair himself. Lionel Robbins was an academic economist who had taught at the London School of Economics and was later elected to a fellowship at New College, Oxford (Howson, 2004). His work as an economic advisor to government during the Second World War contributed to the development of points rationing for food and, put rather grandly, of the ‘creation of the post-war international economy’ (Howson, 2004, n.p.). Robbins might thus be argued to occupy a position that bridges government and academia. His chairmanship of the committee therefore symbolises the critical importance of reform of higher education to the United Kingdom’s global economic standing.

Two members of the committee had a record of public service relating to the relation between education and work. Sir Philip Morris served at the War Office as Director-General of Army Education from 1944-1946, where his duties focused on enhancing the role of education in the process of demobilisation (Glasgow Herald, 1943). Harold Shearman was an elected member of London County Council and held close links with the Workers’ Educational Association (Griggs, 2002). The final report argued that the link between higher education and employment was ‘sometimes ignored or undervalued’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.6); Morris and Shearman thus may be taken as representing not merely an abstract or theoretical connection between education and employment, but a connection grounded in principle and public policy. Indeed, that Morris’s professional concern included the role of education in the transition between military and civilian life is recognition of the importance of education in transforming material life conditions; the final report might thus be read in part as an attempt to resist a ‘pure’ notion of education as an end in itself:

Confucius said in the Analects that it was not easy to find a man who had studied for three years without aiming at pay. We deceive ourselves if we claim that more than a small fraction of students in institutions of higher education would be where they are if there were no significance for their future careers in what they hear and read; and it is a mistake to suppose that there is anything discreditable in this. (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.6)

Note that the committee felt the need to argue that there is nothing discreditable about students relating their education to their career chances; this hints at the existence at that

time of a pervasive discourse to that effect. In choosing to highlight the relation between university study and future careers, the committee is locating the notion of the value of a university education in its relevance to future lives. While this is not the exclusive effect of the *Robbins Report*, it is significant in that it casts the education of university students as a point of friction between different conceptions of the ends of education. The presence of Morris and Shearman on the committee is, on one level, symbolic of this friction; it adds further weight to a reading of the report as an act of resistance to ‘traditional’ notions of university graduates as emerging from their studies cultured, well-read, yet detached from the prosaic concerns of life.

Industrialists and those with a professional interest in science and technology were also represented on the committee. Sir Patrick Linstead, an organic chemist, was Rector of Imperial College London (Imperial College London, n.d.). Sir David Anderson was a mechanical engineer who held several academic posts, most notably principal of the Royal Technology College, Glasgow (University of Strathclyde, n.d.). Sir Edward Herbert had served as director of a number of engineering businesses including Short Brothers and Harland, and was president of the Cambridge University Engineers’ Association and chair of the governing body of Loughborough Technical College (Institution of Civil Engineers, 1965). Reginald Southall was director of National Oil Refineries and British Hydrocarbon Chemicals, and was vice-president of the University College of Swansea and a governor of the Welsh College of Advanced Technology (Times, 1965). This is indicative of the importance ascribed to science and technology in the relation between higher education and the economy; the final report argued that:

it must be recognised that in our own times, progress - and particularly the maintenance of a competitive position - depends to a much greater extent than ever before on skills demanding special training. A good general education, valuable though it may be, is frequently less than we need to solve many of our most pressing problems. (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.6)

Indeed, the presence of so many with an interest in science and technology represents another point of resistance. In this case, it is resistance against the exclusion of technology, engineering and other ‘practical’ applications of scientific knowledge from what is properly ‘academic’. In a somewhat polemical article published in 1960, Vivan Bowden took aim at what he appears to characterise as a cultural unwillingness of universities in the UK to accept engineering and technology:

English universities accepted engineering slowly and reluctantly. Almost all other countries which have determined to industrialise themselves as fast as possible have established large specialised institutions of university rank devoted exclusively to the education of scientists and technologists. Why can't we have one in England? (Bowden, 1960, p.84)

Bowden appears to be describing an 'English problem' with science and technology, one that is not confined to the universities. He notes Britain's likely continued reliance on steam engines and the slow expansion of telephone and motorway networks, and compares Britain's development unfavourably with the United States and continental Europe (Bowden, 1960). In doing so he highlights not just the relation of engineering and technology to national prosperity, but also to Britain's competitive position in the world. Bowden goes on to link his critique to the rapid expansion of the science and technology sectors:

The world of science and technology has been doubled in size once every 15 years or so ever since Newton's time. This means that three-quarters of the scientists and technologists who have ever lived are alive and practising today. Other countries seem to be accepting the implications of this astonishing fact. Are we? (Bowden, 1960, p.83)

While Bowden provides no evidence to support his 'astonishing fact', the image created here is of science and technology playing an increasingly important role in the world post-World War 2. His accusation, again unsupported, that '[t]he English universities contributed nothing to the industrial revolution' (Bowden, 1960, p.83) adds extra passion to his call for an expansion in provision of science, engineering and technology-related provision in higher education. One might temper this interpretation of Bowden's critique by the fact that he was principal of the Manchester College of Science and Technology, and that as a younger man he had held a fellowship at the University of Amsterdam that had been funded by Imperial Chemical Industries (Entwistle, 2004). Thus, Bowden's motivations for calling for an expansion of university-level education in science and technology may have been motivated to an extent by his own professional interests. However, his critique reflects a material division in the structure of the higher education sector at the time. The Robbins report (1963) notes the existence of distinct Colleges of Advanced Technology and other technical institutions providing education beyond A levels, and that in 1961/2 approximately 15 per cent of full-time university undergraduates were studying in faculties of technology. Students of technology were therefore very much the minority in the universities proper, of which there were 25 in the autumn of 1962 (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). Stevens (2004) argues that the template for such a structure was set as early as 1914:

By the First World War, therefore, England had two old universities, teaching traditional classical subjects, augmented by then with history, English and, almost as remote as the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, scientific subjects. Most of their customers were affluent members of what we would now call the Establishment, living relatively expensively and luxuriously in residential colleges, but with some scholarship students from the grammar schools. For those emerging from the grammar schools the new civic universities were more accessible. They were largely non-residential, willing to invest heavily in science and engineering and catering primarily to the new Victorian middle class. (Stevens, 2004, p.11)

Stevens thus paints a picture of a higher education sector stratified according to socio-economic class. Crucially, on this reading not only were institutions of higher education divided by class, but so too were the subjects being taught. Oxford and Cambridge represented the intersection of classical education with socio-economic privilege, the image of which remains an important archetype of university experience. The civic universities, by contrast, represented the intersection of the growing importance to the economy of science and technology with the gravitation of largely middle-class graduates to specialist positions within these growing industries. Thus, in emphasising the importance of scientific and technological subjects to the university sector as a whole, the Robbins committee was in essence resisting a socio-economic stratification that had long characterised university learning in Britain.

Furthermore, tensions between technical education and what counts as university education were by no means restricted to those with academic interests in technology. For example, Stevens (2004) observes that the Anderson report on grants to university students, published in 1960, noted that ‘university training was not the best lead-in to some of those positions in commerce and industry in which the nation must have brilliant but practical men and women’ (Anderson, in Stevens, 2004, p.20); a university education, according to this view, was not about the fostering of practical abilities. By clearly affirming the role of university education in preparation for working life, then, the Robbins report (1963) can be read in part as a resistance to a totalising understanding of the university graduate. Foucault (1980) argues that the reduction of a concept from a ‘diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities’ (p.138) might be achieved in three ways: by its effective subjection; though its utilisation; or ‘by its stabilising itself through a strategy of resistance’ (p.138). We may view the Robbins report’s affirmation of higher education as a preparation for working life as a kind of resistance to competing discourses that would attempt to separate higher education from any considerations beyond the unfettered pursuit of knowledge – consider, for example, the

contrast that Docherty (2011) draws between the university as the site for ‘the struggle between ideas [and] between different attitudes to the body, to its control, and to what constitutes healthy socio-cultural relatedness’ (p.10). The stabilisation to which Foucault (1980) refers implies a solidifying of a certain configuration of an idea against competing discourses. Hence, the Robbins report, projecting as it does into a discursive arena characterised by competing ideas of the ends of education, cannot simply assume a relation of supreme subjection over higher education as if power was law (c.f. Foucault, 1978), nor can it simply deploy the university sector in the service of particular idealised ends. Instead, it must operate as a *strategic codification* that operates through ‘mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings’ (Foucault, 1978, p.96).

To address the ‘pressing problems’ that the committee alludes to (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) required the intersection of general education and specialist knowledge:

it is the distinguishing characteristic of a healthy higher education that, even where it is concerned with practical techniques, it imparts them on a plane of generality that makes possible their application to many problems - to find the one in the many, the general characteristic in the collection of particulars. It is this that the world of affairs demands of the world of learning. And it is this, and not conformity with traditional categories, that furnishes the criterion of what institutions of higher education may properly teach. (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, pp.6-7)

It is here that an important implication of the committee’s arguments comes to light. In rejecting reliance on ‘traditional categories’ of teaching, the report implies also the rejection of reliance upon traditional categories of the graduate. Those that are to make their way in the world would be those that are not prepared merely for the contemplative life, nor only for practical labour. The successful graduate must be comfortable with both abstract and applied knowledge. The committee may therefore be interpreted as rejecting any binary that may be proposed between education as an end in itself and learning for some external end. The fact that this rejection is grounded in ‘progress – and particularly the maintenance of a competitive position’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.6) enables the emergence of a very particular idea of the employable graduate. Graduates, on this logic, could be argued to be employable in terms of: firstly; the relevance of their knowledge and skills to overarching national economic concerns (as opposed to merely the specific requirements of a particular occupation); secondly, in the relevance of these concerns to Britain’s international

competitiveness (and not merely in terms of the national accounts); and thirdly, the ability of graduates to adapt and develop their particular knowledge to new, emergent situations.

Thus, the notion of graduate employability can be dislocated from the narrow concerns of progression from study into employment, from the specific interests of individual employers, and from the interests of individual institutions in maintaining their positions of eminence in a stratified system of higher education. Instead, the committee (1963) points to the location of graduate employability in the realm of international competitiveness, challenging in the process the stratification of students, subjects and institutions. Though the committee (1963) maintains its desire not to impose a uniform approach to higher education, it is clear from this analysis that the report is itself an enactment of power. By attempting to couple the ends of higher education to wider economic considerations the committee is engaging in the disciplining of the higher education sector in the sense of joining a ‘battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays’ (Foucault, 1980, p.132). In this case, by invoking concepts such as the competitiveness of the British economy it is staking its claim in the contest to direct the soul of higher education, or at least to direct higher education’s attention towards its soul in hitherto neglected ways, just as Foucault (1988b) associates a focus on the soul as a principal activity of caring for oneself. In doing so it is an act of resistance to such ‘traditional’ conceptions of liberal higher education as characterised by Oakeshott (2001) amongst others.

4.2.2 Oxbridge problematised

Unsurprisingly, the committee included a number of serving university academics. It might initially be expected that Oxford and Cambridge, as among the most prestigious institutions in the sector, would be strongly represented. Yet the fact that Helen Gardner, a fellow of St Hilda’s College, Oxford, and was the only member of the committee who held a post at either Oxford or Cambridge while serving on the committee (Gay, 2007) belies an assumption that the chief problems to be addressed lay outside of Oxford and Cambridge (Robbins, 1966). The moulding of other universities into something resembling the shape of the ancient universities was therefore not the optimal solution. Nevertheless, the fact that several other members of the committee had had some form of professional or academic connection with Oxford or Cambridge suggests the potential of discourses of university life grounded in the traditions of Oxford and Cambridge to exert a shaping force on the deliberations of the committee. While Oxford and Cambridge represented a powerful cultural image of university life (Committee on Higher Education, 1963), the response of the committee – and of the leadership of the

government by virtue of their control of appointments to the committee - was not to adopt Oxford and Cambridge as the yardsticks by which other universities were to be measured. Rather, the preferred approach of the committee was essentially to challenge the cultural dominance of Oxford and Cambridge: 'what is needed is not only greater equality of opportunity to enter Oxford and Cambridge but also rather more equality of attraction between them and at least some other institutions' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.81). The committee's response to this challenge was to call for 'varied education of high quality... to fit young people to take their place in an increasingly complex social and economic structure' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.150). This emphasis on variation and complexity necessarily points to the challenging of established notions about what a university education is, and thus the introduction of competing conceptions of a high-quality university education. Interpreted this way, the lack of representation on the committee of serving Oxford and Cambridge academics is not altogether surprising; it is difficult to imagine that a dominant discourse of a university education grounded in the traditions of England's two ancient universities could have been effectively challenged by a committee steeped in the contemporary interests and perspectives of those institutions. A sense of institutional distance thus makes space for such conceptual challenge by 'refusing to give oneself a ready-made object' (Foucault, 2009, p.118) as the basis of inquiry. The variety of institutions represented on the committee may thus be read as an attempt to locate the committee's work outside of the particular interests of individual institutions.

The *Robbins Report* classified the universities at that time into seven groups, each characterised according to their structures of governance, historical development, and the numbers of students that they educated. With regards to Oxford and Cambridge, the committee noted that these institutions 'still furnish for many the image of university life' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.22), despite the fact that their share of the university student population had fallen to 16 per cent in 1963 from almost a quarter in the period leading up to the second world war (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). Thus, Oxford and Cambridge were acknowledged to represent to a not insignificant degree a pervasive conception of the university in the British cultural milieu of the time. Indeed, the committee argued that the degree of stratification of British universities marked them out from their counterparts in Europe, particularly given that 'the prominence of Oxford and Cambridge is so marked' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.36). The committee connected the prominence of Oxford and Cambridge with what it described as 'the problem of Oxford and Cambridge' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.78) in terms of competition for places:

Just as competition for entry to universities generally is more intense than competition for entry to other institutions of higher education, so competition for places at Oxford and Cambridge is more intense than it is elsewhere. Success in this competition is often felt to confer a great advantage in subsequent careers. (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.78)

Thus the committee identifies an association in the public consciousness between attendance at Oxford and Cambridge and subsequent success in the job market. At the time, then, being a graduate of one of these ancient universities marked one out as someone exceptional, someone who has successfully risen to the standards set by institutions with reputations for academic excellence. Having a degree from Oxford or Cambridge, then, was a pervasive example of credentialism – to be able to associate oneself with an institution held generally in high esteem, in an era where a relatively small proportion of the population attended university, was held to be of great advantage. Holding a degree from Oxford or Cambridge was thus a not insignificant validation of one's claims to intelligence, capability and suitability for positions of prominence and responsibility. There is little doubt that the committee saw this as an unsustainable state of affairs. The committee associated the problem of Oxford and Cambridge with excessive competition for places (Committee on Higher Education, 1963), but located the root cause elsewhere, as Robbins subsequently argued:

The problem arises essentially because, in a time of increasing population and increasing desire for access to higher education, there have not been developed elsewhere institutions of anything like comparable attractiveness – at any rate up to a very recent date. Whatever may have been, in the distant past, the opposition of Oxford and Cambridge to the development of competing institutions, in the last hundred years or so the blame for the absence of more places of comparable attractiveness lies elsewhere. It lies fairly and squarely with governments and the wealthy classes for failing to respond adequately to the needs of the age and, *pari passu* with advancing numbers, to provide for the multiplication of centres with similar potentialities of development. (Robbins, 1966, pp.59-60, emphasis in original)

Thus, that degrees from Oxford and Cambridge continued to act as powerful forms of credential marking some graduates out from others represented not a failure to increase access to Oxford and Cambridge, but a failure to develop other institutions that could rival Oxford and Cambridge in terms of a reputation for excellence. That Robbins (1966) lays the blame for this failure partly at the door of government is, perhaps, not surprising; to tell a story of the failures of past governments gives the government of the day impetus to act on

their own terms, to justify a more assertive attitude towards institutions that, by and large, operated independently of central control.

Yet Robbins (1966) also chooses to implicate the ‘wealthy classes’ in the failure to develop universities of similar attractiveness to Oxford and Cambridge. On the face of it, this represents a reading of the development of the university sector as an intersection of class interests with questions of social justice. The committee noted that ‘it will still be asked whether present methods of selection at Oxford and Cambridge have results that are socially just’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.80), referring largely to the proportion of students from maintained (state) schools that attended those universities. The committee rejected the idea that Oxford and Cambridge actively discriminated against applicants from maintained schools, instead arguing that a ‘significant cause of the disproportionate representation of the independent schools seems to be that relatively fewer boys from maintained schools apply’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.81). Social justice, on this reading, is to be associated with proportionality of access and not a ‘pure’ notion of meritocratic selection according to a set of universally objective ideas of the qualities of a student. Thus, given the disproportionality of access to Oxford and Cambridge and the popular conception of career advantage that a degree from Oxford and Cambridge afforded – presumably as a means of entry to influential positions in government, the universities and so forth - one can begin to understand why Robbins might have chosen to identify a class-based dimension of the development of universities in Britain.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that the committee’s apparent concerns with equality of access to Oxford and Cambridge is not born out of a desire for a more egalitarian university sector. Rather, it is a consequence of the systemising perspective evident in the committee’s (1963) terms of reference, namely a concern with promoting the contributions to the economy of the university sector as a whole. In the context of a growing population and likely growing demand for higher education places, two institutions of renowned excellence could not reasonably be expected to carry the burden. Rather, we may read the committee’s concern with access to Oxford and Cambridge as a challenge to an environment that seemingly accepts the stratification of institutions and students. A class-driven university system is thus a symptom of a university system that is failing to respond adequately to the prevailing economic and social conditions. By invoking an imperative of international competition in conjunction with unequal access to two leading institutions, the committee (1963) is paving the way for the disciplining of the university sector as a whole consistent with the economic circumstances of the times.

4.2.3 The needs of industry

One of the most significant aspects of the Robbins Report as a focus of research is the very public way in which its development and emergence played out. Such extensive public coverage and commentary offers access to some of the conflicts, tensions, arguments and ad hocery (Ball, 1994) that characterise the development and enactment of policy. It thus offers a window into the collisions of discourses that may have been at play at the time, particularly regarding the relevance of higher education to the needs of industry. The quantity of debate in the public realm, indicative of public interest, that surrounded the work of the committee offers some justification for Robbins's (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) association of the significance report with the Education Act of 1944. This is clearly evidenced in coverage of the question of university graduates in *The Times*. Even prior to the appointment of the committee and the commencement of its inquiries, conflicting discourses surrounding the employability of university graduates had begun to emerge. In March 1960, for example, *The Times* wrote of the annual report of the Oxford University Appointments Committee, in which it was noted that sixth formers going straight into industry from school may provide strong competition for arts graduates; the extra two or three years' industrial experience gained by school leavers may be more attractive to employers 'against graduates' newness' (The Times, 1960a, p.8). The report also notes the expected expansion of the universities and the demographic bulge in secondary schools. Already, then, a prominent institution is placing the relevance to industry of graduates' qualities as a central concern, identifying this as a competitive challenge:

The report says that it will be up to the universities to prove to industry that their graduates do represent the cream of their generation, and this may not be easy. A special danger is seen in the tendency to use purely scholastic standards for university entrance. (The Times, 1960a, p.8)

Note also that the report was 'written with the aid of two industrial personnel officers' (The Times, 1960a, p.8). That a committee of one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious universities should, some three years before the publication of the *Robbins Report*, seem to enlist the support of representatives of industry does not appear to suggest an institution defending a pure ideal that is diametrically opposed to an instrumentalist understanding of the purposes of higher education. Rather, it hints at a more tactical anticipation of the future for higher education, perhaps an attempt to anticipate and prepare for a competitive challenge in the coming years. It certainly relates to Ball's (1994) sense of policy being enmeshed in differing discourses, a collision between the macro and micro of the policy environment for

higher education. We thus have a curious intersection of interests that belies the invocation of stereotypical images of university interests as exemplified by Oakeshott's description of liberal education as 'adventures in human self-understanding... "liberal" because it is liberated from the distracting business of satisfying contingent wants' (Oakeshott, 1975, p.15).

Yet the position of the Oxford University Appointments Committee implies that universities, far from offering nothing of relevance to everyday contingent wants, do indeed have something of value to offer – and must be prepared to make such a case. The report thus sets up a tension between the possession of business-relevant experience and a more abstract notion of innate human potential and capability, and thus indicates the space for a new discourse of graduate employability to challenge that of the possession of relevant work experience. That this tension represents something of a battle is underlined by a report later that year, in which a Mr Vivian Ridler, printer to Oxford University, is quoted as arguing that industry should recruit more university graduates on the basis that 'more of the brighter boys are being "creamed off" by the universities' (The Times, 1960c, p.7). By comparison, the same article quotes the personnel director of Imperial Chemical Industries as arguing that middle management require more scientific knowledge, and that such 'knowledgeability and that expertness are not easily going to be acquired by those who have had to come up the hard way, however intrinsically good they may be' (The Times, 1960c, p.7). While such arguments appear to contradict the Oxford University Appointments Committee's fears of graduates losing out to school leavers for want of experience, they do point to the need for the content of university degrees to be more overtly relevant to industrial needs.

The report of the Oxford University Appointments Committee is but one report at one moment from one university. Yet it indicates the possibility of a relation between higher education and industry that is characterised not by cool detachment and distance but by proximity and consequential connection. It affirms the possibility of universities establishing the relevance of the education offered to the contingent needs of business, and acknowledges a certain desire amongst business for such a relation. It also enables higher education to be regarded in relation to other choices open to school leavers, and characterises universities as being in competition with direct entry to employment. Here we are presented with a concrete sense in which the employability of graduates opens up an 'extra-institutional, non-functional and non-objective' (Foucault, 2009, p.119) generalised analysis of the networks of power relations within which higher education is located. It thus cannot be argued that the problem of graduate employability is solely a problem of the university; rather, the *problématique* gives

rise to a broader technology of power that can encompass such ideas as the ‘cultural fit’ of graduates into the workplace (Foucault, 2009).

A growing sense of business demand for university graduates was highlighted that September by the Federation of British Industry. In a conference focused on the skills base of smaller companies, the director general argued that there was a ‘growing appreciation of the value of higher education. The university graduate was therefore sought after’ (The Times, 1960d, p.4); this was largely because smaller firms were felt to lack the capacity to develop skilled people from within. Nevertheless, a sense of dissonance in the relation of university graduates to business was expressed at a British Institute of Management conference in October 1960. Some delegates expressed a fundamental difference between graduates of the sciences and of the arts, arguing that: ‘Science graduates are less troublesome than arts men... they bring with them some knowledge and expertise that is of immediate relevance to the business. The art man does not have this advantage and most companies will confess that at first they did not know how exactly to cope with them’ (The Times, 1960e, p.7). Some suggested that the presence of graduates in the workforce may trigger resentment among those middle managers who had ‘come up the hard way’ (The Times, 1960e, p.7), whereas some graduates were felt to have ‘an unconscious attitude of superiority to business, a feeling that it was slightly sordid with its emphasis on selling and profit-making’ (The Times, 1960e, p.7). It was posited that this may be a consequence of graduates moving from a university environment in which they felt a sense of personal consequence to a business environment in which they ‘had to learn from people who were perhaps mentally his inferiors’ (The Times, 1960e, p.7). Such sentiments, expressed among representatives of Britain’s management and employer communities, speak to a tension between valuing the knowledge possessed by graduates and addressing the environmental differences between higher education and industry. This is not merely posed as a question of the acquisition of human capital, but brings to the fore the challenges of bringing together people steeped in differing organisational and cognitive traditions – graduate employability is thus not simply a question of skills but of disposition and cultural fit, as exemplified by the assertion that a graduate might have ‘acquired a vocabulary that is equally irritating to his commercial mentors’ (The Times, 1960e, p.7). In this way, a relation is established between higher education and industry. This relation is defined not only in terms of the relevance of the content of education to the contingent needs of business, but also in the attitudes of graduates towards their future roles in industry and notions of cultural ‘fit’ of graduates into environments where graduates may not be in the majority.

Given that the Oxford University Appointments Committee had referenced the coming expansion of the universities, the question of the governance and control of universities had entered the public debate. This is evidenced by comments made by one Sir David Hughes Parry, QC, in support of an autonomous university sector as ensuring the scrutiny of and challenge to societal attitudes, values and techniques: ‘In Britain the state had so far been able to provide support for the universities without imposing state control and from today’s papers he was happy to see that this support had substantially increased’ (*The Times*, 1960b, p.8). That Parry felt the need to express such views perhaps indicates a suspicion or fear that moves may have been made to alter the relationship between government and the universities; read in the light of the anticipated expansion of universities this may be taken as indicating a sense that the autonomy of universities was under question.

Indeed, the question of universities’ autonomy appears to have been a feature of the political environment of the times. A parliamentary debate held in July 1963, presaging the publication of the *Robbins Report*, indicates the extent of tensions between the defence of universities’ independence and the governance of higher education with regards to national needs. *The Times* notes that ‘preserving of the academic freedom of the universities – to which [the Chief Secretary to the Treasury] attached importance – was not necessarily going to be easy when the enormous national importance of certain studies was realized’ (*The Times*, 1963, p.16).

Eirene White, the Labour MP for East Flintshire, argued for the creation of a ‘National University Development Council, which should be responsible for the strategy of higher education’ (HC Deb 1963 681, col.558). To what extent such a committee’s purview of strategy would have extended is unclear. However, White had introduced into the discussion concerns regarding a perceived shortage of places in universities and teacher training colleges, comparing the government of the day’s ambitions for university expansion unfavourably with those of France, the United States and the Soviet Union (HC Deb 1963 681, cc.544-656). In response, the Conservative Chief Secretary to the Treasury referred to the ‘massive growth of the cost of the universities to public funds and the growing appreciation of the importance of their work in the national interest’ (HC Deb 1963 681, col.561), leaving open the question of whether the ‘independence of our universities from even the possibility of political interference’ (HC Deb 1963 681, col.561) could be maintained. This particular exchange sets up a tension between national needs and national resources and places the governance of the UK’s universities at its centre. Such a tension enables a particular relation between the universities and central government to be established, one which emphasises the economic and fiscal dimensions of the public funding of higher education.

4.2.4 A two-fold act of resistance

In the late 1950s and early 1960s a space had opened for a discursive conflict over the relevance of university education to the economy. In Foucault's (1984a) terms this represents the emergence of a game of truth, a moment in the endlessly repeated play of dominations. This particular game of truth can be interpreted in the context of several larger projects. Firstly, a post-war demographic bulge is assumed to lead to, among other things, a rising demand for university places; the necessity of the expansion of university places can thus be read in terms of both increasing numerical pressure and a sense of justice with regards to having a fair chance of winning a place at university. Graduate employability can thus be cast in terms of individuals being able to, as Dewey puts it, participate freely and fully in associated life (Dewey, 2001). Secondly, Britain's place in the world in the immediate period post World War 2 is not one of great imperial strength, but as a nation rebuilding following the trials of war. Hence, there is significance in the comparisons made between the development of Britain's higher education sector and major post-war economies such as the United States and the Soviet Union. The relevance of university graduates to the economy can thus be read in terms of Britain's competitive position relative to other major economies. Thirdly, there was at the time a pervasive discourse of the importance of knowledge and skills in science and technology to the national economy. This was argued to be reflected in the demands of employers for university graduates. Yet such discourses also bring into play the question of the cultural 'fit' of university graduates into an industrial sector dominated by non-graduates. Graduate employability can thus be read in terms of the cultural distance between universities and industry and the ability of graduates to transcend that distance. Of particular relevance to this dynamic is a sense of reluctance among universities to embrace science and technology. By reading these grander projects together a web of relations is established that locates higher education to the national economy in very specific ways. The *Robbins Report* can then be interrogated as an enactment of that set of relations.

The debate over the provision of university places in relation to the national economy began before the Robbins committee was appointed. In that sense, the committee's inquiries and subsequent report are but one stage of a contest to establish a truth of graduate employability. Robbins thus cannot be considered as a point of origin. Yet it does represent a moment when very different discourses of the relevance of university education to the economy interacted. Hence, it is a moment of emergence (Foucault, 1984a) that allows an insight into the way that discourses interact. As a work of policy, the *Robbins Report* is an attempt to make universities legitimate targets for governance, or the exercise of conduct

upon conduct. It also offers access to the broader economy of power relations (Foucault, 2009) within which universities were located. Thus, while the report does not attempt to direct the activities of universities, the preferences of employers and the choices of students, it does create space for the exertion of conduct upon conduct. Its headline objective – to make recommendations for the future pattern of full-time university provision – is in itself an act of governance, being as it is an affirmation of the strategic importance to the economy with which universities were viewed at the time; hence it represents a legitimisation of the enactment of governance over universities.

The Robbins committee, being simultaneously higher education's representatives in Whitehall and Whitehall's representatives in the higher education sector, attempt to articulate a vision that brings some semblance of coherence to these tangential discourses. Universities, by contrast, react with a mixture of opposition and strategic anticipation. It is, in Ball's (1994) terms, an exercise in *ad hocery* – not a direct execution of an instruction from government, but an attempt to order and regularise the web of relations within which higher education is located and establish a discourse of the relevance of university education to the economy. It is a twofold act of resistance; not only does the committee's report anticipate and push back against a reduction of higher education to training, recognising a distinctive character of university education, it also attempts to establish the validity of the idea that university education can bear relevance to industry and the economy. It is thus an act of resistance against both an instrumentalist reduction of education to training and against a pervasive sense of universities' isolation from the contingent wants of the economy. We are thus left with a new space out of which conceptions of graduate employability can emerge that are steeped not just in the relevance of university education to business, but in the relevance of graduates themselves to the national economy and supporting Britain's place in the world. Hence, the committee is not advocating an engagement with higher education for its own sake, nor are they arguing for expansion purely in relation to demographic change or demand for places. Therefore, the committee exhibits a clear tension – the key *problématique* of the day – between addressing national and personal economic needs and defending higher education in its distinctiveness.

4.3 University-Industry Relations

The thesis now moves to address the second of five major policy documents: *University-Industry Relations* (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976). This is a wide-ranging report by the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology (henceforth

referred to as ‘the Committee’) that addresses not only the relation between university education and employment in industry, but also questions such as the relative attractiveness of the engineering profession, pay and conditions in industry, collaboration over research and so forth. The inquiry was initiated through the

beliefs that scientific endeavour “should contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community”, that scientific funding institutions should bear in mind the “social and economic benefit of the community” and that politicians had a responsibility to ensure that a “continuing and fruitful dialogue is maintained between the social and economic decision-making machinery and the scientific decision-making machinery” (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, pp.11-12)

Such were the conclusions of an earlier inquiry by the Committee into scientific research in universities, which noted concerns ‘about the rationale behind the organisation and funding both of that research and of the higher education in the sciences with which it is invariably and naturally associated’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.11). As a result, *University-Industry Relations* sets out an unambiguous concern with national economic productivity:

If the Government is serious in its desire to rebuild British productive industry it must create an environment in which there are adequate incentives to attract the ablest young people into industry and away from non-productive [sic] public and private services (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.8)

In this one sentence the Committee establishes a clear distinction between productive and non-productive industry and sets the ground for a sharp distinction in esteem between different sectors of business. In doing so it also implies a sense of malaise pervading the economy, something which requires an immediate and incisive response. In particular: ‘Every encouragement should be given to bringing the higher education system and industry generally into closer alignment’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.8). Thus, the tone for the Committee’s deliberations is set – higher education is positioned squarely as a target of a policy response to an economic crisis.

Given the wide range of questions addressed by the Committee, this analysis addresses only those sections of the report that can be connected clearly to the idea of employability as discourse – and in particular those with relevance to the sphere of undergraduate education. For the purposes of this analysis, it is the relation to first degree education that is most pertinent. This is for several reasons. Firstly, the teaching of undergraduates constitutes a large proportion of the activities of universities. Thus, to focus on arguments relevant to

undergraduate education therefore speaks to what makes universities distinctive as places of learning. Secondly, the vast majority of undergraduate students do not go on to postgraduate education; primarily addressing connections to undergraduate education therefore speaks to the experiences of the majority of students who follow non-vocational degree programmes. Thirdly, and similarly, to address the notion of employability in terms of more general educational pathways offers the opportunity to break with arguments of direct vocational relevance. The idea of employability may then be located in a wider set of ideas which offers opportunities to interrogate the interplays of knowledge and power that may be identified. It thus offers greater potential for a nuanced Foucauldian analysis.

The analysis begins by categorising a number of pertinent extracts from the text according to the type of discourse of graduate employability that they may facilitate or mitigate. These extracts were then thematically coded to indicate the range of ideas represented. Notable from this process are two things. Firstly, in terms of our types of discourse of graduate employability, the report is grounded clearly in terms of human capital, with a strong sense of both criticism of credentialism and emphasising of graduate identity. This juxtaposition of two types of discourse and a repudiation of a third suggests a tension between an inherited ‘tradition’ of what it means to be a university graduate and a desire to reframe what counts as ‘good’ outcomes of higher education. Secondly, upon coding the extracts three key ideas emerge: a tension between applied and academic knowledge; a sense of the privileging of science and technology; and a concern over standards within higher education. These can be read in the context of a sense of an economy in crisis, industry in decline, and a country facing an uncertain future in a competitive world.

4.3.1 A declining economy

The economy of Britain in the 1970s can be characterised by *declinism* (Tomlinson, 2005). This, notes Tomlinson (2005), can be rooted in the widespread acceptance of a new notion of economic decline. This is argued to comprise of three key aspects: the impact of ambitious military and strategic objectives on economic growth and living standards; failure to match the growth of other western European economies resulting in a sense of relative decline; and a pervasive sense of the waning power and influence of Britain in global terms (Tomlinson, 2005). The intersection of these three elements leads to a sense of progressive decline of the British economy, a sense that provides a significant contextual background against which attitudes to social and economic matters may be read.

In their response to *University-Industry Relations*, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (the CVC) observes that: 'The group recognises that the current economic difficulties of the country have led many people to seek to apportion blame to various sectors of the community for the poor quality, as they see it, of the management and performance of industry' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1977, p.6). Similarly, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) emphasises 'the contrast between Britain's relatively good performance in pure science and her relatively poor industrial performance' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1977, p.20). Note the use of the term 'relatively' in this sense, implying a kind of comparative understanding of Britain's economic performance; Fraser (1975), for example, suggested in a case study of a South Korean petrochemical plant, that 'the productivity of Korean welders doing the complicated pipework was between 2½ and 3 times that of pipe-welders on Teesside, and the quality was superior' (p.12). The Engineering Employers' Federation also pointed to the portrayal of industry in schools and the media as 'a strike-ridden and pollution-creating treadmill' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1977, p.42). The contemporary conception of the British economy generally, and industry in particular, was thus not positive.

Foucault points to the significance of such a pervasive sense of economic decline when he writes:

We believe in the dull constancy of instinctual life and imagine that it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the present as it did in the past. But a knowledge of history easily disintegrates this unity, depicts its wavering course, locates its moments of strength and weakness, and defines its oscillating reign. (Foucault 1984a, p.87)

Invoking such a concept enables a disruption of a narrative of a constantly evolving university sector and national economy, instead prompting attention to the distinctiveness of the conditions of the time. Tomlinson's *declinism* thus provides a point of departure for a period-specific analysis of the relation between higher education, society and the economy. It prompts a questioning of the received, conventional logics and assumptions made in previous eras, inviting an engagement with the vicissitudes that characterise the British economy of the time and their consequences for attitudes towards education. Among the contemporary arguments offered for this sense of decline, Tomlinson writes that 'what does emerge in many cases is that the culprit is inadequate 'rationality', intelligence or expertise. Britain, in these accounts, is governed by people untrained and poorly prepared for the demanding tasks that they undertake' (Tomlinson, 2005, p.166). This might be read as a deficiency of the particular skills or qualities necessary for sound government in the context of the times. However, this

may not merely be a functional deficiency in the sense of a failure to replace what has been lost or consumed. Rather, it can be argued to be a cultural dynamic. Tomlinson (2005) points to C. P. Snow's characterisation of 'two cultures' in western intellectual life as a particularly influential exemplar of this argument. In the Rede Lecture of 1959, Snow argued:

I believe the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups. When I say the intellectual life, I mean to include also a large part of our practical life, because I should be the last person to suggest the two can at the deepest level be distinguished... Two polar groups: at one pole we have the literary intellectuals, who incidentally while no one was looking took to referring to themselves as 'intellectuals' as though there were no others... at the other [pole] scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. (Snow, 1998, pp.3-4)

Snow therefore diagnoses an embedded cultural divide between those of a more classical outlook, who may have benefited from a more traditional liberal education, and those of a more rationalist or scientific outlook. This may imply tensions along epistemological lines, though a detailed examination of this is beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, it suggests a conflict between traditions of knowledge to be recognised as superior or privileged. Snow's argument also points to a sense of antipathy between these outlooks. However, this may well be primarily a reflection of Snow's dislike of what he saw as literary intellectuals' 'snobbish and nostalgic social attitudes' (Collini, in Snow, 1998, p.xxiii) and his 'apparent hankering for the rule of a scientific elite' (Collini, in Snow, 1998, p.xxiii). Despite this, if Tomlinson (2005) is correct in his characterisation of Snow's arguments as particularly influential, then this allows a reading of the policy debates over higher education in the era of post-war decline in terms of the clash of two great traditions of thought. In the case of the following debate, we might read a sense of economic decline – crisis, even – alongside a conflict to acquire greater privileges for science, technology and associated subjects within higher education. *University-Industry Relations* speaks of this kind of conflict, and allows us to identify a range of potential consequences for the connection between higher education and preparation for work, and thus the conditions are offered for a particular understanding of graduate employability to emerge.

Given the economic context of the times, it is helpful to turn to Jose Ortega y Gasset to provide a further grounding for the analysis. At first glance, Ortega may be a curious choice of theorist to accompany a Foucauldian genealogy. Mora notes Ortega's emphasis of 'the historical character of philosophy itself' (Mora, in Ortega, 1961, p.6) without going as far as to regard philosophical truth as relative to historical conditions. Instead, the 'relative and the absolute

interact and play a fascinating and subtle “dialectical game” (Mora, in Ortega, 1961, p.6). This perspective would appear to be at odds with Foucault’s (1984a) characterisation of truth as an historical error and genealogy as enabling the details and accidents of history ‘to escape from a labyrinth where no truth had ever detained them’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.80). Yet Ortega’s characterisation of an interplay between the relative and the absolute is itself of value in interpreting the specific tensions and historical details of the case. His exploration of the notion of a generation, for example, is predicated on the following:

Life, then, for each generation, is a task in two dimensions, one of which consists in the reception, through the agency of the previous generation, of what has had life already, e.g., ideas, values, institutions and so on, while the other is the liberation of the creative genius inherent in the generation concerned. The attitude of the generation cannot be the same towards its own active agency as towards what it has received from without. (Ortega, 1961, pp.16-17)

We are offered here a scheme within which the attitudes expressed in policy can be located. Through this, the tensions between attitudes to what has been received and what may be desired become visible. This is because we are able neither to break completely with the past nor to adjust completely to it (Ortega, 1961, p.20). As a result, we are caught between our disposition towards the past and our determination to shape our future; our attitudes are therefore never completely original or completely received. Yet because such a tension can mark out the distinctiveness of a generation, it can also indicate what Foucault (1984a) refers to as different points of emergence through which the genealogy of a concept can be traced. Indeed, the dual attitude to agency and tradition that Ortega (1961) argues that a generation must demonstrate would represent a way of telling an *effective* history which ‘will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy towards a millennial ending’ (Foucault 1984a, p.88). It is in this spirit that the tensions and conflicts within *University-Industry Relations* are analysed here.

4.3.2 Employability as a project of modernity

To begin with, we might ask whether the tensions described in *University-Industry Relations* might be understood as a project of modernity. The notion of modernity can be understood as the experiencing of the world as a human construction, ‘an experience that gives rise to both an exhilarating sense of freedom and possibility and to a basic anxiety about the openness of the future’ (Eyerman, 1992, pp.37-38). Modernity thus encompasses the constitution of subjectivity, the social construction of the modern self, and the political and cultural expressions of these phenomena (Eyerman, 1992). This presents a dilemma that Ortega

(1961) argues to be definitive of the spirit of a generation - the stance it takes between its intellectual inheritance and its own spontaneity. The notion of graduate employability offers access to such tensions. The Committee's own position on Ortega's (1961) dilemma is indicated as follows:

There is a very real sense in which the organisation of higher education, and our attitudes towards both education [sic] and industry, continue to be determined by the debates of our Victorian forbears. It is essential that we should be prepared to re-examine the organisation of science and scientific education in terms of our current needs. We believe that the large volume of evidence which we have received—much of it unsolicited—bears ample testimony to the widespread concern in Britain about the contribution of the higher education system to the nation's industrial future. (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.13)

Here we see expressed a concern with higher education on two fronts: a desire to break with the past, and a desire to shape the future. Firstly, by invoking Britain's industrial heritage the committee is identifying and putting into question the veneration of traditional approaches to higher education that are grounded in the economic conditions of a previous age. In this sense they recognise a connection between higher education and the industrial economy; the Committee is therefore not criticising higher education for its disconnectedness from industry, but instead are questioning the form and content of that relation. The Committee is therefore receptive to the ideas, values and institutions of a previous age (c.f. Ortega, 1961) while still expressing the necessity of reform, restructure or rethinking. We may therefore take this quotation as indicative of a distinctive form of thought with regards to the relation between higher education and industry, one which is grounded in a certain relation with the past. Indeed, it represents the emergence of a distinctive will to the disciplining of higher education and begins to make clear those strategic aspects of power-knowledge that underpin the debate opened up through the report, and hence the 'rationality of power' (Foucault, 1978, p.95) that characterises this particular set of relations.

Secondly, by invoking the notion of the nation's industrial future there is the acknowledgement of a sense of rupture, a fracturing of that relation. Yet this fracturing is predicated not on the possibility of a relation between higher education and industry, but on its form and content. That there *is* a relation between higher education and industry is not questioned – the assumption of such a relation is necessary to the very logic of the report. Instead, we are invited to consider this rupture as a problem of recognition:

The failure fully to integrate the process of scientific discovery into the process of industrial production cannot be regarded as the sole cause—or

even the principal cause—of Britain’s relative industrial decline, but it is undoubtedly a significant contributory factor. This Report is concerned with institutional problems which mainly derive, in our view, from the failure of different, [sic] groups in the community to appreciate the extent of their interdependence. (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.15)

Hence the relation between higher education and the industrial economy is implicit, inevitable, yet unrecognised. It might be suggested that the committee had identified a kind of conceptual distancing that posits higher education and industry as two distinct fields, each with their own concerns and objectives. The committee’s response is effectively to characterise such a stark separation as illusory, an inability to appreciate that beyond the bounds of our immediate concerns lie a network of interrelations that locate our activities within a grander scheme.

It hardly needs to be said that the committee regarded this failure of recognition as a potential source of crisis. Dire warnings of ‘Britain’s relative industrial decline’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.15) and Britain having ‘ “opted out” of the industrial race’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.16) point to the perceived consequences of such a misrecognised interdependence. Indeed, this sense of crisis is clearly connected to a conception of Britain as lagging behind in a global competition. Thus the apparent framing of the outcomes of higher education in terms of human capital can be read in the context of a response to a crisis. Since this is posed as a crisis on a national scale, it may be argued that the committee is attempting to justify a response on a national scale.

Indeed, the committee’s insistence on the interdependence of higher education and industry locates their response to crisis squarely as a project of modernity. Edmunds writes that a defining feature of modernity is that:

In our modern—globalising—world, the principle of respect for the bond of common humanity links all humans across cultures, underpinning notions of personhood, equality, freedom, justice, and rights. (Edmunds, 2013, p.21)

On this reading of modernity the committee’s response to what is perceived as a crisis in the relation between higher education and industry can be interpreted as a moral concern for the lives of graduates. Edmunds (2013) is concerned with how social change impacts upon traditional groups; thus she posits societies as fundamentally dynamic and responsive to historical and political conditions. In examining societal responses to new situations we are offered insight into both the particularities of a society and the generalities of the human

condition (Edmunds, 2013). By this logic we might regard the committee's response to a perceived crisis of Britain's global competitiveness as opening the way for a new conception of graduate employability. This conception is grounded in a generalizable idea of graduateness, one in which the qualities of a 'good' graduate are assumed to be discoverable, even if they are not spelled out precisely. Thus *University-Industry Relations* can be approached as a moral-ethical project, where interdependence can be invoked in order to break with an inherited tradition of an autonomous higher education sector detached from the concerns of the economy.

This breaking of bonds points to a second sense in which *University-Industry Relations* could be interpreted as a project of modernity. In this case, by bringing into question the traditional relation between university study and work, the committee is arguably attempting to supplant one pattern of social relations with another. Bauman writes that:

Modern times found the pre-modern solids in a fairly advanced state of disintegration; and one of the most powerful motives behind the urge to melt them was the wish to discover or invent solids of - for a change - *lasting* solidity, a solidity which one could trust and rely upon and which would make the world predictable and therefore manageable. (Bauman, 2000, p.3; emphasis in original)

By casting the relation between higher education and industry in a sense of crisis and of international competition the committee are able to ground their response as a replacement of the traditional order with one that is in some sense better suited to the perceived conditions of the age. This might, for example, have as its aim a form of relations between the university and the economy that is more amenable to governance, whereby what is to be valued in higher education is elaborated more specifically. This response can be characterised by three inter-related ideas: a tension between applied and academic knowledge; a privileging of science and technology; and a concern with standards in education. These are the points at which the 'invasions, struggles, plunderings, disguises [and] ploys' (Foucault, 1984a, p.76) pertinent to a notion of graduate employability can be accessed.

University-Industry Relations brings to the surface a tension between applied and academic knowledge. Britain, it is argued, 'is often regarded as a country which is good at research but bad at translating the results of research into production' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.15). The Committee noted that those giving evidence offered a variety of explanations for this. Representatives of Hewlett-Packard observed that 'more and more graduates are coming to us having followed the course material, knowing the formulae and

the principles, but they do not have an understanding of what is taking place' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.21), while also criticising declining standards in schools and a 'cook-book approach of university teaching' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.21). Here we see the tension between academic and applied knowledge located in terms of standards of education. Hewlett-Packard's criticisms point to a sense of declining standards in both compulsory and post-compulsory education; indeed, their insistence that 'more and more' graduates present with sound conceptual knowledge but lacking in practical understanding indicates the perception of a growing problem, an unfavourable comparison with some unspecified past time.

Similarly, the 'cook-book' analogy indicates a perception of higher education that privileges a formulaic approach to knowledge – for example, how to combine particular pieces of knowledge into discrete and well-defined concepts that can be consistently replicated and applied. However, to explore the analogy further, recipe books may specify how certain dishes might be prepared but often say little about how these dishes might be combined at a dinner party. To do this would require a range of different kinds of knowledges – of the preferences of guests, of one's own cooking skills, of the seasonality of produce, of how different flavours combine and so forth. The implication of Hewlett-Packard's evidence to the Committee (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976) is that this tacit knowledge, this context-sensitive understanding, is what enables the 'recipes' of science and technology to be translated into practical application. From the perspective of industry, then, the notion of standards of education encompasses not just academic or disciplinary knowledge but the capability to translate knowledge from one setting to another, or to think beyond the formulaic replication of packets of knowledge in discrete conditions. By contrast, the distinctive capabilities that graduates bring to the workplace might be characterised as more habitual, whereby the knowledge and skills developed through degree study become parts of a broader repertoire of qualities.

This points to the possibility of a human capital understanding of graduate employability, one that encompasses both formal, disciplinary knowledge and tacit, contextual understanding. Indeed, on this basis it might be argued that employability is located in the possibility of bridging different domains of knowledge. In these terms, the employable graduate must be more than a 'walking textbook' or a competent technician. Rather, this understanding of the employable graduate requires serious attention to what Biesta (2016) calls the possibility of transcendence. This idea of going beyond is, according to Biesta (2016), fundamental to our understanding of the role of teaching – the idea that teachers bring something more to their

students, and thus teaching can be framed as the distinctive activity of schools. In these terms, teaching is ‘something that comes radically from the outside, as something that transcends the self of the “learner”, transcends the one who is being taught’ (Biesta, 2016, p.46). This is in contrast to a constructivist understanding of learning as immanent, whereby the role of the teacher is not to give but to draw out what is already there (Biesta, 2016).

However, while Biesta frames transcendence in terms of learners going beyond themselves through being taught, the Hewlett-Packard argument (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976) implies another kind of transcendence: going beyond formal categories of knowledge, escaping the bounds of discipline and subject, not remaining in the realm of the abstract and general. Thus, if formal disciplinary learning can be conceived as a progression from particular, specific understanding to an understanding of general and abstract ideas, the notion of transcendence suggests that to become an employable graduate is to progress to a different engagement with the particular. It is to be able to return to the world of the particular in order to bring abstract disciplinary knowledge to bear in specific situations. This is not a question of going back to a state where the abstract or general is of no value, however. Instead, it is the ability to set aside or bracket out the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge, to see them not as boundaries of understanding but of indicators of potentiality – the opportunity to do something new. This points to the possibility of conceiving of the employability of graduates in terms of their ability to return from the general to the particular, to be able to combine and synthesise knowledge in order to direct it towards some practical problem. Disciplinary knowledge might thus be argued to become a toolkit with which the employable graduate is equipped. This is distinct from a ‘cookbook’ of ready-made solutions to known problems. It therefore points to the possibility of a discourse of employability grounded in human capital.

4.3.3 A contest for graduate standards

It is notable that the Committee’s report highlights declining standards of education as a growing problem. In addition to the comments of Hewlett-Packard, the Confederation of British Industry talked of ‘a growing proportion of those with only poor or mediocre talent’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.21) and EMI Ltd asserted ‘that the expansion of higher education had “lowered input standards; there are more graduates, but they have a lower average standard”’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.21). This sense of a growing problem of the standard of graduates can be read in terms of what the Committee calls ‘the crisis facing science and engineering education’ (Select

Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.20). It is telling that the Committee frames its discussion in the following terms:

it may be that Britain —that is to say, the British people— has simply “opted out” of the race. Although the Committee do not believe that [this] explanation is necessarily true, the question must be asked: does Britain any longer wish to be an industrial leader? There is little doubt that many overseas observers long ago concluded that that was no longer the case, as have some social scientists. Nor do the reported attitudes of students within the higher education sector, or the reluctance of students to study subjects relevant to the needs of industry, indicate any widespread enthusiasm amongst the better educated and potential opinion-leaders for a society made prosperous by industrial growth. (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.16)

Thus, in the Committee’s view, the crisis is not merely one of declining economic growth or the intensity of global competition. At the root of the crisis is an issue of attitudes, a lack of willingness or determination to be among the global leaders in industrial output – an abandoning of prosperity through industry. This line of argument places the tension between academic and applied knowledge in a fresh light. Such tensions cannot be conceived of purely as issues of demarcation; it is not simply that higher education does not ‘do’ applied knowledge as part of its core mission. Rather, it points to a conflict between attitudes towards knowledge. It puts into question what we choose to value as knowledge and on what basis.

Snow (1998) offers a means of conceiving of this contest of valuation as a polarisation of culture. On the one hand, there is a valuation of traditional culture that is grounded in the incomprehension of science:

I believe the pole of total incomprehension of science radiates its influence on all the rest. The total incomprehension gives, much more pervasively than we realise, living in it, an unscientific flavour to the whole “traditional” culture, and that unscientific flavour is often, much more than we admit, on the point of turning anti-scientific. (Snow, 1998, p.11)

This incomprehension of science is likely to prompt a rejection of science in favour of a reinforcement of what has been traditionally valued. By implication this is a rejection of, and indeed resistance to, modernity: ‘If the scientists have the future in their bones, then the traditional culture responds by wishing the future did not exist’ (Snow, 1998, p.11). On the other hand, Snow notes that ‘the scientific culture really is a culture, not only in an intellectual but also in an anthropological sense’ (Snow, 1998, p.9). This is a culture marked out by commonality of attitudes, standards, behaviours, approaches and assumptions that are hallmarks of the community: ‘Without thinking about it, they respond alike. That is what a

culture means' (Snow, 1998, p.10). Snow's characterisation of the polarisation of two cultures thus offers an explanation for the Committee's assertion of a lack of enthusiasm for 'a society made prosperous by economic growth' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.16).

Disposition towards industry is thus arguably a matter of attitude and not just a matter of pragmatic decision-making; it is something inscribed or embedded into patterns of thought. We might therefore point to the existence of distinct political rationalities that suggest relationships between the social entity and the individual (Foucault, 1988c, p.153). Such political rationalities are 'dependent upon economical, social, cultural, and technical processes' (Foucault, 1988c, p.161); they are 'embodied in institutions and strategies' (Foucault, 1988c, p.161) and have their own specificities. Thus, Snow's (1998) proposition of two distinct cultures of thought – scientific and traditional – imply their own particular contexts, conditions, practices, institutional situations and so forth. They therefore imply specific ways of political thinking, or political technologies of which individuals become objects (cf Foucault, 1988c). The Committee's (1976) identification of the opting out of the race for global industrial leadership points to a conflict between two kinds of political technology, a conflict of which education becomes the key battleground.

The Committee connects this attitudinal crisis towards industry to a departure from science and technology in education. The Committee asserts that: 'So sharp has been the drift away from science and technology in the schools that there now exists a serious imbalance between the provision of university places and the supply of students to fill those places, despite a general easing of entry standards in science and engineering departments in the universities' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.19). This would appear to imply a generalised devaluing of learning of direct relevance to industry, and of a generalised problem of the quality of that industry-relevant education that does take place. Thus, a sense of crisis can be invoked as justification for policymakers to take a more interventionist disposition towards the employability of graduates. The Committee highlights a traditional distancing between policymakers and higher education, noting that: 'Throughout the post-war era, educational policy at national level has reflected an ambivalence towards the aims and philosophy of higher education' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.28) that is held to have undermined efforts at reforming technological education. Taken in the context of a perceived attitudinal crisis, this may be read as an attempt to pave the way for a more direct engagement with the mission and organisation of higher education. This therefore offers a justification for a kind of political technology (cf Foucault, 1998b) that can

attempt to counter the influence of what Snow (1998) characterises as a traditional outlook grounded in incomprehension of science. However, combined with a general rejection of manpower planning (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.28), this would appear to favour policy approaches that are less command-and-control in nature and more focused on making the choice of certain forms of action more likely (Foucault, 1982) – conduct upon conduct, an act of Foucauldian governance *par excellence*.

This in itself presents an interesting point of tension. On the one hand, such a disposition would appear to favour an understanding of employability grounded in human capital – the demonstrable knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates. This might support a more standardised notion of exactly what an employable graduate should know and be able to do. Yet, as already noted, there would appear to be an implication that employability in this sense means being able to move beyond the realm of the abstract and general and exhibit an understanding of the particular and contextual. This might suggest that an over-emphasis on specialist knowledge is unlikely to result in graduates possessing the right kinds of human capital. Indeed, the Confederation of British Industry told the Committee that:

Graduates were needed in industry for a wide range of jobs “for many of which specialist academic research experience is of no direct benefit and may even, if it has narrowed the graduate’s perspective on life, be a handicap” (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.20)

An over-emphasis on the acquisition of specific knowledge might therefore be a detriment to the employability of a graduate. Needless to say this presents particular challenges to higher education in navigating the tension between pure and applied knowledge. Again, this can be read not as a problem of who *does* what, but of who *values* what and on what basis. To govern the employability of graduates is therefore to govern the systems of values that permeate the realm of education. It is a case of influencing the kinds of choices made by educators and students in order to set about encouraging an alignment with perceived national needs. The Committee recognised a certain danger in such an approach, in that ‘the aim of providing a particular pattern of technical manpower must always be in conflict with freedom of choice’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.28). Thus, to govern the outcomes of education is to engage at the level of attitudes and values.

A consequence of responding to this perceived crisis in science and technology education is the necessity of privileging science and technology in the policy conversation. Several of the key recommendations made by the committee alluded to the status of science and technology in education policy. These included the need for a higher priority on the training of ‘engineers

and applied scientists suitable for employment in productive industry' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.7), a revisiting of the Robbins Committee's proposition for specialist scientific and technological institutions (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.7), and a hope that 'the Secretary of State will devote more attention to the scientific aspects of her job than have most of her recent predecessors' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.7). It is interesting to note that the government accepted in broad terms those recommendations regarding prioritising training engineers, yet were less receptive to specific proposals for structural interventions in the higher education sector (Department for Education and Science, 1977). This suggests a certain receptiveness to approaches to employability informed by discourses of human capital; as noted, the perceived crisis facing higher education and the economy has been framed in terms of a drift from science and technology resulting in a reduced supply of graduates into industry. It is perhaps not surprising that responses framed in terms of the supply of suitably qualified graduates would possess a certain attractions. For example, Denis Healey MP, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, welcomed arguments for the supply of skilled engineers to be encouraged 'even by exerting compulsion on the universities' (Leigh, 1976, p.2). Indeed, the Committee itself expressed the legitimacy of such interventionist dispositions towards the universities:

Suggestions have been made to us—and are often repeated in the press—that schools, colleges and universities do too little to encourage a positive attitude towards industry, and even that they actively encourage antipathy towards industry. These are very serious charges and, if they are true, the Government have a right to intervene to correct the balance. (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.54).

By invoking the 'right' of a government to 'correct the balance' of attitudes in education we are offered grounds for justifying in broad terms the governance of the choices and preferences of educators, students and institutions. Yet when this kind of response is read in conjunction with the notion of economic crisis, we have a clear example of what Foucault (2008) refers to as the formation of a *dispositif* from a set of practices and a regime of truth. It is this combination of factors that makes the key issues raised in *University-Industry Relations* more than merely a technical question of how to procure more trained engineers. This particular *dispositif* is one that not only privileges human capital-based responses to perceived crises, but also implies the challenging of a perceived credentialist stance within the higher education community in which the pursuit and profession of certain ways of knowing – and even certain ways of living – is held to possess higher value than others.

This credentialist stance identified by the Committee can be framed as a tension between the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of learning, and a question of whether one ‘ought’ to value one more highly than the other (or not at all). For example, in their evidence to the Committee the engineering firm Lucas Industries argued that ‘for a very long time, a career in industry had been frowned on in many University departments as somewhat ‘money grubbing’ and had ranked below university research, the scientific civil service or even teaching’ (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.22). Certain professional orientations, then, are perceived to carry more credibility within the domain of higher education. Such are more likely to be marked out as indicators of ‘proper’ outcomes of higher education. Further, in a letter to the editor of *The Times* a Reverend Kenway argues that:

According to Sir Hermann Bondi, science at university level should, like the study of the classics, be an education in itself, rather than approximate to the deliberately oriented teaching of, say, the medical school. Mr Callaghan, on the other hand, seems to view education, especially university education, according to a fairly crude and predictable utilitarian calculus, and thereby displays a serious misunderstanding of the role of the university not only in the field of further education but also in the life of the nation. (*The Times*, 21 October 1976, p.15)

Here we are presented with a tension between study being either deliberately oriented towards certain ways of acting or more generally oriented towards ways of being. This might be presented as a credentialist discourse in the sense of it relating to a certain vision of the role of higher education; Reverend Kenway might well offer support for a ‘proper’ understanding of higher education as speaking to the more fulsome growth of the life of the nation rather than merely responding to short-range economic necessities. Some parallels are to be found here with Newman’s argument that, notwithstanding the further advantages that may be obtained through knowledge, in the pursuit of knowledge ‘we are satisfying a direct need of our nature in its very acquisition’ (Newman, 2008, p.129). It is not inconceivable to think that this might translate into a disposition within higher education that regards disciplines such as pure sciences as more creditable than, say, engineering or applied sciences. Subjects with an overt orientation to what might be termed as secondary benefits of learning might on this logic be at best lacking, at worst harmful.

Yet it is the *dispositif* that combines a sense of economic crisis with responses grounded in human capital that can be argued to legitimise a challenge to this credentialist position. In this sense *University-Industry Relations* represents a contest for the route to a ‘good’ life. The Committee argues that:

If we are concerned with attitudinal problems, we must recognise that they may derive not only from the traditional jealousies of rival groups in a class-ridden and status-ridden society, but also from conceptions of society and of life which are hardly conducive to the achievement of greater prosperity.
(Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.16)

Here it might be argued that the Committee is challenging a particular conception of the good life, one in which material prosperity is regarded as having been almost completely neglected. Indeed, such 'conceptions of society and of life' are implied by the Committee to be antithetical to the achievement of prosperity. Thus, prosperity becomes the grounds by which such credentialist discourses of the outcomes of education might be challenged, a yardstick by which the value of certain dispositions and attitudes might be judged. This marks a distinct break with the tone taken by the Robbins Committee; while Robbins invoked the notion of higher education's relevance to the economy in order to broaden the policy debate and reintroduce what was perceived to be a neglected issue, *University-Industry Relations* invokes higher education's contribution to economic prosperity as a means of displacing other arguments. It can be read as an attempt to establish a distinctive truth about the good life, one in which material prosperity is afforded a much higher value. Such arguments create the conditions for an understanding of graduate employability that emphasises the contribution that a graduate might make to productive industry insofar as that contribution is oriented towards economic prosperity.

From this we may read another consequence into the Committee's insistence on the right of governments to 'intervene to correct the balance' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.54) in academic attitudes towards industry. As noted earlier, *University-Industry Relations* can be read as a project of modernity in that it attempts to supplant one pattern of social relations with another. Therefore, it is more than a technical response to a practical problem. It has as its target not merely the realm of higher education, but also would-be students, employers and government. It therefore points to two different mechanisms of power: disciplinary and regulatory (Foucault, 2004). In doing so it further affirms graduate employability to be an exercise of power. However, it does more than this: not only can graduate employability have as its target disparate individuals, but it can also target the population as a whole.

Foucault (2004) points to the emergence of biopolitics as a new technology of power distinct from sovereignty and discipline. Whereas sovereignty engages with the relation between contracting individuals and the social body, and discipline deals with the practicalities of individual bodies, biopolitics engages 'with the population as a political problem, as a problem

that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem' (Foucault, 2004, p.245). Biopolitics deals with 'collective phenomena which have their economic and political effects [that] become pertinent only at the mass level' (Foucault 2004, p.246). Biopolitics, argues Foucault, introduces a distinct set of mechanisms 'not to modify any given phenomenon as such, or to modify a given individual insofar as he is an individual, but, essentially, to intervene at the level at which these general phenomena are determined, to intervene at the level of their generality' (Foucault, 2004, p.246). We are therefore concerned not with the effects of governance upon individuals, but upon the population as a whole. Thus, the individualising discourse of graduate employability that emerges through the bottom-up demand for learning, as exemplified in the *Robbins Report*, appears to give way to a systematising notion focused at the level of the general population. It is to this dynamic, visible within *University-Industry Relations*, that the analysis now turns.

4.3.4 Employability with the population as a target

Foucault (2004) distinguishes between two different mechanisms of power. The first, disciplinary, saw the 'adjustment of power mechanisms to the individual body by using surveillance and training' (Foucault, 2004, pp.249-250). Disciplinary power is thus oriented towards the individual, with particular conduct and practices coming to the fore. Such power relations tend to be centred on institutional frameworks. The second, regulatory, emerged as power mechanisms were 'adjusted to phenomena of population, to the biological or biosociological processes characteristic of human masses' (Foucault, 2004, p.250). This tends to be located at the level of the state – though, as Foucault (2004) notes, this is not to imply a strict dichotomy between state and institution. At first glance, to engage in the governance of graduate employability is to exert conduct upon conduct at the level of the institution; indeed, *University-Industry Relations* does point to the criticality of the institutional perspective, particularly with regards to academic attitudes towards industry.

Yet it is arguable that the ideas addressed in *University-Industry Relations* go beyond the practices of institutions and individuals. For example, the Committee's warning that 'it may be that Britain —that is to say, the British people— has simply "opted out" of the race' (Select Committee on Science and Technology, 1976, p.16) for economic prosperity speaks to something greater than the individual. It addresses the population as a whole. Foucault writes: 'We are, then, in a power that has taken control of both the body and life or that has, if you like, taken control of life in general – with the body as one pole and the population as the other' (Foucault, 2004, p.253). It is somewhere on this axis that the notion of graduate

employability lies as informed by *University-Industry Relations*. The debate encapsulated in *University-Industry Relations* engages questions of the good life, of Britain's economic competitiveness on a global scale, of a general sense of crisis and so forth. It therefore engages a broader range of matters than simply the practices of individuals and institutions.

This is not to say that graduate employability is a matter of life itself; rather, it represents a concern with the norm. Foucault (2004) characterises the norm as in circulation between the disciplinary and the regulatory 'which will make it possible to control both the disciplinary order of the body and the aleatory events that occur in the biological multiplicity' (Foucault, 2004, p.252). A normalising society is, then, not simply one where disciplinary institutions predominate, but one where discipline and regulation intersect (Foucault, 2004). By invoking the notion of crisis in Britain's economic performance, *University-Industry Relations* posits material prosperity as symbolic of that intersection. It enables the policy debate to engage with both the disciplinary effects of institutional practice and the regulatory effects of societal attitudes towards business and prosperity. As a result, prosperity becomes the key principle of normalisation. This points to a set of conditions that support an understanding of graduate employability as grounded in human capital and diametrically opposed to an understanding of the university graduate grounded in Snow's (1998) conception of the traditional culture.

Ultimately, this suggests the possibility of a notion of graduate employability in which the examination of oneself becomes paramount. Foucault (1998a) identifies three major types of self-examination in terms of: correspondence to reality; relation to rules; and, relation to hidden thought and impurity. The tensions described in *University-Industry Relations* offer the basis for a political technology that makes possible an intervention in these three forms of examination. Firstly, the notion of a country in economic crisis points to a privileging of economic rationality in terms of what should be taught and learned in higher education. Secondly, this privileging of economic reality enables a privileging of science and technology – a challenging of traditional conceptions of higher education and the stratification that this implies. Thus the rules of the game change; becoming an employable graduate means engaging with a different set of rules as to what to study, where to study, how to demonstrate this to employers and so forth. The old credentials that marked out one group of graduates from the mass are devalued. Thirdly, the idea of a crisis of standards prompts an examination of the self in terms of our hidden ways of thinking. We are to become 'a permanent money changer of ourselves' (Foucault, 1988b, p.47), to become conscious of how we choose, prioritise, value and discriminate between ways of being. The political technology that governs this kind of self-examination is grounded in human capital and a rejection of the

privileged credentials of traditional educational culture. It is thus a break with prior conceptions of the employable graduate and establishes a distinct notion whose emphasis is normalisation. Higher education becomes framed as a normalising experience as opposed to a liberating one. The employability of graduates may thus be considered as a measure of the efficiency of that normalisation.

4.4 The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s

The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s (Department for Education and Science, 1985) (hereafter referred to as ‘the Command Paper’) was published in 1985, two years after the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher was returned in a landslide general election victory. Coming as it did in the wake of a general election manifesto promising a reining in of public spending and ‘steadfast progress towards [economic] recovery’ (Conservative Party, 1983, n.p.), it animated the contemporary debate on the roles, purposes and funding of higher education in the United Kingdom. Many of the policy directions indicated did not lead to lasting policy change, at least not in the forms envisaged at the time. Watson (2014b) characterises the Command Paper as focused on achieving economies, reductions in student numbers, and making higher education more economically relevant. He points to a combination of a failed attempt to introduce fees for full-time domestic undergraduates and flawed assessments of demographic data as being among the reasons for its subsequent failure (Watson, 2014b). Likewise, Parry (2006) suggests that the Command Paper represents a policy of contraction which was subsequently reversed towards the end of the 1980s as part of a trajectory towards mass higher education. Dixon (2006) contends that this reversal in approach is connected with the replacement of Sir Keith Joseph as Secretary of State for Education and Science with Kenneth Baker, ‘a populist broadly committed to renewed growth’ (Dixon, 2006, p.306). On one level, then, it is notable as a record of what never came to be, thus marking out a fracture between two discursive positions.

Thus, the Command Paper’s significance is not to be evaluated according to its tangible impact on government policy. Rather, it is notable because it offers insight into the way in which the playing out of a policy debate can facilitate the formation of a certain kind of discourse of graduate employability. In some ways, this is hardly surprising. Glendinning (2005) notes an ‘increasingly explicit concern with “national economic interest” that has occurred with the drive towards mass access’ (Glendinning, 2005, p.115), arguing that the state’s involvement in

the funding and protection of higher education has for the better part of a century rested on the expectation that it ought to be ‘delivering what... the state wanted from it’ (Glendinning, 2005, p.115). In the case of the Command Paper, a Foucauldian genealogical analysis illustrates how logics of a national economic crisis and a response to it (the pursuit of growth in science- and engineering-based sectors of business) can be deployed in order to facilitate a notion of graduate employability grounded in the acquisition of the ‘right’ human capital. Such a discourse creates the conditions for a mechanism of governance encompassing universities, students and employers. Shattock (2008), for example, argues that the arrival of the Thatcher government marked a change in approach to higher education; in the period post-Second World War ‘the state continued to respect institutional autonomy in policy making, even though it had become its majority shareholder’ (Shattock, 2008, p.183). Read this way, the Command Paper represents a significant stage in a re-alignment of the process of policymaking. It represents not just a market-driven reshaping of higher education in response to a perceived economic crisis, but also a concerted attempt to shape that market demand. It is thus concerned with more than just the development of higher education, but in some senses also the economic development of the United Kingdom. A discourse of employability thus emerges through the interaction of these factors.

38 extracts from the text of *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s* were identified that deal directly with the relation between higher education, the economy, employers, and the lives of young people. These were coded according to the extent to which they facilitate or mitigate against certain types of discourse. Of the 38 extracts from the policy text identified, 27 (71 per cent) appear to promote or facilitate discourses of graduate employability grounded in the acquisition of human capital. Additionally, 11 (29 per cent) could be argued to support discourses of employability in terms of graduate identity, while four speak to the employability of graduates in terms of their own self-perception. Notably, six of the extracts appear to counter the notion of employability in terms of the credentials acquired by graduates. On a basic level, this would suggest that *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s* is a policy text that strongly reinforces a discourse of graduate employability as being grounded in the kinds of knowledge, skills and behaviours that a graduate can demonstrate to employers. Connected to that is the broad notion of graduates presenting an identity that is validated by employers as ‘employable’. By contrast, it pays relatively little attention to the notion that a graduate is demonstrably employable merely by being successful in seeking work, and at some points seems to actively counter the notion that one’s credentials (including qualifications or institutional affiliations) mark one out as more or

less employable. The key questions, then, relate to: the particularities of the policy text that enable the emergence of discourses of graduate employability in particular forms; and the significance of these particularities for the interpretive community around the Command Paper.

As a second stage of analysis, 117 codes identified from the extracts taken were assigned to a keyword that represent the major theme implied by each. The following illustrates how the major themes were analysed to ground the analysis of the emergence of certain discourses. Occurrences of themes were mapped against the type of discourse that the relevant code appears to facilitate. Taking human capital as the major example, 68 instances of codes were identified that relate to the following themes. Out of 68 separate codes that relate to discourses of human capital, 13 (19%) address specifically the outcomes generated through higher education, while 10 (15%) address questions of the relevance of higher education to the economy. Another 9 (13%) address questions of prioritising HE provision. The codes assigned to these themes and the connections between types of discourse, themes and specifics of policy represent the deployment of concepts within the policy document as a whole. This then offers grounds for deeper analysis of the playing out of dominations (Foucault, 1984a) through the document as a whole.

4.4.1 Responding to competitive threat

As noted, more than 70 per cent of extracts from the Command Paper that address the relation between higher education, graduates and the economy can be read as fostering a view of graduate employability grounded in human capital. Yet, while the OECD (Keeley, 2007) emphasises the importance of human capital through its possession by the individual, the Command Paper is focused on the possession by the nation of people with the 'right' human capital – particularly in comparison with other nations. The focus here is therefore the national stock of human capital in comparison to other national economies, as opposed to the human capital possessed by this or that individual graduate. Indeed, the starting point for the Command Paper's analysis is the assertion that:

The economic performance of the United Kingdom since 1945 has been disappointing compared to the achievement of others (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.3)

That such a comparative statement appears as the first substantive assertion effectively sets the tone for the paper. Further references to 'the evidence that societies of our competitors are producing, and plan in the future to produce, more qualified scientists, engineers,

technologists and technicians than in the United Kingdom' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.3) indicate the seriousness with which the situation was viewed within government: the United Kingdom was thus in a state of competition with other countries, though quite what kinds of prizes were being contested is never made exactly clear.

Nor is it made clear in the Command Paper exactly what the United Kingdom's competitive position at the time was held to be. While the Command Paper refers to 'evidence', it is notable that nowhere in the Command Paper is any substantive evidence presented that describes the United Kingdom in comparison to any other country. This may be an example of an idea considered immobile (Foucault, 1984a), a 'truth' ingrained into a prevailing discourse on the condition of the economy at the time. If this were true, it might be expected that such a sentiment was detectable through discussions of the relevant issues in, for example, the mainstream media. Yet a survey of articles in *The Times* in the period 1984-1986, that address the role and relevance of higher education to the economy, reveals very little explicit consideration of the United Kingdom's international competitive position. A notable exception is a report that John Cassels, then the director general of the National Economic Development Office, told an annual meeting of the Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education of a growing need in industry for greater levels of skills amongst employees:

The pace is being forced not by the arbitrary will of government or the Manpower Services Commission or anybody else but essentially by the pressure of international competition and the pace of technology change.
(*The Times*, 1984a, p.5)

Mr Cassels's address remarked on the rights of French and German workers to training, and noted their absence in the British economy (*The Times*, 1984a). Such sentiments do indicate an imperative to keep pace with other countries in specific ways. However, where the relevance of higher education and the skills of graduates are concerned, the debate appears to be centred on the evident needs of employers, with the overall consequences for the national economy being an implicit concern. For example, a report on the response of Aston University to demands for cuts in its staffing and students numbers notes astonishment that 'such a sacrifice could be demanded of a university which by any standards could play a leading role in Britain's future industrial renovation' (Seton, 1984, p.13). This juxtaposition of a university with a record of graduate employment second only to Cambridge (Seton, 1984) with the notion of Britain's industrial renovation does hint at a perception of the United Kingdom's standing as an industrial nation – and Frederick Crawford, the then vice-chancellor of Aston, notes that 'Britain desperately needs to tackle the ever more complex problems of a

'technological society' (Seton, 1984, p.13). However, even here the relevance of university education to Britain's standing is merely implied rather than made explicit.

Nor is there a clear consensus that increased funding for higher education would lead to improved outcomes for businesses. A report by an advisory body for local authority-run higher education institutions noted that so-called refresher courses for mature students 'are ill-suited to the needs of students and employers' (Hughes, 1984a, p.2), and that a substantial increase in funding was required. However, an exchange of questions in parliament later that year indicates the following:

Mr Neil Hamilton (Tatton, C): Will he accept that there is no demonstrable link between the amounts of public expenditure on higher education and the performance of the economy, and arguments that purport to show there is are humbug?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with every word. (The Times, 1984c, p.4)

Such a sentiment - expressed by the then-Secretary of State for Education and Science in response to a question from a government backbencher - could, of course, be interpreted as being consistent with an explicit policy of reducing public expenditure generally, a point that had featured in the governing Conservative Party's general election manifesto of 1983 (Conservative Party, 1983). Yet, read in conjunction with the apparent seriousness of the United Kingdom's international economic position (Department for Education and Science, 1985), this might offer an example of an enmeshing of contradictory discourses (Ball, 1994) that offer the possibility of a distinct reading of the notion of graduate employability. Take, for example, the Command Paper's insistence that 'the whole graduate body can make a contribution to the development of the economy' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.9); when read alongside the assertion on the very next page that '[so] long as taxpayers substantially finance higher education, however, the benefit has to be sufficient to justify the cost' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.10), this suggests an approach to supporting higher education that bears down on 'generating the qualified manpower the country needs' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.6). Thus, while the competitive position of the United Kingdom can be implied to be a priority that guides higher education policy, the specifics of policy can be very much read in terms of immediate choices and consequences. The potential is then created for a discourse of graduate employability that may displace other discourses of the national benefits of higher education.

Indeed, where the outcomes of higher education are concerned, a key concern of the Command Paper appears to be the perceived return on investment that higher education

represents. From the government's standpoint, the desire to reduce public expenditure to make headroom for tax reductions (Conservative Party, 1983), combined with the principle that the benefits of higher education justify the costs (Department for Education and Science, 1985), makes visible the expectation that taxpayers are to be considered stakeholders in higher education. This deployment of the notion of taxpayers is significant in that it deliberately attempts to extend the web of relations that animate policy and cause it to move. Ball (2016a) notes that a 'policy network is a set of interactions, interdependencies, and exchanges, and a form of power relations which do governing work and through which policy moves, or rather, is moved' (Ball, 2016a, p.561). By invoking the image of the taxpayer, grounded in the apparent legitimacy of an electoral mandate, the Command Paper is in effect an attempt to exert a governing force upon the relation between the purposes of higher education and its outcomes. In the face of such logic, the notion of the wider social benefits of higher education is not sufficiently compelling in itself to represent a counter discourse. The effect is to reduce the potency of positions that attempt to decouple higher education and its contribution to the economy.

We are thus presented with a situation where the 'other social benefits derived from higher education which are not directly associated with the education of highly qualified manpower or research' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.59) are very much 'other' benefits. They are to be 'kept in mind' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.59), an acknowledgement of their existence but hardly an indication of their centrality to the policy discourse. Rather, the fostering of the human capital deemed necessary to address the economic challenges faced by the nation becomes the major policy priority. Indeed, this notion of prioritising certain outcomes through higher education is played out in the Command Paper as a choice between luxuries and necessities. Most starkly, the suggestion is made that the entire notion of knowledge as an end in itself could be under threat:

unless the country's economic performance improves, we shall be even less able than now to afford many of the things we value most – including education for pleasure and general culture and the financing of scholarship and research as an end in itself. (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.3)

This is another example of how the idea of economic crisis is invoked in order to justify and legitimise an act of governance. In this case, investment in the scientific and technical capacity of the economy represents a necessity, while the value of the arts is held to be non-vocational and hence a luxury that, in a time of crisis, the nation can afford to de-emphasise. Thus, the government grounds its assertion that 'the proportion of arts places in higher education as a

whole can be expected to shrink' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.9) in the form of a response to an existential threat, ironically to the sorts of scholarship and learning upon which, it is implied, society places a high value.

One possible implication of this is the characterisation of investment in skills for employment as a grim duty, a sacrifice that must be made immediately in order to preserve the wider value for the longer term. This may be a recognition that such an approach may be anathematic to those who, like Oakeshott (2001), defend a conception of liberal learning in terms of its disconnection from everyday needs or, like Newman (2008), regard liberal education as the disciplining of the mind for its own sake. For example, it is Newman's contention that what we choose to value is not necessarily useful or practical:

Things, which can bear to be cut off from every thing else and yet persist in living, must have life in themselves; pursuits, which issue in nothing, and still maintain their ground for ages, which are regarded as admirable, though they have not as yet proved themselves to be useful, must have their sufficient end in themselves, whatever it turn out to be. (Newman, 2008, p.106)

Thus, something that may be detached from practical application or contingent want (Oakeshott, 2001) must be capable of representing an end in itself. Liberal knowledge, argues Newman, can do just that; it is that 'which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be *informed* (as it is called) by any end, or absorbed into any art, in order duly to present itself to our contemplation' (Newman 2008, p.108). Liberal knowledge is therefore of evident value even *before* it is applied (Newman, 2008). Thus, the pursuit of skills for employment is at best a secondary outcome of the primary goal, namely the pursuit of liberal knowledge. The Command Paper may thus be characterised as attempting to subvert the assumption that skills acquisition is a secondary by-product of higher education by invoking the urgency of the economic challenge facing the nation.

This tension between the defence of some fundamental value of higher education and the response to contingent needs is highlighted by an editorial in *The Times* in 1984 which makes a striking connection between utility and the wider benefits of higher education:

Questions of utility and worth go much further than that however. Universities in particular contribute far more to society than in the line of superior vocational schools. They have a research role that does not stop at what may be thought 'relevant' to the concerns of the moment. They make for enlargement of the intellect in the medium of a community, as Newman had it, (not a foundry, or a mint or a treadmill). They cultivate a critical

intelligence in which the world may see itself reflected to its benefit. They are agents of cultural transmission and enlightenment. They innovate. They civilize. They serve the values implicit in the obsolete expression 'seats of learning'. (The Times, 1984b, p.13)

The Command Paper does acknowledge a relation between liberal education, critical thought and a free society (Department for Education and Science, 1985). Yet the invoking of a notion of economic crisis that requires immediate response essentially serves to sideline defences of the 'civilising' effects of education, and can thus be read as an attempt to re-set the rules of discourse on the purposes of higher education. Space is thus created for a new notion of being 'in the true' (Foucault, 1981, p.61) with respect to what counts as valuable outcomes for students, one that privileges the relevance of what students learn to the economic use they might make of it. Concerns such as the enlargement of the intellect and the transmission of culture, while not irrelevant, are certainly not imbued with the same kind of urgency as the renewal of the national economic capacity in the transition from the 'age of the smokestack to the era of the microchip' (Conservative Party, 1983, n.p.).

4.4.2 Governance of the outcomes of higher education

Through the confluence of policy objectives and the invocation of a sense of national crisis, a space is created that legitimises an act of governance. In the case of the Command Paper, it is an act of governance with three targets: the higher education sector; students (and their families and advisers); and employers. The higher education sector is advised that decisions on funding will take into account the 'country's need for qualified manpower and the case for a continued switch of emphasis in higher education towards science and technology' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.42), a sentiment perhaps motivated by analyses such as those offered by Digby Anderson, founder and director of think-tank the Social Affairs Unit:

The truth is unsurprising: the universities and their staff, like coal mines, vary in quality and productivity. Most have been sheltered, not savaged. Universities urgently need stimulation to reduce rigidities, shake out the less able and productive and diversify their funding. They can help themselves – Salford, the Open University, the London School of Economics and, above all Buckingham, are starting to show that. If the Government is encouraged to look closely at universities, it may conclude that their independence and efficiency require a systematic reduction of state funding (including student grants) to 49 per cent; a little less for Oxford. (Anderson, 1985, p.12)

On readings such as these, the latitude of universities to determine for themselves what the proper priorities of higher education ought to be is a legitimate object of scrutiny. Certainly, by invoking the notion of crisis and a sense that the stakeholders of higher education are wider than academics and students, the Command Paper is able to create a space analogous to the non-place that represents a place of discursive conflict (Foucault, 1984a). In this case, the tension between the pursuit of education as an end in itself and the perceived contingent needs of the economy characterises this ‘pure distance’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.85) between the government and the higher education sector, which opens the possibility for the emergence of new configurations of the relation between government and higher education. Anderson’s (1985) urging of the government to ‘look closely’ at universities could thus be interpreted as a cue for this tension to ‘leap from the wings to center stage’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.84), indicating both the possibility and the probability of conflict over the purposes of higher education.

A particular example can be seen in those aspects of the Command Paper that appear to run counter to the notion of credentialism in graduate employability. As noted earlier, discourses of credentialism highlight the role of the ‘right’ subjects and institutions in communicating ‘powerful ideological messages about who does and does not belong’ (Edwards, 2014, p.328). Yet it is arguable that the deployment of a policy objective grounded in increasing the supply of suitably skilled and qualified graduates, with a particular focus on science and engineering, enables the questioning of embedded notions of where the most suitably skilled and qualified graduates tend to come from. This kind of challenge is set out in the following statement:

The Government has no wish to impose a uniform pattern on higher education; on the contrary, the Government would like to see even greater vitality and flexibility. The present structure of higher education is complex but each type of institution has a valuable contribution to make, provided that what each does is fit for the purpose which it serves. (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.5)

Notable is the appeal to fitness for purpose and the associated notion of a basic purpose for each type of institution. The Command Paper of 1985 identifies a higher education system that is in some ways more rigidly delimited than the present day; in 1983/84 institutions were divided along the lines of universities, polytechnics, Scottish central institutions, other maintained colleges, direct grant or voluntary institutions, and the Open University (Department for Education and Science, 1985). Each institution was held to address a different set of purposes. Universities, for example, were described as ‘the principal guardians of pure academic excellence and the main source of creative research’ (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.5), while polytechnics were involved ‘substantially in first degree work and

more selectively in postgraduate and research activities' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.37). This differentiation in activity and focus had given rise to a sense of hierarchy, whereby employers 'still treat polytechnic graduates as second best, although more polytechnic courses aim to prepare students for work' (Hughes, 1984b, p.2). Indeed, a profile in *The Times* of Middlesex Polytechnic and its director noted that the 'image of the second-class university – or something even worse – dies hard' (The Times, 1985, p.19). This somewhat paradoxical situation may have informed two dynamics visible in the Command Paper: an association between employability and lifelong learning, and a challenge to the attitudes and dispositions of employers with regards to their signals to students.

The association between employability and lifelong learning is established by appealing to the idea of rapid technological change:

In some subjects, such as engineering, the traditional, closely circumscribed, vocational degree was evolved at a time when initial education and training sufficed for a career. Where technologies are changing rapidly this is no longer true. (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.25)

By this logic, the constantly evolving state of the art requires continual retraining in the latest practices. Employability – if defined on the basis of sufficient human capital – is thus a time-limited and transitional notion; therefore, even a degree from the most prestigious university for engineering only bears limited value as a signal to who belongs and who does not. Again, the deployment of employability as human capital acts as a counter to credentialist discourses through the construction of employability as an essentially short-term notion that requires constant renewal. This point, and the apparent urgency of the need to increase the numbers of students graduating in science and engineering (Department for Education and Science, 1985), seems to highlight a tension between an imperative of policy and the ways in which employers and institutions engage with matters of workforce relevance. Yet it is notable that higher education institutions are not held entirely responsible for effecting a response.

4.4.3 Employers become targets of governance

It would be wrong to think of the Command Paper as merely an attempt to govern the choices of universities and students. Since the pursuit of an overt policy focus on the stock of human capital needed to respond to perceived economic difficulties, employers themselves become targets of a logic of governance. This is established through an assertion of what success in industry ought to look like:

One of the potentially surer routes to a successful business career (with all the capacity to contribute which that entails) for those with an enterprising and innovative attitude of mind ought to lie through competence in science, engineering, technology or mathematics. It is important that employers should recognise this themselves and through their actions convince able youngsters and their parents. (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.7)

The most obvious implication of this is that employers are also held to be responsible for the signals that they send to students and their parents. In this case, where science and engineering are perceived by government as being so vital to the economic wellbeing of the nation, a certain justification is presented for exerting conduct upon the conduct of employers, thus attempting to structure the likely range of options open to them (Foucault, 1982). Here a parallel can be observed with Foucault's proposed mechanism for the 'hysterization of women's bodies' (Foucault, 1978, p.104), one of what he calls the 'great strategic unities' (Foucault, 1978, p.104) of discourses of sex. Firstly, the employer is analysed in terms of the relevant object of discourse – in this case, the development of human capital of the workforce. The Command Paper holds employers to be agentive in influencing the attitudes and choices of students and their parents and are thus co-opted into a policy response to the pursuit of the 'right' kinds of human capital to promote economic performance.

Secondly, a perceived weakness in its present performance is identified. In this case, employers are held to be incentivising the 'wrong' sorts of educational choices. Thus the employer can be legitimately integrated into the sphere of higher education policy, just as Foucault (1978) proposes that the integration of the feminine body into the medical sphere occurs 'by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it' (Foucault, 1978, p.104).

Finally, the employer is 'placed in organic communication' (Foucault, 1978, p.104) with relevant dimensions of society – in this case, choices of courses of study at school and university, the health of the national economy, the stock of qualified workers and so forth. By this process, employers are not the ultimate clients of higher education policy, in the sense of benefiting from an increase in skilled and qualified workers, but are enmeshed in the knowledge-power relations surrounding the very notion of the human capital of graduates. Since employers' actions are implied to be an essential part of the web of relations and interactions, and are implied to have contributed to the overall underperformance of the national economy, then the structuring of the actions and choices of employers becomes integral to the enactment of policy.

4.4.4 Employability and societal value

It is also illustrative to reflect on what is barely visible, or even absent, from the Command Paper. As noted earlier, the deployment of a logic of economic responses to economic crisis has the potential to displace other discourses of graduate employability in particular and the value of higher education in general. In particular, the question of the values that higher education embodies receives comparatively little attention. For example, on the question of the responsibilities of higher education institutions, the Command Paper argues that:

All institutions, at all times, have a responsibility to ensure that their affairs are conducted as befits a liberal institution. In particular, they have a responsibility to protect freedom of speech within the law, even for those with widely unpopular views: this is essential, as part of a free society, for critical thought and the liberal education which it underpins. (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.5)

In this case, the deployment of the term ‘liberal’ seems to be associated with a certain sense of openness to ideas and a bold curiosity, or a ‘courageous intelligence’ (Dewey, 2001, p.328), is held to be a precondition of a free society. Thus, higher education institutions are held to be obliged to defend some notion of a liberal education. Yet the relatively low weight assigned to this responsibility in the Command Paper, in contrast to the emphasis placed on relevance of study and research to business, hints at a threat to two shibboleths (Glendinning, 2005) of the idea of the university: that it is governed by an idea of pure learning and an idea of pure inquiry. Such shibboleths serve to identify who or what belongs within the sphere of higher education or the kinds of policy initiatives that are regarded as beneficial or threatening – in other words, they allow policy interventions to be identified as friend or foe. Indeed, the Command Paper’s suggestion that the idea of research as an end in itself may become unaffordable without some kind of intervention (Department for Education and Science, 1985) could be read as a very direct threat to Glendinning’s shibboleths. Thus, another point of discursive conflict is identified, one that reaches beyond the question of choices and actions of participants in higher education and puts in question the very idea of a university itself. Nevertheless, the Command Paper’s invoking of a responsibility to the values of liberal education creates space for a distinct understanding of the graduate. Consider, for example, Dewey’s (2001) association of a vocationally-relevant education with the renewal and democratisation of both the economy and society:

For industrial life is now so dependent upon science and so intimately affects all forms of social intercourse, that there is an opportunity to utilize it for development of mind and character. Moreover, a right educational

use of it would react upon intelligence and interest so as to modify, in connection with legislation and administration, the socially obnoxious features of the present industrial and commercial order. (Dewey, 2001, p.329)

Dewey's argument, which emphasises the potential for education grounded in science to bring about fundamental social reform, can be contrasted with the logic of the Command Paper in suggesting that science and technology ought to offer '[o]ne of the potentially surer routes to a successful business career (with all the capacity to contribute which that entails)' (Department for Education and Science, 1985, p.7). Indeed, it is the scope of the 'capacity to contribute' that represents the key division between Dewey's vision and that of the Command Paper. Arguably, the Command Paper's focus on transforming the stock of human capital of the nation might effectively preclude – or render secondary – the kind of social transformation that Dewey envisages. Nevertheless, space is made for a discursive notion of the successful graduate that prioritises competence in science and engineering, possessed of a kind of curiosity and intellectual confidence that underpins not only the success of the economy but also the values of society.

4.4.5 Towards a politics of the truth of graduate employability

In summary, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s* is a policy text that has at its heart a very definite idea of what graduates can and should contribute to the economy. Framed in a context of economic crisis, it identifies as its key policy solution the promotion of study in science, engineering and technology subjects. In this respect it continues to play into one of the key discursive tensions identified through *University-Industry Relations*, namely the tension between classical and rationalist outlooks (e.g. Snow, 1998) on education. Like *University-Industry Relations*, the notion of economic decline and Britain's place in the world become key contextual factors making certain policy responses more likely than others. Yet despite these similarities, the Command Paper broadens the scope of the exercise of conduct upon conduct (Foucault, 1982) by bringing employers themselves within the scope of governance. This, combined with a decisive 'othering' of the perceived wider benefits of higher education, indicates a policy environment that offers an even tighter specification of the employable graduate – it is concerned not only to promote study in what employers might value, but attempts to govern what it is that employers, and hence society, *ought* to value.

The Command Paper thus sets the conditions favourable to a narrowing of the conception of the employable graduate. Yet taken alongside the expressed desire not to specify a general

pattern of higher education, the policy text represents not an attempt to compel or to control, but to produce a certain kind of ‘truth’ of the employable graduate. Foucault argues that:

truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p.131)

Here Foucault prompts us to give attention to the consequences of a narrowing of the idea of the employable graduate. In invoking the notion of economic crisis, of a dynamic of competition between national economies, and of the need for higher education to demonstrate value for money, the Command Paper attempts to create such a general politics of truth with regards to graduate employability. The employable graduate is understood to be one who can contribute to the enhancement of Britain's global economic competitiveness through the application of science and technology; employable graduates are those with the ‘right’ human capital that may be converted into economic outcomes. It is on these grounds that the actions of universities, students and employers can be judged to be ‘in the true’ (Foucault, 1981, p.61). Yet the Command Paper, in attempting to prioritise the economic contributions of higher education while still defending its liberal principles, expresses a major contradiction in its conception of higher education’s place in society. It is perhaps the difficulty in resolving such a tension in practical terms that explains its failure to precipitate tangible impacts upon policymaking. Yet it sets the terms of debate over higher education that reflect the character of the contemporary political environment.

4.5 The Learning Age

The Learning Age (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) represented a key set of education policy proposals of Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ government of 1997-2001. Marples (2000) characterises it as ‘inspirational in its recognition that a culture of learning is more than a means to enhance employment prospects’ (p.130); he argues that it represents a rejection of crude utilitarianism and instead emphasises learning as a route to empowerment, personal autonomy and fulfilment. It represents perhaps the first point at which employability emerges as an explicit object of policy, described by David Blunkett, then secretary of state for

education, as individuals' 'passport to the future. It is likely that most people won't have one job for life – but several. That means learning new skills to survive, ensuring that if you lose your job you are more likely to be able to get another' (Blunkett, 1998, p.31). Employability is thus cast as a practical necessity of life in a changing world, a means of reinforcing personal agency and individual responsibility.

Yet reading *The Learning Age* through the lenses of five types of discourse of employability offers a more nuanced perspective on Marples's characterisation. Of 67 relevant extracts taken from *The Learning Age*, around half appear to offer support for employability in terms of human capital; almost 20 per cent speak to notions of self-perception, while 16 per cent cast employability in terms of gaining employment. In contrast to other policy documents addressed in this project, a strong anti-credentialist thread does not on the face of it appear to be present. On the surface, this points to a highly individualised notion of graduate employability underpinned by a view of education as a commodity to be deliberately and proactively sought out. The apparent prominence of extracts speaking to the idea of self-perception suggests, as will be argued, the prominence of personal responsibility in the policy discourse of employability. This will be read in the context of rapid change, both in terms of the economic and the social and political conditions of the United Kingdom at that time. Employability emerges for the first time as a deliberate object of policy that is deployed with a view to the reform of societal structures and a challenge to personal attitudes. In this sense, employability can be located within the political logic of the *Third Way*.

An analysis of the codes attributable to these extracts illustrates the presence of a range of ideas. From this analysis, the notion of responsibility emerges as a recurrent theme. A distinction can be made between the responsibility of individuals towards their own learning (14 occurrences) and a collective responsibility towards the learning of the population more generally. The notion of change appears in seven extracts, while the notion of learning being for the many and not the few appears in four. Note, however, that these represent headline codes; other thematic codes may be read in conjunction with these – for example, three references to 'revolution' within the extracts may be read as imbuing change with a sense of urgency and pervasive upheaval. Connections such as these will be explored through the analysis.

4.5.1 Employability and the *Third Way*

The Learning Age can be argued to be an example of the political logic of the *Third Way*. Bonoli and Powell (2004) characterise the *Third Way* as not merely a synthesis of left and right,

but ‘a new politics that transcends the old categories, making them redundant’ (Bonoli and Powell, 2004, p.49). It is therefore positioned as a distinctive logic in its own right and not merely a pragmatic response to the tensions between two established paradigms. Themes such as fairness, justice, enterprise and economic dynamism are claimed to be pursued via the logic of the Third Way, hence it is crucial to identify the relationship between such themes and the overall discourse of the Third Way (Bonoli and Powell, 2004). The Third Way as an analytical category can thus be engaged with as a political logic that is characterised by a distinctive intersection of social and economic themes.

However, the characterisation of New Labour as grounded in a Third Way politics that is distinct from neoliberalism has been challenged. Hesmondhalgh *et al.* (2015) note three distinct views of New Labour among political scientists: as an episode of revisionism that is characteristic of social democratic politics, in the form of a deliberate decoupling from the ideology of the Labour Party’s past; as a means of accommodating neoliberalism; and as a hybrid of social democratic and neoliberal politics. Similarly, Lall (2012) chooses to ground her analysis of New Labour’s policy logic clearly in neoliberalism, while Tambi (2012) describes the Third Way as a rhetoric underpinned by neoliberal philosophies. There is therefore some doubt as to whether the Third Way is separable from neoliberalism. Mifsud (2016) identifies decentralisation, autonomy and accountability as being characteristic of what she terms a decentralised neoliberalism, leading to a ‘paradox of “growing” autonomy and “constraining” government requirements’ (Mifsud, 2016, p.451). Thus, if employability is to be conceived of as an objective of government policy to be pursued through decentralised means, one might reasonably ask whether graduate employability itself is to be conceived of as part of the apparatus of the neoliberal governance of higher education. This in itself is not new. However, one might take the implications further; we might question whether the discursive construction of the employable graduate as an object of neoliberal governance puts into question arguments that approaches to learning underpinned by social constructivism, decentralisation or student voice lead to greater autonomy and agency (e.g. Soini *et al.*, 2015; Arthurs and Kreager, 2017; Laux, 2017). Employability thus emerges in tension between economic utility and individual agency.

Nevertheless, three key themes are argued to underpin New Labour policies (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015). The first is an economic philosophy that rejects state ownership, embraces markets, yet does not ‘represent a radical revision of social democracy’ (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015, p.26). The second is a downplaying of concerns with equality of wealth, instead emphasising the combatting of social exclusion and exclusion from the labour market (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*,

2015); this is characterised as deriving from the logic of neo-liberalism and the parlance of the tabloid press (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015). The third is a form of governance characterised by greater monitoring and audit of the public sector, their acceptance of which represents a continuation of the approach taken by preceding Conservative administrations (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015, p.27). Given the challenges made to the distinctiveness of the Third Way, then it would be remiss to claim that *The Learning Age* represents an example of Third Way logic that is generalizable beyond its particular circumstances. Nevertheless, reading policy through the lens of the New Labour Third Way can point to a distinctive, particular intersection of ideas that give rise to a distinctive understanding of graduate employability. It is in this spirit that the term Third Way is used in this analysis.

4.5.2 A new age

The kinds of themes identified by both Bonoli and Powell (2004) and Hesmondhalgh *et al* (2015) are evident in the extracts from *The Learning Age* that speak to the notion of graduate employability. Firstly, the significance of education to the nation's economic performance is underlined by the argument that:

To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force. To cope with rapid change and the challenge of the information and communication age, we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7)

Here, education is connected not just with growth but with *stable and sustainable growth*. There is thus the invoking of a sense of fundamental importance to a thriving economy. This is projected as an argument for investment in human capital to both a high standard and a suitable degree of flexibility (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7). Such an argument is predicated on an assumption of continued and significant change, in this case prompted by the growing importance of information technology. Indeed, the notion of rapid and fundamental change appears to be a critical means of legitimating the logic of *The Learning Age*:

Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.9)

Thus, the eponymous ‘learning age’ is presented as just that – not merely a conscious shift in policy, but an assertion that the nation is entering a new, distinct phase of its history. Rapid change is juxtaposed with the idea of opportunities for a better life; hence, the threat of disruption is combined with the hope of something more, while education is located as central to realising that hope. However, note the use of the term ‘we have no choice’. This may be interpreted as a simple rhetorical style aimed at giving the policy text more of a forceful impact. To say ‘we have no choice’ may elicit a certain emotional response in the reader – a sense of urgency, perhaps a sense of fear, but certainly a sense of inevitability. It perhaps plays on a latent desire for change as evidenced by the Labour Party’s landslide general election victory in May 1997, an event which brought eighteen years of Conservative government to an end. On this reading, *The Learning Age* might be characterised as a call to action both to pre-empt the loss of old familiarities and to take advantage of the emerging opportunities of the information age.

Yet to say ‘we have no choice’ also points to a deductive logic that justifies the location of education as central to this response. Our societal conditions are changing, it is argued. Our existence is inseparable from our social conditions. Therefore, we must inevitably change *with* our social conditions. Foucault (1982) describes a form of power ‘which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him’ (p.781). This law of truth is the means by which we can recognise ourselves – know ourselves, even – and how others can know us. By implication, who we are (or, rather, who we can *truthfully say* that we are) is a consequence of power relations. Our identities do not exist prior to or outside of power; thus, who we are cannot be separable from the social conditions within which we move. On this logic, to say that education is ‘the key to success’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.9) is to position education as having formative qualities. Instead, education is posited as existing in a discursive system that also encompasses individuals and the wider society. In *The Learning Age*, all three are inseparable from each other. *The Learning Age* is therefore not simply a technical response that proposes practical responses to contemporary challenges. Rather, it is a project of (re)shaping who we are as individuals, within which education for employability is posited as an essential component.

4.5.3 An individualising discourse of employability

The practical consequences of *The Learning Age* undoubtedly fall to individuals, in contrast to *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s* which identified the higher education

system as a whole as its target. Examples of this individual focus include ‘a national system of individual learning accounts [that] will lead the way for people to take control of this investment in their own future’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.27) and an insistence that: ‘The Learning Age will not just be about the ‘top’ of organisations spreading the message. It will be as much about encouraging demand for learning from the bottom up’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.35). There is thus a strong element of personal responsibility for one’s own transformation, predicated on personal agency. Ball (1999) argues that the Labour Party’s policies for education and the economy were characterised by three principles: choice and competition; autonomy and performativity; and centralisation and prescription. The emphasis on individual responsibility for learning underpins the drive towards choice and competition; individual agency over one’s own learning is essential to the stimulation of competitive provision of learning opportunities. Likewise, the ability of individuals to fulfil their responsibility towards learning relies on the ability to act autonomously and also to demonstrate the extent to which one has fulfilled one’s responsibility; *The Learning Age* thus rests on the performance of one’s educated-ness. This points to the possibility of graduate employability being grounded in a sense of responsibility for oneself to both engage with learning and to demonstrate the outcomes of this engagement.

However, Ball’s identification of centralisation and prescription as organising principles of Labour Party policy point to ‘a set of pedagogical strategies the effects of which are actually antithetical to the needs of a “high skills” economy’ (Ball, 1999, p.196). This arises out of a tension between the necessity of autonomy and the demands of performativity, which is characterised by a technocratic or input-output approach to education. The necessity of accounting for oneself favours the acquisition of skills and dispositions that represents ‘an aversion to learning – having no conception at all of the processes and meaning of learning’ (Ball, 1999, p.201). What is lost through such an emphasis on accountability is any sense in which education might be valued for anything other than outcomes; this manifests itself a kind of atrophied accountability devoid of any moral content. A potential consequence of this is that learners acquire a trained incapacity to think critically and openly (Ball, 1999). Such an outcome would be antithetical to an economic environment that prizes higher-order thinking and creativity. Indeed, such an approach would reduce education to the deliberate acquisition of what Kant (2015) calls tutelage, an inability to exercise one’s own judgement and understanding without direction from others. To be separated from the process and meaning of learning is arguably to be maintained in a state of immaturity, dependent on others to

determine what is worth learning, what is worth being able to do. One's role is reduced to the mere demonstration of the 'right' sorts of behaviours; the pursuit of the new and innovative is left to privileged others.

The technocratic approach to education policy described by Ball (1999) is embodied in the assumption that: 'In the Learning Age, equipping people with the right knowledge and skills will be crucial to maintaining high and sustainable levels of employment and price stability. It will also improve productivity' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.33). Here we see a clear example of input-output thinking; put the right skills and knowledge into people, and the right economic outcomes will emerge. This is exemplified by the claim that: 'Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7). Likewise, a connection is also made between long-term unemployment and a lack of foundational skills, and hence 'education and training are central to all four options in the New Deal for young people aged 18 to 24' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.40). Acquisition of skills and knowledge is thus posited as central to addressing the problem of youth unemployment. The New Deal – through which jobless young people were compelled to accept offers of training, subsidised work placements or voluntary work – therefore becomes emblematic of a new age that 'we have no choice' but to face.

A consequence of this technocratic approach is both to insist on the importance of autonomy and agency in directing one's learning, but also to direct the blame (for want of a better word) for unemployment towards individuals. It thus points to an individualised discourse of employability where acquiring the right sorts of human capital, the currency of which is knowledge and skills, is bound up with our sense of perception of ourselves. Dean (2004) points to the significance of this in Third Way political thought:

The metaphor '*human capital*' accords recognition to the productive potential of every citizen and to the ideals of self-development and individual empowerment. In so doing the concept calls attention to the role of the citizen as an economic rather than a social actor and as a competitive individual rather than as a cooperative social being. (Dean, 2004, p.191)

Employability, then, can be characterised in terms of both the ability of individuals to increase their productive capacity and to see themselves as primarily economic beings, where the focus of their autonomy is making choices that maximise their potentiality to be productive. Concepts such as social cohesion, equality of opportunity and social inclusion thus become secondary considerations (Dean, 2004).

4.5.4 Employability, responsibility and social justice

However, it is not sufficient to read *The Learning Age* as offering only an individualising discourse of employability. To do so would be to ignore the insistence on ‘sharing responsibility with employers, employees and the community’ (Department for Education, 1998, p.13) for fostering a culture of learning. White (2004) argues that, in the logic of the Third Way, responsibility ‘is not equivalent to the classical liberal notion of self-reliance, the idea that the individual should stand on his or her own feet without any assistance from government (White, 2004, p.28). Rather, advocates of the Third Way do make some commitment to opportunity (White, 2004) and its provision through the action of the state. Thus, there is the responsibility not just for individuals to seek out and take opportunities to improve their productive capacity, but also a responsibility for wider society to make such opportunities available. This might be characterised as comprising of a decent floor of opportunity for all as opposed to strict equality of opportunity (White, 2004); in this sense it is a weak commitment to social justice (Ball, 1999).

In *The Learning Age*, this ‘weak’ commitment to social justice is necessitated by an insistence on the plurality of motivations for learning: ‘People learn for a variety of reasons; it could be to change career, to increase earning power, to update skills, or simply for the joy of learning itself’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.17). To acknowledge a multiplicity of motivations is to imply a multiplicity of desirable outcomes. In such a case, any attempt at specifying a universal set of opportunities is likely to be so general as to be inadequate as a guide to policymaking or so restrictive as to preclude the possibility of a plurality of aims. Instead, commitments to social justice in *The Learning Age* are presented in ‘big picture’ terms. For example, opportunities to learn are positioned as response to the decline of traditional industries: ‘In communities affected by rapid economic change and industrial restructuring, learning builds local capacity to respond to this change’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.11). There is also the general insistence that: ‘All of our proposals are aimed at improving the skills, creativity and employability of our people, young and old, and at promoting a fair society in which all have a stake’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.54). Given the diversity of circumstances in which different communities find themselves, it seems unlikely that a detailed specification of what ‘having a stake’ means for all could be reasonably offered. Hence, the commitment to social justice given here can only be ‘weak’ or general.

One of the consequences of a generalised commitment to social justice for the notion of employability is that it is insufficient to conceptualise employability purely in terms of discipline. On the face of it, this may seem counter-intuitive. For example, Dean (2004) characterises the emergence of the human capital-suffused Third Way approach to social policy as essentially managerial. Such approaches foster behavioural change through an ever-growing knowledge of individuals. Foucault writes:

The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible (Foucault, 1995, pp.170-171)

Thus, it might be reasonable to infer that employability as conceptualised in *The Learning Age* is an essentially disciplinary concept. Ball (1999) reinforces this by arguing that 'Labour is attempting to realise economic policy in education by creating a model of schooling which is essentially Fordist and micro-managed' (p.203). This allusion to the industrial production line emphasises regularity, predictability, quality control and efficiency, driving at a maximised return on investment. Such an approach is underpinned by 'highly prescriptive systems of accountability – performance indicators, inspections, league tables, achievement targets' (Ball, 1999, p.203). It is therefore reasonable to suggest that employability as a deliberative policy outcome sits within this managerial, production line paradigm, one which relies on ever-growing and ever-finer knowledge of individuals, their actions and their outcomes.

Contemporary with *The Learning Age*, such a production line mindset underpins a popular representation of employability as the pursuit of a good job. This is framed particularly in the impending introduction of tuition fees for university education:

Next year students will need to pay – to a greater or lesser degree – for higher education. They will thus be looking at value for money, choosing universities they think will best prepare them for a career, i.e., get them a job (MacDonald, 1998, p.2[S])

Here, employability is the acquisition of the human capital necessary to mark oneself out as employable as evidenced by success (or otherwise) in the labour market. Framed in this fashion, universities are perceived as suppliers of educational goods that confer employability upon students, whereby concepts such as 'value for money' reinforce the managerial paradigm among students and their families as well as among policymakers.

Yet, as Ball (1999) suggests, such an approach stands in contrast to the rhetoric of the policy at the time. This discrepancy is significant – not because it invalidates or falsifies the policy text, but because it points to the intersection and interaction of two distinct logics: an individualising perspective grounded in disciplinary techniques, and a bigger-picture approach that has the population as its target. Employability, rather than being merely a technology of the control of individuals, emerges in the space where these two logics meet. Indeed, the insistence that ‘learning contributes to social cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging, responsibility and identity’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.11) points clearly to the intersection of the individual and the collective, making room for attention to both personal performativity and joint responsibility. Consider, for example, the proposal for individual learning accounts made in *The Learning Age*:

Learning accounts will be built on two key principles: first, that individuals are best placed to choose what and how they want to learn; and second, that responsibility for investing in learning is shared. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.27)

By emphasising the benefits of learning to both individuals and employers, this proposal indicates the centrality of partnership within the vision of *The Learning Age*. Lewis (2004) argues that the Labour Party valued partnership ‘as a means of addressing the problem of governance’ (p.221) by promoting locally driven and bottom-up policy implementation. On this logic, learning accounts can be read as an initiative that promotes collective and local solutions to fostering a culture of learning. This intersection of the individual and the collective attempts to legitimise a logic of governance that expects both personal and collective responsibility within the wider population. This opens the way for central government to claim a retreat from top-down prescription and provision while still exercising the techniques of governance over choices and behaviours. This is analogous to the trend in the governance of schools identified by Wilkins (2015) which is characterised by both the decentralisation and devolution of powers to the level of the school and the situation of schools within a culture of testing and external accountability. The apparent tension between a retreat from direct management and a desire for ever greater assurance of good outcomes is resolved through the application of two technologies of governance:

the inspection and professionalization of [school governing bodies] constitute policy technologies and disciplinary strategies aimed at inscribing difference (differences between effective and ineffective GBs, for example) together with making processes and subjects knowable and visible in order that they may be managed. (Wilkins, 2015, p.189)

Such technologies are underpinned by discourses of the ‘good’ school, of responsibility, of accountability, and of rigour. Arguably, the intersection of personal and collective responsibility is an example of just such a simultaneous retreat-and-advance. In the case of *The Learning Age*, this simultaneous application of decentralisation and accountability is reinforced by a suggestion of the centrality of partnership to the country’s prospects, as exemplified by Dearing writing in *The Times*:

From universities, colleges and employers, I look for a commitment to create the most effective system of education and training in the world, and a joint commitment by us all to truly create a learning society. Britain’s future depends on it. (Dearing, 1998, p.43)

The importance of the notion of partnership lifts the scope of employability beyond the choices and preferences of individuals and elevates it towards the prospects for the population as a whole. It is hence more than an exercise of disciplinary power focused on the changing of behaviour or the production of docile bodies (Foucault, 1995). What is needed is a conceptualisation of power that focuses on the collective rather than the individual. Such an approach would provide a lens through which the collective or bigger-picture dimensions of *The Learning Age* might be read.

The notion of employability, in the context of *The Learning Age*, would appear to be a prime candidate to be analysed as a phenomenon operating at the mass level. Firstly, the language deployed throughout the policy text is clearly grounded in collective notions such as society, community and the economy. Learning, for example, is conceived of as ‘securing our economic future’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7) through which the ‘most productive investment will be linked to the best educated and best trained workforces’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.10). A headline goal is the transformation of ‘our culture’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.17), while ‘[all] of our proposals are aimed at improving the skills, creativity and employability of our people, young and old, and at promoting a fair society in which we all have a stake’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.54). We are therefore clearly offered a policy vision that is focused on mass transformation, where the anticipated outcomes aggregate and amount to a coherent whole. The ambition is scaled to the level of national economic performance, where the minutiae of individuals’ lived experiences matter insofar as they contribute to the bigger picture.

Furthermore, where individuals' actions, choices, responsibilities and so forth are addressed, this is generally with regards to their relation to some form of collective. Take, for example, the following passage:

Individuals, employers and the state should all contribute, directly or through earnings foregone, to the cost of learning over a lifetime because all gain from this investment. Individuals enhance their employability and skills, businesses improve their productivity, and society enjoys wider social and economic benefits. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.25)

This passage offers justification for the sharing of investment in education and training grounded in the collective benefits experienced simultaneously by individuals, businesses and wider society. The multiple benefits are expressed here as inseparable, and this inseparability justifies the policy impetus towards investment. Relating this to graduate employability, a requirement on students to invest in their own education is justified on the grounds of shared benefits, whereby the benefits to the collective are part of that consideration. Graduate employability may thus be read as a shared and deliberative notion. It is not simply a package of skills, knowledge and qualities that students may obtain to be traded in the labour market. Rather, this intersection of personal and collective benefits is a distinctive feature. When this interrelation is embedded at the level of national policy, it is arguable that the driving imperative is the need of the collective and not the need of the individual. This is reinforced by the government's insistence that: 'To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well-educated, well equipped and adaptable labour force' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7). Thus, while the policy text refers to the benefits and choices of individuals, these are relevant based on how they aggregate and contribute to the collective; the specific qualities of the individual are typically addressed only in abstract and general ways. Therefore, we are offered a reading of policy towards employability that has the regulation of a collection of individuals as its target, not the disciplinary consequences for this or that individual. Employability, then, becomes a political problem of the population as a whole (Foucault, 2004).

Despite this primacy of the governance of a collective in *The Learning Age*, the individual is still more prominent than in, say, *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s*. It is notable that the text of *The Learning Age* expresses a tension between the individual and the education system. The idea of personal responsibility is expressed clearly:

To realise our ambition, we must all develop and sustain a regard for learning at whatever age. For many people this will mean overcoming past

experiences which have put them off learning. For others it will mean taking the opportunity, perhaps for the first time, to recognise their own talent, to discover new ways of learning and to see new opportunities opening up (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7)

Here a diversity of individual responses to the headline policy proposals are acknowledged, as is the necessity of individuals actively engaging in their own learning. Thus, within the concept of *The Learning Age* individuals are conceived of as agentive, not passive recipients of a set of policy interventions. This necessitates individuals regarding themselves as prime actors in their own employability, rejecting the possibility of conceiving of themselves as victims of a system. Note that, in doing so, there is a tacit acknowledgement that 'many' individuals have experienced unsuccessful or downright damaging relations with education. We thus have a tension between an ethic of self-reliance and an imperative towards systemic reform, albeit one where individuals are not expected to merely wait for reform to occur. This relates to Dean's (2004) insistence on the centrality of the notion of human capital to Third Way political thought: individuals are possessed of a potentiality that needs to be realised, and it is in the realisation of this potentiality (such as the recognition of latent talent in the example above) that the relation between the individual and the education system can be located. Again, though, this represents the consideration of individuals in a collective sense, where success is represented by multiple individuals exercising their agency. It is therefore not the nature of individual responsibility or the specificities of the discharging of that responsibility that is at issue from a policy perspective. Rather, what is at stake is the creation of conditions within which as many individuals as possible can engage in responsibility for growing their own human capital – it is the size of the outcome, not its fine detail, that is of concern. This exemplifies what Foucault calls 'double conditioning' (Foucault, 1978, p.99), whereby the exercise of power at a local or micro level (i.e. in the context of an individual learner) is to be regarded as part of an overall or macro strategy of power (i.e. encompassing the population as a whole); employability as a strategy in *The Learning Age* is thus characterised by 'the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work' (Foucault, 1979, p.100).

4.5.5 Employability as an outcome measure

The necessity of the interrelation of the individual and collective points to graduate employability offering grounds for evaluating the value offered by higher education. The notion of value for money appears in the discourses around higher education in the early days

of the Blair government. For example, a commission investigating the future of the University of Oxford concluded that:

Oxford dons are to be told they must improve their teaching skills to show that the university provides value for money at a time when its funding is under intense scrutiny. Greater attention will also be placed on teaching ability when recruiting academics (Charter, 1998, p.12)

The report points to a concern to demonstrate a return on investment, alongside a sense that the university is being subject to greater scrutiny over its activities. This is connected with what Ball (1999) refers to as the 'managerialisation and commercialisation of education' (p.196), which he argues to be one of New Labour's key organising principles of education policy. Such an emphasis on performativity points to the necessity of a basis for evaluating performance, and it is in this space that graduate employability emerges. This is of particular relevance when the UK's economic performance is considered in a global context, as is the case in *The Learning Age*:

In the global marketplace the UK cannot compete on the basis of low wages and low added value. Rather, we will need to provide better quality goods and services, high added value and productivity, and be able to use technology to the full. This will require investment in the skills and abilities of management and workforce alike; and also the creation of new enthusiasm for learning (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.18)

By identifying clearly the necessity of the UK economy being internationally competitive, the policy text is able to make the outcomes of investment in education and training part of the overall sense of value for money. With the centrality of such logic within the governance of the higher education sector, even institutions as apparently prestigious and successful as the University of Oxford are caught within its gaze. We therefore have the grounds for graduate employability to emerge as a key measure of the value offered by higher education.

A consequence of employability being conceived of as an output measure is the necessity of measuring that output. This requires that employability is viewed as a distinct thing that students are able to acquire through their higher education. This brings us back to what Dean (2004) describes as the emergence of the managerial human capital approach in Third Way thinking. What is visible through *The Learning Age* is that graduate employability becomes itself a distinctive form of human capital. For example:

Individuals should invest in their own learning to improve their employability, professional competence, and earning potential or for leisure. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.26)

Here, employability is identified as distinct from such ideas as professional competence and earning potential. It is therefore not simply reducible to skills or labour market positioning. Indeed, the government justifies its expectation that individuals invest in their own education because individuals ‘enhance their employability *and* skills’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.25; emphasis added). Bush (1998), writing in *The Times*, expresses the distinctiveness of employability as follows:

Employability is the buzz word which, more than any other, sums up what Mr Blunkett is trying to do: to create an environment in which as many people as possible are equipped to make their own livings and are skilled to seize the opportunities of a fast-changing world economy (Bush, 1998, p.29)

On this interpretation, employability is the intersection between the possession of knowledge and skills, the ability to take and occupy positions in a competitive environment, the ability to meet one’s own basic needs, and the capacity to be autonomous or agentive with respect to one’s own career prospects. Through this we are offered the possibility of higher education institutions being evaluated on their success at ‘producing’ autonomous, skilled and knowledgeable graduates that possess the habit of lifelong learning. Thus, when the government calls for universities to become ‘beacons of learning’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.50), part of this involves ‘ensuring high standards so as to enhance the employability of graduates’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.50). We therefore see a particular vision of the ideal graduate emerging, for whom employability is a key form of capital of which skills, knowledge and agency are its currency. *The Learning Age* clearly connects the pursuit of such an ideal with the notion of standards in higher education, thus paving the way for employability to enter the lexicon of the governance of higher education.

4.5.6 Employability as perfection of the self

New Labour’s vision of the workforce is one in which individuals are empowered, in partnership with employers and education institutions, to be successful in a ‘new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.9). This is characterised by the notion of shared responsibility; individuals are not merely passive ‘things’ upon which education acts as a kind of treatment, but are expected to engage in their own development. This is couched as both an economic necessity and an inescapable responsibility. *The Learning Age* does, of course, represent a set of interventions that have the collective as their target,

and thus is not simply focused on the disciplinary consequences for individuals. Yet throughout there is a clear implication that the fostering of employability is a matter of individuals taking ever greater care of their own potentialities and prospects. Here we might turn to Foucault's (1988b) notion of technologies of the self as a kind of truth game that:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality
(Foucault, 1988b, p.18)

These are truth games in the sense that they imply particular configurations of ideas such as happiness, wisdom and perfection. This is not to imply the pursuit of some kind of universal form of the good, but of forms plural grounded in context or the particularities of the time. Foucault (1988b), for example, locates the displacement of self-care by self-knowledge as a prime rule for personal conduct in two factors. Firstly, Foucault identifies the emergence of a Christian morality through which self-renunciation was regarded as the path to salvation; self-knowledge became a prerequisite to self-renunciation. Secondly, Foucault identifies a trend within theoretical philosophy of the ever-increasing importance of the thinking subject as the basis for theories of knowledge. Both of these examples point to the pursuit of ends such as happiness, perfection, wisdom and so forth, albeit in different senses. Thus, in considering graduate employability as a technology of the self, we must consider how particular configurations of the pursuit of perfection (for want of a better phrase) emerge. In *The Learning Age*, three such ideas emerge. Firstly there is the notion of personal and collective prosperity, which speaks to the idea of personal responsibility:

Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7)

Prosperity – in the sense of economic wellbeing – sits at the core of the New Labour vision. Individuals' investment in themselves is key to the pursuit of prosperity, hence learning becomes central to this particular technology of the self. Note also the juxtaposition of personal and collective prosperity. Arguably, this means that individuals do not just possess a responsibility to pursue their own prosperity for their own benefit, but also to recognise that in doing so they are contributing to the prosperity of others. Thus, to neglect one's own situation is to impede the prosperity of others.

Secondly, there is the imperative of continuous change:

Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. At the same time, new opportunities are opening up as we see the potential of new technologies to change our lives for the better (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7)

Change is posited as a consistent feature of the times, thus the pursuit of perfection is inescapably connected with responses to change. This is quite clearly not the capacity to resist change, to fend off the future and maintain a steady course. In this sense, the act of self-transformation becomes a good in itself. This makes the pursuit of some constant, universal vision of the good as essentially impossible; we are instead to constantly seek opportunities to change. Employability as a technology of the self is thus the constant pursuit of change. It is significant that the policy text identifies the transformative potential of technology; the late 1990s saw the rise of what was called the dot com bubble, where the transformative potential of technology – the internet in particular – pervaded the discourse of business and education. Hoare (1998), for example, argues that the efficacy of the application of technology could become a distinguishing factor between business schools.

Thirdly, there is the idea of social cohesion. Pursuing one's employability is not merely a case of maintaining one's prosperity. Nor is collective prosperity merely the sum total of individuals' prosperity. Employability as a technology of the self is to be part of a coherent whole, not just a loose association of autonomous individuals:

Our vision of the Learning Age is about more than employment. The development of a culture of learning will help to build a united society, assist in the creation of personal independence, and encourage our creativity and innovation. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.7)

In this case, personal independence is associated with the idea of a united society. Independence is thus not the same as separateness; one's independence is clearly implied to be cast in the context of an overall vision for society. This may be read as embodying the idea of shared responsibility for personal wellbeing. The pursuit of employability therefore becomes a means of escaping from dependence on state welfare provision; thus the policy text argues that learning 'lies at the heart of the Government's welfare reform programme' (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p.11). Dean (2004) argues that such an association between work and welfare is 'the pivotal element of Third Way thinking' (p.190), and that a key assumption is that inequality is a limiting factor of social cohesion.

Employability as a technology of the self as the embracing of self-transformation is thus posited as opening up possibilities for reducing inequality. In this way it is part of the Third Way's attempt to reconcile the discourses of the left and the right (Bonoli and Powell, 2004).

In summary, *The Learning Age* represents a distinctive break with previous ways of conceptualising graduate employability. Firstly, and most obviously, the term *employability* itself becomes part of the policy discourse. This is significant in that, in contrast to the policy texts analysed thus far, employability is posed as a deliberate policy object. When analysing the conditions through which this policy object is formed, we see a distinctive logic that may be characterised as the political logic of the Third Way, which emphasises the juxtaposition of necessity and responsibility. It is this juxtaposition that offers a distinctive reading: employability is posed as a necessity in terms of individuals being able to access economic opportunity, to not be excluded from the prosperity of society and to escape from welfare dependence. Thus, fostering employability is framed as a question of social justice. Crucially, responsibility for the fostering of employability is to be shared between individuals, higher education institutions, employers, and the state. This leads to three key conclusions with regards to graduate employability: firstly, it is a concept rooted in economic wellbeing, hence may be regarded as an individualistic concept; secondly, it is associated with a transcendence of social position; thirdly, it poses employability as a problem of the population as a whole, notably from the perspective of social cohesion. The intermingling of these three dimensions represents the distinctiveness of the notion of employability posed in *The Learning Age*, yet taken together it offers the conditions for the emergence of a more individualistic, technocratic notion of graduate employability – one which subsequently emerges after the New Labour period.

4.6 Success as a knowledge economy

Success as a Knowledge Economy (hereafter 'the White Paper'), published in May 2016, sets out the UK government's proposals 'to boost competition and choice in higher education, and strengthen the ways in which the sector is regulated and research is funded' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.5). The White Paper addresses three core themes: competition within the higher education sector through measures such as enabling new providers – so-called *challenger institutions* (Widdowson, 2016) - to enter the sector; enhancing student choice through transparency of information and a focus on standards of teaching, with a particular emphasis on the Teaching Excellence Framework; and regulatory reform, including the creation of a new regulatory body, the Office for Students. Reform is

necessary, argues the then universities minister Jo Johnson MP, to 'ensure that the system is... fulfilling its potential and delivering good value for students, for employers and for the taxpayers who underwrite it' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.5).

Contemporary reactions to the White Paper reflected these core themes. Commentary from Universities UK, a representative body for UK higher education institutions, notes an increased emphasis placed on market reform in the White Paper and suggests a sense of playing down the successes of existing providers (Hale, 2016). Similarly, McGettigan (2016) suggests that the White Paper's emphasis on facilitating new providers 'seems rather to express an astonishing level of resentment against the history and autonomy of the established sector' (n.p.). The National Union of Students drew attention to the proposed linking of tuition fee levels to teaching standards through the Teaching Excellence Framework (National Union of Students, 2016). Spicer (2016) argues that the notion of the knowledge economy (expressed as growth in the number of jobs that require degree-level qualifications), while an appealing in itself, is not reflected in the realities of the labour market. Similarly, Wolf (2016) suggests that government policies towards higher education are underpinned by a belief in the notion of the graduate premium in terms of salary and career prospects, thus encouraging a drive towards full-time university study. While this is not a comprehensive summary of reactions within and around the higher education sector, such reactions do speak to the significance of the White Paper as an intersection of knowledge and power.

This section will address the conditions created through the White Paper for the emergence of a particular configuration of the idea of graduate employability. It proposes that four key trends emerge from the discourse: an assumption of a graduate premium; a presumption in favour of a consumerist perspective on higher education; the necessity of accountability to students, taxpayers and employers; and the centrality of graduate employment as a measure of employability. It argues that an emphasis on accountability, through measures such as the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Office for Students, disconnects employability from personal agency and the responsibility of students for themselves. Such an emphasis on student satisfaction as a key component of excellence, through an embedding of a consumerist perspective, also serves to distance employability from meaningful content. As a result of reducing higher education to a transaction, students' self-perception and graduate identity become secondary to a consideration of what students believe they have received from higher education. Thus, the notion of gradueness as a distinctive quality disappears in favour of employability conceived of as a largely statistical output measure.

Thirty seven extracts pertaining to graduate employability were identified in the White Paper. These were categorised according to the discourse of graduate employability that they appear to facilitate or mitigate. Associating each extract with one of the five types of discourse suggests a significant focus on employability in terms of human capital within the White Paper. This is perhaps unsurprising given that this has emerged as the most common type of discourse present in all of the policy documents interrogated so far. What is notable is that employability as gaining employment appears to be the second most common type of discourse visible within the text. As will be argued, this apparent juxtaposition of human capital and gaining employment can be read in terms of the policy significance of the so-called graduate premium, an embedding of consumerism, and the subsequent rise of employability as a statistical and technocratic measurement in the context of the regulation and government of higher education institutions.

An examination of thematic codes present in the extracts supports this through frequent references to ideas such as excellence, return on investment, economic performance, choice and competition. This is visible notably through the intersection of excellence with accountability, distinctions between institutions and the notion that higher education can be evaluated on the basis of the returns it generates for graduates. When read alongside an emphasis on economic performance and responsiveness to employers' skills needs, we might suggest an embedded notion that university graduates and the economy might benefit from a premium as a result of study in higher education. Two further implications also emerge: the notion that study at some institutions offer a greater premium than others, and thus prospective students ought to be enabled to distinguish these 'better' institutions from others; and that progression to high-skilled, high-salary employment becomes the key indicator of the employability of institutions' graduates. Paradoxically, the effect of the intersection of such ideas is to shift the focus away from the skills, knowledge and personal qualities of individual graduates towards the 'standards' and performance of institutions. Thus, graduate employability is cast as an idea that is less a property of an individual graduate but a function of a given institution.

4.6.1 Normalisation via employability

Fundamental to interpreting the intentions behind the reforms advanced in the White Paper are the concepts of normalisation and examination. Frankham (2017) notes that, while employability clearly matters to government, there is no clear consensus over what employability means. As a result, a number of proxies have emerged. In the case of the White

Paper, the key proxy for employability is the number of graduates that progress to high-skilled, higher-salaried employment. As will be argued, the emphasis placed on regulation and governance of the institution through the White Paper means that the institution, not the graduate, becomes the key object of policy towards employability. The effect of this apparatus of governance of institutions on students themselves can thus be said to be indirect; this is not a case of directly attempting to constitute the employable individual in some form or another. Rather, as an exercise of power the White Paper creates conditions conducive to the pursuit of normalising practices at the level of the institution while also refraining from intervening directly in the means of normalisation. As a result, the employable graduate is simultaneously present and absent. This is a significant distinction, and to set it out we may turn to Foucault's conceptions of the normalising judgment and the examination.

The normalising judgment, writes Foucault (1995), exercises two key functions. Firstly, it imposes homogeneity through establishing the *normal* as 'a principle of coercion in teaching' (p.184), notably through the introduction of standardised education and colleges of teacher training. In this sense it enables a distinction to be drawn between the normal and the abnormal, the creditable and the discreditable, the things that will and will not do. Secondly, the normalising judgment 'individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render the differences useful by fitting them to one another' (p.184). The normalising judgment thus sets individuals in particular forms of relation to one another inasmuch as that ordering furthers some institutional purpose or another. The White Paper clearly does offer grounds for a normalising judgment of the graduate. For example, in emphasising the importance of graduates attaining professional employment (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016) it enables a distinction between employable graduates according to the employment outcomes they achieve. Yet this says nothing explicitly about the knowledge, skills, qualities and so forth that employable graduates are expected to possess. Instead, the principle of normalisation is grounded in something greater than the individual. It is a function of mass measurement, of macro-level accounting. By declining to engage more closely in the configuration of the normalised employable graduate, the White Paper creates a space in which this definition is contestable.

Of the examination, Foucault (1995) writes of two possibilities, firstly:

the constitution of the individual as a describable, analyzable object, not in order to reduce him to "specific" features... but in order to maintain him in his individual features (p.190)

And secondly:

the constitution of a comparative system that made possible the measurement of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given “population” (p.190)

Here Foucault is describing a means by which individuals might be classified, qualified and punished according to a normalising judgment. By this argument the examination is not a means of categorising individuals as this or that, nor is it a mechanism for diagnosing what is to be done to whom. Rather, it is a means by which ‘each individual receives as his status his own individuality’ (Foucault, 1995, p.192), where individuality becomes a very visible signal to others. Thus the modality of discipline of the examination operates not through the pronounced judgments of some sovereign power, but through the kinds of relations to others enabled through the process of fixing one’s individuality as one’s status. In other words, it is not the case that a university can deem a graduate to be employable according to some objective standards or a prescriptive model of employability. Employability cannot consist of a certification. Rather, employability as a normative judgment is as a result of the status that each graduate takes on through the examination of their specific features. This is precisely what the White Paper makes possible through its treatment of students as consumers. At the root of this logic is the assumption that the institution one attends does matter, since it inevitably becomes part of one’s status by association. Clear indicators of the quality of institutions thus function to mediate employers’ evaluations of the status of graduates. It is therefore imperative that prospective students are offered a means of distinguishing ‘good’ universities from others.

Thus, the White Paper sets the scene for the employable graduate to be constituted not so much through their own efforts, qualities and so forth, but through their associations with certain subjects and institutions. Through the mode of the examination these associations become part of a student’s individuality, which becomes a symbol of status. In turn, this fixing of status enables certain possibilities in the labour market and closes off others. By relying on such a logic, the White Paper foregrounds the forming of such associations and leaves to the mechanisms of the market any attempt to actually define what an employable graduate ought to look like. In this sense, the employable graduate is both visible, in terms of the imperative to select the ‘right’ institution, and invisible, in terms of a reduction of graduates to units of accounting by which an institution might be judged. The individual graduate thus ceases to be an object of policy, instead becoming a factor of the measurement of institutions. This loss of focus on the individual student implies two important consequences. Firstly, it suggests that institutions are no longer in the business of educating their students, but of preparing them for

success in the labour market; there may be a tacit assumption present that good education leads to good labour market outcomes, yet it may also be the case that the ‘right’ education proves to be more important - for example, the suggestion that the so-called STEM subjects are crucial to economic prosperity (e.g. MacDonell, 2016). Secondly, the reduction of students to consumers and to units of accounting effectively renders the student’s own subjectivity and agency as irrelevant. It is no longer necessary for students to exert effort, to engage with the possibility of transcendence (e.g. Biesta, 2016), to explore and to struggle with one’s own sense of self. Rather, all that matters is that you can select the kinds of institutions and courses that are likely to offer the sort of status that qualify one for graduate-level employment. Higher education thus becomes not an extension of human possibilities but an exercise in position-taking informed by utilitarian calculus.

4.6.2 The graduate premium

A key part of the government’s justification for reform with institutions as its target is encapsulated in the notion of the graduate premium. The White Paper argues that higher education ‘continues to be a sound financial and personal investment with a wide range of societal benefits’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.7). In particular: ‘Higher education leads to a better chance of being employed, and an average net lifetime earnings premium comfortably over £100,000 compared to holding 2 or more A-Levels’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016, p.42). Thus, there is a core assumption that merely being a graduate confers substantial personal economic benefits. Wolf (2016) describes this as ‘faith’ (p.25) in the graduate premium, implying that such beliefs exert a strong orientation on government policy that would in themselves be difficult to challenge.

The idea of the graduate premium can be extended to the benefits to the national economy as a whole. The White Paper argues that graduates ‘are central to our prosperity and success as a knowledge economy’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.8) and that:

a 1% increase in the share of the workforce with a university degree raises long-run productivity by between 0.2% and 0.5%; and around 20% of UK economic growth between 1982 and 2005 came as a direct result of increased graduate skills accumulation (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, pp.8-9)

In this sense, universities generate benefits for both individuals and the economy as a whole. This is connected to an assumption that the UK economy is one ‘driven by knowledge and ideas’ (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.7). This reflects the idea that the UK economy is one driven by demand for higher level skills, as evidenced by shortages of

scientific, technical, engineering and mathematical (STEM) skills (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.8). Such perspectives are echoed by MacDonell's observation that: 'Labour market experts say that the "STEM" subjects... are crucial for the health of the economy' (MacDonell, 2016, p.13). The idea of the knowledge economy thus represents an idea of higher-level skills, where 'higher' represents the valuing of certain fields of knowledge and skills more than others.

Such an embedded faith in the value of the graduate premium, and its connection with high technology, high skilled employment, offers grounds for evaluating the employability of graduates in these terms. At a broad level, one might argue that to be a graduate in itself confers a different kind of employability compared with non-graduates. Yet the characterisation of the UK economy as driven by higher-level skills implies a stratification of courses of study, and thus of graduates. Indeed, the White Paper suggests there is 'large variation in graduate outcomes across both providers and subjects, and even for those that studied the same subject within the same provider' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.8). Not all degrees are made equally, therefore not every graduate benefits from the graduate premium. The graduate premium is thus grounded in a particular sense of what is to be valued – be it subject of study or the institution in which it is studied. Therefore, the White Paper does not offer support for the notion that graduates are employable by merely being graduates, echoing Wolf's claim that '[j]ust having a degree has long since stopped taking you to the top' (Wolf, 2016, p.25).

The centrality of the graduate premium to the White Paper stands in contrast to lines of criticism of the idea in the contemporary debate. The intention here is not to examine the validity of such lines of critique, but to locate the terms on which the idea of the graduate premium is debated. Mian (2016) refers to work by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that indicates significant variations in the salary prospects for graduates between institutions; as in the White Paper, this line of argument challenges the notion of a universal graduate premium. However, others question the very notion of a graduate premium. Hosking (2016), referring to a study by the Bank of England, writes that:

The power of a tassled mortarboard to enhance earnings has dwindled, with the typical British graduate earning 34 per cent more than an employee with no qualifications at all. In 1995, the wage premium enjoyed by graduates was 45 per cent. (Hosking, 2016, p.45)

While it is arguable that such observations could be explained in terms of variations in outcomes between institution and subject, it is interesting that the argument is presented as a

critique of the graduate premium itself. This locates the debate around higher education policy firmly within an overall idea of graduateness. Still others suggest a gradual shift away from degrees being passports to prestigious careers. Crampton (2016) reports that major employers Penguin, Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers had removed requirements for new recruits to hold degrees. An article in *The Times* (2016) refers to an apparent return to the 'articled apprentice' route into the legal profession. Raikes (2016) goes further in questioning the implicit connection between a course of study and the acquisition of skills and qualities that lead to higher earnings:

The question is: of the high salaries accruing to graduates of the LSE et al, how much is attributable to the degree course and how much to the individual? Perhaps these high earners would still have been high earners even if they had not gone to university. (Raikes, 2016, p.26).

Such lines of argument all serve, in their own ways, to trouble the fundamental assumption that possessing a university degree confers economic benefits to individuals and the economy as a whole. In doing so they help to locate the White Paper as offering grounds for an understanding of graduate employability in largely economic terms – driven by an assumption of the acquisition of certain forms of human capital that may be exchanged for certain positions on the labour market or, reflecting Fromm's (2002) critique of capitalist society, a certain lifestyle. Indeed, the economic imperative is ever-present in the context of the White Paper, even when the wider benefits of higher education are considered:

Universities provide an environment for deeper and wider learning, allowing for the development of analytical and creative thinking, objective inquiry and primary research. But evidence suggests that for most students, the most important outcome of higher education is finding employment.
(Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.11)

We may therefore read the White Paper, with the notion of the graduate premium at its heart, as advancing an understanding of graduate employability that is driven by human capital, economic and technocratic in character. This is set in the context of a more nuanced, wider debate on the centrality of higher education to success in the workplace and what ought to be valued. It is left to Wolf (2016) to sum up this complexity regarding the relation of higher education to the labour market:

No one in the past thought that universities existed simply to enrich. They were always partly vocational; in medieval times they trained priests and lawyers, as well as allowing independent, critical thought to develop. But in the 15th century Pope Alexander VI's reason for establishing the University of Aberdeen was so that men "would apply themselves to [the] study of

letters ... and acquire that most precious pearl of knowledge". (Wolf, 2016, p.25)

4.6.3 Consumerism

Underpinning the reforms proposed in the White Paper is the notion that students are consumers of higher education, which casts universities as competing providers of services within a marketplace. Within this logic, students are to be addressed as having needs that ought to be met by a range of market providers; this provides the impetus for regulation of providers:

The market needs to be re-oriented and regulated proportionately - with an explicit primary focus on the needs of students, to give them choices about where they want to study, as well as what and how. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.11)

This leads to an emphasis on information to support consumer choice, particularly information relating to price and quality (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). The White Paper expresses a perception of a lack of such information, both generally within the sector and particularly relating to 'teaching quality, which should be among the most important factors in students' choices' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016, p.11). A broad definition of teaching quality is given that includes: learning environments, student support, course design, career preparation and soft skills (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). In this way, a notion of employability as the human capital required for career entry is located firmly within the realm of the quality of teaching.

This locating of career preparation within teaching quality, and by extension within the scope of regulation, is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it positions employability as an anticipated outcome of higher education - a product that higher education institutions are expected to provide directly through teaching. In particular, certain kinds of employment outcomes are expected through higher education, namely higher-paid professional or managerial roles:

The Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education longitudinal survey found that one in five employed graduates were not working in a professional or managerial role three and a half years after graduation. Furthermore, the OECD has found that around 7% of graduates are leaving higher education with a low level of basic skills. We need to ensure the full benefits of higher education are available to all those who make this investment. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.12)

In these terms, progression to professional or managerial employment is framed as a return on investment - an expectation that fee-paying students are adequately prepared through the teaching they receive to progress to such kinds of employment. This clearly positions employability as a discrete good that higher education institutions can be expected to provide as part of their offers.

Secondly, locating career preparation clearly within the notion of teaching quality makes it a legitimate part of the apparatus of the government of higher education. This is justified in the White Paper on a number of bases. Firstly there is a sense of responsibility toward students:

What we expect though, is that excellent teaching, whatever its form, delivers excellent outcomes. There is of course more to university than financial gain, but the idea that excellent teaching occurs in a vacuum, independent of its impact on students' future life chances, is not one we can or should accept. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011, p.43)

By invoking the notion of students' life chances we are invited to consider higher education as a critical stage of development, the outcomes of which can have a significant impact on the life course of individual students. The quality of teaching provided thus takes on a critical importance. This is arguably presented as a basis upon which higher education institutions can be expected to exercise a kind of duty towards the future opportunities of their students. We cannot simply be satisfied with regarding higher education simply as the pursuit of scholarship, as in Daniel Bell's classical model of universities (in Docherty, 2011). To do so would leave too much to chance, and by extension would represent an abdication of institutions' responsibilities towards their students. Indeed, to reject the idea that excellent teaching is disconnected from students' future life courses plays into Bell's (in Docherty, 2011) pragmatic model of universities; such institutions address the atomisation and split sense of self that are potential consequences of the classical model, thus preventing an arbitrary partitioning of different dimensions of our lives. However, argues Bell (in Docherty, 2011), this is achieved at the cost of autonomy of scholarship. We are thus offered an impetus to regulate institutions to ensure that students can defend a right to a certain level of care, much as someone who presents for medical treatment can expect a certain quality of provision. This creates the conditions for employability to become a technology of the government of higher education, one that serves to (re)define the roles and responsibilities of academics at a fundamental level.

Thirdly, and relatedly, this represents a shift in emphasis of graduate employability away from a judgment of the qualities of individual graduates in favour of a judgment of the higher

education institution. This serves to, in effect, decouple employability from the autonomy of students; students are not expected to develop their employability, but instead can expect to have their employability developed. By positioning this as a consumer right, the responsibility for fulfilling this right moves towards the higher education institution. Because employability has thus become part of the apparatus of governance, this leads to the construction of employability as a statistical concept, one that can be measured according to standard criteria (e.g. seniority, skill level, salary). As a result, students and their outcomes are reduced to units of accounting; institutions are thus judged according to the proportions of students who progress to roles fitting such standard criteria. Again, this is framed as an ethical matter, particularly with regards to the apparent differential outcomes experienced by different demographic groups:

There are also pronounced differences in retention, degree attainment and progression to employment and further study, between students from some black and ethnic minority groups and white students, which cannot be explained by other factors such as prior educational attainment. We need to take a whole lifecycle approach to all of these challenges, looking across access, retention, attainment and progression from HE. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.55)

The implication of this is clear: higher education institutions have a duty to examine and address inequities in outcomes across the student population. This is presented not just as a matter of economic expedience, but as a question of justice. Government can therefore justify the use of employability as a technology of governance, through a logic of consumer rights, on the basis of addressing differentials in treatment.

To emphasise the duty on institutions with regards to the outcomes their students experience has the consequence of shifting the focus away from the skills, qualities and knowledge possessed by students upon graduation towards a focus on the quality and efficacy of what happens within the institution. Frankham (2017) characterises the institutional pursuit of developing students' employability as a recursive spur to action, something that becomes a never-ending activity with its associated internal and external drivers of accountability. One may question, as Frankham (2017) does, whether this leads to the institution essentially disconnecting itself from its actual activity in preference to satisfying externally-defined criteria of quality in higher education, in other words succumbing to external, normalising influences. This might be thought of as pursuing accountability as an end in itself, where enhancing the institution's market standing with reference to league tables and other 'measures' of quality becomes the chief driving force.

As a consequence, this attempt to govern higher education in the name of protecting students' rights as consumers may actually impede the furthering of students' interests. This is because, when employability is measured in terms of value-light terms as earnings, the lived experiences of individual graduates become secondary considerations, if they are considered at all. For example, if a criterion of 'good' employability is that graduates earn above a particular salary, it would hardly matter whether said graduates actually enjoyed their work or considered themselves to have good long-term prospects. Thus, the impetus to evaluate institutions as opposed to the experiences of graduates themselves not only decouples employability from the autonomous activity of students, but also from their own value judgements about their own lives. We are therefore left with the possibility that the defence of students' rights as consumers is achieved at the expense of any consideration of students as authors of lives that they have reason to value, or what Nussbaum (2006) refers to as human capabilities. Such an apparent paradox speaks to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the progression from education to work, where the limits of a statistical notion of 'good' employability outcomes becomes evident:

One hundred years ago an apprenticeship was more valued than a degree: fathers paid for their sons to work for a reputable company or begged a favour from a friend; universities were the cheap option. Dickens and Brunel didn't need to spend three years drinking on a campus. One was an article clerk, the other an apprentice... You may have a degree from Imperial but if you can't wake up on time and you feel no loyalty to the company, it's worthless. (Thomson, 2016, p.2)

Thomson's observations represent a strand of thought that challenges both an uncritical faith in the notion of the graduate premium (explored earlier in this section) and the implication of the White Paper that the 'right' governance of higher education can ensure good outcomes for graduates. Such counter-arguments downplay the significance of students-as-consumers effectively 'purchasing' their future prospects and point to wider socio-cultural and structural factors that play into the notion of employability and social mobility:

Shouting at universities and schools is too easy. Look earlier, at the seedlings, the earliest years. At five, children from poorer backgrounds are on average already 19 months behind peers from more economically secure families in "school readiness" — reading, concentration, self-management, cooperation. (Purves, 2016, p.29)

As a consequence, the White Paper offers a route into a discursive tension over the notion of employability as a discrete educational good. By locating career preparation clearly within teaching, the White Paper creates space for envisioning employability as a product of higher

education. Responsibility for the quality of this product sits clearly with its producers in the form of higher education institutions. This justifies an approach to governance of higher education which attempts to advance notions such as social mobility and equality of opportunity through the logic of consumer rights. As a consequence, the qualitative experiences of students become secondary to the quantitative measure of employability outcomes. This is by no means a universally-held perspective, ignoring as it seems to do the impact of wider social and structural influences on the choices and actions of individuals. We are therefore left with a discursive conflict that brings into question the fundamental value of higher education itself - something that seems to contradict the basic premise that graduates are 'central to our prosperity and success as a knowledge economy' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.8).

A significant thread running through the White Paper is an apparent reliance on employment market outcomes as a measure of employability. Given that the very notion of employability is discursively contested, it is thus freighted with definitional difficulties that encourage the search for various proxies (Frankham, 2017). One proxy that features prominently in the White Paper is that of progression to employment post-graduation. The tone is set early on through an assertion that, for most students, finding employment is the most important outcome of higher education (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). However, while finding employment is held to be an important outcome in its own right, a distinction is made in the White Paper between finding a job and finding a *graduate* job. As noted earlier, the notion of progression to 'professional or managerial' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.12) employment is invoked because of, or to justify, belief in the idea of the graduate premium (c.f. Wolf, 2016). A further consequence of this is to create space for employability to be defined in terms of graduate-level employment.

The emphasis on graduate-level employment can be connected to the idea that choosing a university and course represents a calculation of investment versus anticipated return. The White Paper makes explicit connections between higher education and earnings potential, addressing skills shortages, meeting employers' demands and reducing differentials in outcomes for students from different backgrounds. In short, the measurement of graduate-level employment rates gives grounds for judging whether a particular institution or programme is 'worth it':

The two most important decisions for a prospective higher education student are what course of study they choose, and at which institution. These decisions are significant

factors in determining a student's future life and career success, so it is crucial that they represent sound investments. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.43)

By this logic a graduate's employment market prospects are part of the consideration of what makes for a 'sound investment'. It is this idea of identifying a 'sound investment' that is used to justify the reframing of the regulation of the sector. This leads to two key consequences: that employability-as-employment plays into the assessment of the quality of an institution; and that employability-as-employment becomes a basis on which institutions can be stratified.

A frequently occurring theme within the White Paper is the notion of excellence. Excellence is invoked in a number of ways throughout the White Paper, but particularly with reference to the quality of teaching and its impact on students' future opportunities. For example, the White Papers refers to 'excellent teaching that helps prepare [students] for the future (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.6), excellent teaching that, 'whatever its form, delivers excellent outcomes' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.43), and the insistence that Degree Apprenticeships 'combine high quality degrees with a job with training' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.52). A discourse of excellence is thus developed that justifies the consideration of students as consumers, who are to be furnished with the requisite information in order to be able to differentiate between those institutions and courses that lead to high-quality outcomes.

Readings (1996), in his critique of market-driven higher education, argues that excellence is rapidly becoming the watchword of the university, a concept that is simultaneously the centring of an institution and the way in which it becomes comprehensible to the outside world. Yet therein lies a danger with the very notion of excellence: Readings argues that 'the assumption is that the invocation of excellence overcomes the problem of the question of value across disciplines, since excellence is the common denominator of good research in all fields' (Readings, 1996, pp.23-24). By implication, all questions of specificity, differences in context and so forth are essentially ignored, leading to the assumption that institutions are evaluated according to common, yet unspoken, standards. Yet by disconnecting excellence from an institution's specificity or context, excellence becomes devoid of content, and thus becomes uncontestable (Readings, 1996). Readings writes:

The point is that no one knows what excellence is but that *everyone* has his or her own idea of what it is. And once excellence has been generally accepted as an organizing principle, there is no need to argue about differing definitions. Everyone is excellent, in their own way, and everyone

has more of a stake in being left alone to be excellent than in intervening in the administrative process (Readings, 1996, pp.32-33)

Paradoxically, then, excellence is invoked as a concept for differentiating institutions from one another – for identifying sound investments from poor ones - yet is almost completely unsuited to such a task. The broad application of the notion of excellence points ultimately to its emptiness (Readings, 1996), which in itself suggests challenges for the White Paper's emphasis on excellent employment outcomes. As argued earlier, the consumerist thrust of the White Paper serves to place the focus on the activities of the institution as opposed to the lived experiences of the student. Readings's argument thus points to a further consequence: the dislocation of 'excellent' outcomes from any meaningful referent. We are not offered the possibility of understanding an 'excellent' outcome in terms of the desires of individual students, the relative distance travelled, or the context of local labour markets. We are not offered the possibility of considering that a career in the creative arts might be evaluated on different terms to a career in finance, for example. Instead, we are left with a context-free notion of excellence that is grounded in nothing more than a statistical measure.

The decoupling of excellence from context, and its positioning as an incontestable 'fact' about an institution, is a significant strategic move in the discursive logic of the White Paper. It is a clear example of what Foucault (1980) calls a *floating signifier*, one whose decipherability becomes central to its deployment in a logic of power. The reduction of excellence to an incontestable statistical measure, beyond precise analysis, positions it squarely within the apparatus of the governance of higher education, one whose effects come to bear not through direct intervention in the management and operation of higher education institutions but in the self-regulation by institutions of their own activities. When invoked alongside a logic of consumerism, whereby students are conceived of as rational choosers between comparable goods and institutions are competing providers of said goods, this formless, contentless idea of excellence becomes a critical means of regulating from afar.

As a result, the idea that one's employability can be evaluated by the type of job one can get and how much one can earn exerts a significant influence. Thomson (2016) offers a comparison between the average level of student debt and the potential rewards of not going to university, observing that in the United States 'some of the most brilliant and entrepreneurial students now see university as a "speedbump"' (p.19). Hurst (2016), meanwhile, points to the potential for public funding to be withdrawn from institutions whose graduates do not earn a premium over non-graduates. The fact that such debates occur at all gives an indication of how the public discourse creates the space for employability to be

regarded as something of a statistical concept, one applicable mainly to the evaluation of whether this university or that one offers a sound return on investment, or even whether higher education is a sound investment in itself.

The logical conclusion of this, the reduction of employability to a statistical concept set against an assumption of the power of market forces, is that the stratification of different institutions is not merely reinforced but actively encouraged. If choices are to be made, then one must be able to distinguish a good choice from a poor one. Again, this suggests that achieving high-quality outcomes from higher education is less about how individuals engage with the opportunities that higher education might present and more about picking the right options in the first place. For example, the White Paper makes the point that: 'Although applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds are at record levels, a disproportionate number of entrants to Russell Group universities come from a tiny minority of the country's state-funded secondary schools' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.13). While on one level this might be read as a concern about unequal access to high-quality educational opportunities, a counter-reading is that the very invocation of the term 'Russell Group universities' speaks to the significance of the stratification of institutions; the identification of an elite group of institutions that embody a vision of excellence becomes a significant part of the policy logic. Similarly, a reference in the White Paper to a study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that showed 'huge variance in graduate earnings depending on choice of subject and institution' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.42) is indicative of a reliance on statistical proxies as a measure of employability. The fact that it is referenced at all offers an insight into the grounds on which such evaluations are to be made in policy terms.

In this sense, it is no surprise that the White Paper carries the ambition to 'ensure that everyone with the potential to succeed in higher education, irrespective of their background, can choose from a wide range of high-quality universities, access relevant information to make the right choices, and benefit from excellent teaching that helps prepare them for the future' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p.6). It is also no surprise that, given the complexity and diversity of the higher education sector, a range of employment outcome-related measurements are deployed as part of a general language of excellence. Yet, to return to Readings's (1996) critique of excellence in higher education, the very act of attempting to transcend the specific, the local and the particular in the quest for system-wide excellence may ultimately be self-defeating. Instead of facilitating institutions to 'close the gap' in outcomes, the pursuit of excellence may instead reinforce such a gap. Indeed, it is arguable that the very idea of excellence, reliant as it is on a relation to something else (Readings, 1996), depends on

their being a visible hierarchy of institutions. It may ultimately be that, if every institution is excellent, then none of them are. Thus, employability as a normalised, statistical concept becomes a technology of stratification and of sorting – not of graduates, but of institutions.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an analysis of five policy texts that address the relation between higher education and the economy in the context of the United Kingdom. While each policy document has been treated as a moment in its own right and analysed as discrete sets of distinctive conditions, some commonalities are visible across the five. These point to three critical conclusions.

Firstly, there is the tendency to frame the question of graduates' readiness for work in terms of some socio-economic crisis or challenge. The nature of these challenges changes according to the context. In the case of the *Robbins Report*, for example, the challenge is a demographic one – post-war population growth is held to inevitably increase demand for places in higher education, quite apart from the famous axiom that 'courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.8). By contrast, in the case of *The Learning Age*, the core problem is one of economic inclusion and social cohesion, characterised by reducing reliance on welfare. This invocation of the idea of crisis – be it economic, social, demographic or otherwise – provides an impetus to and justification for policy-driven interventions. Again, the character of such interventions depends on the context of the times. Yet such interventions almost inevitably point to tensions in the relation between higher education and the state; the Robbins committee, for example, acknowledged tensions between universities' financial dependence on the state and 'their legitimate rights of self-government' (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.4). Thus, the question of employability can be posed as a problem of essential relations between higher education and the state.

Secondly, in the responses to such crises there is a tendency to regard education primarily as a means of imbuing students with distinctive forms of human capital. In the case of *University-Industry Relations*, for example, an idea emerges of the specific kinds of science and technology-related human capital needed to combat a notion of economic declinism (Tomlinson, 2005) and enhance the United Kingdom's international economic prowess; *The*

Development of Higher Education into the 1990s continues this theme. Thus, graduate employability can be posed as a problem of content – what is to be taught, to whom, and to what end?

Thirdly, a question emerges as to how graduate employability is to be recognised. In *University-Industry Relations* the key driver is the overall health of the economy; in *The Learning Age*, ideas such as social cohesion and welfare dependency are introduced. *Success as a Knowledge Economy* offers a clear picture of the reduction of employability to a statistical measure of progress to high-paid employment. On this logic, graduate employability can be posed as a problem of truth – how is the ‘truth’ of the employable graduate to be constituted?

These three dimensions – relations, content and truth – create a space where ideas are never finalised, where debates are never concluded. Indeed, by reading the emergence of different notions of graduate employability in this way we are alerted to the possibility of other conceptions. We are awakened to the possibility that graduate employability might not be merely a technocratic concept developed in Whitehall; that it might be more than mere success or otherwise in the labour market; that it could represent something other than the practical necessities of business leaders. Indeed, the possibility emerges that universities, far from being targets of yet another set of policy interventions, might actually have a role to play in reconstituting graduate employability through the games of truth implicit in the idea of discourse. Foucault (1984c) characterised his work as not the history of solutions but the history of problems; it is a serious engagement with the problems of employability that offer universities a way out of Bell’s (in Docherty, 2011) fundamental opposition of the classical, truth-seeking institution to the pragmatic, society-serving institution.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Research questions revisited

To conclude, the project revisits the three research questions identified following the literature review.

1. *What particular conditions, tensions and conflicts in the history of higher education in the UK have enabled the emergence of different discourses of graduate employability?*

A genealogical analysis of five key policy developments in the history of higher education in the United Kingdom has pointed to the significance of a number of debates for the emergence of different configurations of graduate employability. While it would be too presumptive to state that this project has returned these debates to the record, it has facilitated the re-reading of these policy texts. This has enabled a ‘disturb[ing] what was previously considered immobile’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.82) in order to challenge a reduction of graduate employability to a mere technological conception and to establish employability as a discursive concept. In doing so it has attempted to invoke what Foucault (1984a) refers to as *effective history* which ‘deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.88). The effective history of graduate employability thus makes unstable and contested what might otherwise be regarded as lifeless and clinical. It has therefore opened a new space within which graduate employability and associated policies and practices within higher education might be examined and re-evaluated.

While the term ‘graduate employability’ does not in itself emerge within the analysis until the late 1990s, the configurations of employability emerging through the texts interrogated here enable the positing of the conditions through which multiple conceptions of graduate employability have emerged. The *Robbins Report* begins by reaffirming higher education’s connection with the needs of the economy by emphasising both its role in the preparation of a growing young population for careers and its contribution to the post-war competitive position of the United Kingdom. In this sense it enables graduate employability to be read as emerging through the intersection of personal economic needs, national economic concerns and a sense of what makes higher education distinct. In advancing what has become known as the *Robbins axiom* – ‘that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.8) – the report might initially be read as a call to enhance the economic and productive capacity of the populace through the expansion of higher education. This logic

would locate graduate employability as a measure of human capital. Indeed, the committee acknowledges that ‘conceiving education as a means, we do not believe that modern societies can achieve their aims of economic growth and higher cultural standards without making the most of the talents of their citizens’ (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.8). This would represent a utilitarian calculus – expansion of university places to meet increasing demands through a demographic upturn would be predicated on the presumption that said graduates would contribute to the economic fortunes of the UK.

However, to read the emergence of employability solely through utilitarian concerns would be to assume that a present-day concern with the human capital of graduates can be read back through history to obtain ‘the distant ideality of the origin’ (Foucault, 1984a, p.80), thus ignoring the conceptual tensions and conflicts that the report both fuelled and reflected. While it is reasonable to read such a concern with the utility of graduates as a significant contemporary matter, to do so to the exclusion of other discursive possibilities for the emergence of the employable graduate would afford it unjustifiable privilege. For example, the Robbins committee also claims that:

education ministers intimately to ultimate ends, in developing man’s capacity to understand, to contemplate and to create. And it is a characteristic of the aspirations of this age to feel that, where there is capacity to pursue such activities, there that capacity should be fostered (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p.8).

Such lofty ambitions introduce the possibility that employability might also be read in terms of students being able to fulfil some innate capacity that is not dependent on the attainment of labour market outcomes. Instead, we are offered three possibilities: that growing demand for university places confers a responsibility on government to enable the meeting of that demand and hence the fulfilment of the potential of a generation; that post-war Britain, as a former imperial power, was facing significant economic competition and thus to enable the next generation to fulfil their potential was both a moral and economic mission; and that of immediate practical concern was the nature of the relation and cultural distance between higher education and industry. To read the *Robbins Report* this way offers the potential to resist the mask of identity (Foucault, 1984a) that a conceptualisation of graduate employability solely as human capital might offer. In doing so universities might identify ways of connecting employability with the fostering of higher-order values and qualities, such that graduates are prepared not merely to insert themselves into a pre-existing economic order but to relate to the world in an agentive and deliberative way.

University-Industry Relations emerged against the backdrop of an economy in decline and a sense of Britain's fading global influence (Tomlinson, 2005). Set against this is the identification of higher education as being shaped by the nation's industrial past, yet possessed of the potential to transform the national economic interest. Indeed, higher education is assumed to bear a significant relation to the industrial future of Britain; thus, it becomes a legitimate target of governance. This governance can be read as a project of modernity, grounded in a concern for the economic futures of graduates and a desire to supplant an outmoded conception of higher education with one that better responds to a pervasive sense of crisis. By bringing to the fore a tension between pure academic knowledge and applied knowledge, the report sets the conditions for an understanding of employability that is grounded in the acquisition by individuals of practical knowledge of value to industry. Thus, the academic choices made by students fall within the scope of the governance of higher education. We might therefore consider the potential for constructions of graduate employability to speak to mediate our conflicting desires for future ways of life. In doing so, universities may see opportunities for a reconnection with what we have good reason to value - thus bringing out new forms of relation between education and work.

Moreover, in adopting such an encompassing position as is implied by the notion of modernity, the mode of governance conceptualised in *University-Industry Relations* moves beyond the choices made by individuals to encompass the population as a whole. This sets the pursuit of employability as not simply a private interest, but one that is grounded in individuals' relation to the population as a whole. Thus, as individuals we are prompted to self-examine and locate our own development in the context of the regulation and normalisation of the broader population. This points to a tension between the pursuit of education as a form of training or discipline (e.g. Foucault, 2004) and education as a means of engaging deliberately with the relation between our selves and the prevailing discursive conditions. Employability might thus emerge as a distinct notion through such a tension.

The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s signifies a re-alignment of the relation between the state and higher education. In particular the command paper emphasises a logic that casts higher education as a supplier in response to the demands of the state (e.g. Glendinning, 2005). Set against a political context of restraint in public sector investment, it places a focus on students' acquisition of the 'right' sorts of human capital. Here the emphasis is firmly on science and technology as both a driver of economic growth and as a response to a perceived crisis in Britain's economic competitiveness. Indeed, it is this notion of economic crisis that is deployed to justify a prioritisation of the economic contribution of higher

education over its wider benefits. This is invoked to justify an approach to the government of higher education that essentially re-sets the rules of discourse on the purposes of higher education.

The command paper has at its heart a definite idea of what graduates can and should contribute to the economy. Employability, by the logic of the command paper, thus becomes a matter of relevance to the needs of the economy. Initial education is no longer considered sufficient to sustain one through a career, hence employability is cast as a time-limited concept. Continual refreshing of skills and knowledge is therefore necessary. However, the idea that initial education must be fit for purpose remains central to the argument of the command paper. The British higher education system of the mid-1980s exhibited a diversity of types of institution that each represented a distinct set of purposes - universities, for example, were identified as institutions of academic excellence and creative research, while polytechnics were held to be primarily teaching institutions. Such a clearly demarcated structure implies a sense of how each kind of institution is expected to contribute to national policy objectives. Thus, employability emerges in the space between policy objectives and institutional purpose, and in turn acts as a signifier of a contest for the soul of the university.

Despite this, the command paper - with its emphasis on the fostering of scientific and technological human capital - also brings employers into the scope of governance. Employers are deemed responsible for the signals sent to students and parents as to the sorts of skills and qualities to be favoured in the workplace. Employers are thus held to be agentive in influencing the choices made by students, and thus are drawn in to the apparatus of governance deployed through policy. No longer are employers merely clients of higher education, they are themselves implicated in the enactment of economic policy. There is, therefore, space for employability to emerge as a means of governing the functioning of the economy, the opportunities and choices made available to students by employers. Thus, to emphasise opportunities in scientific and technological careers above other options – by intimating that graduates in sciences and technology are more employable than others – is to attempt to make such choices more likely. This is an example of what Foucault (2009) describes as being ‘to arouse, to facilitate, and to *laisser faire*, in other words to manage and no longer to control through rules and regulations’ (p.353, emphasis in original). Employability then may be cast in terms of natural processes (Foucault, 2009) of progressing from education to a worthwhile form of employment.

The Learning Age marked the emergence of employability as an explicit outcome measure of the pursuit of social inclusion through education. In common with *The Development of Higher Education Into the 1990s*, *The Learning Age* locates education as central to the economic prospects of the nation. However, rather than valuing the outcomes of higher education purely in terms of economic outcomes, *The Learning Age* connects economic inclusion with social inclusion. Employability thus emerges as a practical necessity, a way of coping with a rapidly changing world. In emphasising both the economic and social outcomes of access to employment, education is positioned as both a private and a public good. This is invoked to justify an insistence on both an individual and a collective responsibility to pursue employability as an outcome of education. Investment of time, effort and resources in education is therefore simultaneously a necessity and a responsibility. This creates the condition for a technocratic, managerial approach to the pursuit of employability.

Success as a Knowledge Economy locates employability as a consumer good to be obtained from higher education. The centrality of market logic to the white paper prompts a focus on the value-for-money of higher education provision. Employability is thus conceived of as a combination of acquiring work-relevant human capital and the actual gaining of employment. While this can be read as an individualising discourse in which the qualities and outcomes for individual graduates matter, arguably the focus of the white paper as an instrument of governance is not individual graduates but individual institutions. The outcomes of individual graduates become a mechanism for holding institutions to account. Thus, individual graduates become instruments of the governance of institutions. However, this consequently creates the conditions for a normalising judgement of graduates: if graduates are deemed to be consumers, choosing institutions and courses on the basis of ‘objective’ measures of their quality, then the employability of graduates can be evaluated not only according to their own efforts and qualities, but also through their choices to associate themselves with this or that university.

2. What new, critical understandings of the notion of graduate employability are enabled through an application of a Foucauldian genealogical approach?

This emergent genealogy of graduate employability enables three distinct, new understandings of graduate employability. Firstly, by conceiving of employability as a discursive concept, it is inevitably a temporal one. It is no longer possible to think in terms of eternal, fixed ‘models’ of employability. Rather, employability is a product of the discursive tensions of the times, and

thus must be reformulated in order to take account of the political, economic and social conditions at any given moment. Indeed, it illustrates that Yorke's (2006) call for 'higher education to facilitate the development in students of the understandings, skills and attributes that will help them to make a success of their careers' (p.11) must inevitably be more complex than the application of a schema to translate academic experience into work-ready qualities.

Secondly, if employability is a discursive concept, then it must also relate to the real conditions in which higher education operates. It is therefore inseparable from higher education. Thus, it is not sufficient to regard employability as something that is added on to the 'true' experience of higher education. To critique graduate employability is thus to critique higher education, and vice versa. It suggests the necessity of critiquing almost every aspect of higher education: the construction of the curriculum; the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge; pedagogies and practices in the classroom; the relationship between student and staff, and between staff and institution and so forth.

Thirdly, by conceiving of graduate employability as emerging through the making and enactment of policy, we must abandon any suggestion that employability is something imposed on top of education as an instrument of policy. To make such an assumption is to accept what Barnett (2000) calls the thesis of the 'end of the university' (p.411). Instead, an attitude to policy is required that, following Ball (1994), acknowledges higher education's role in the formation of policy through its enactment. It is to instead locate the concept of employability as emerging from the minutiae of practice.

3. How do these new understandings create spaces in which new critical understandings of the roles and purposes of academics, universities and higher education might emerge?

A key consequence of considering graduate employability to be a discursive concept is that higher education is agentive in its (re)formation. It is not sufficient for higher education to regard employability as an alien concept imposed upon it from without. Indeed, to regard employability as merely an external imposition would amount to a surrendering of higher education's agency in the interpretation and enactment of policy and its complicity in the continued masking of such power relations. To recognise higher education as agentive in constructing the notion of graduate employability means that higher education practitioners can engage in more than a great refusal. Rather, the opportunity exists for higher education to

assertively advocate for an understanding of employability that is grounded in whatever can be held to make higher education distinct.

Genealogy thus enables a clearing of the way, which leads to the redundancy of old conflicts between a ‘pure’ notion of academic work and so-called neoliberal or managerialist agendas. The impossibility of being external to the power relations that lead to the emergence of the idea of employability is not a counsel of despair, but represents the potential of agency. A Foucauldian genealogy of graduate employability proposes ways in which the relation between higher education, the state and work might be analysed. In turn, this indicates potential strategic opportunities to engage in creative resistance to the reduction of higher education to mere economic utility.

Academics themselves are also caught up, and are hence agentive in the discursive formation of graduate employability. Instead of seeking to differentiate between what is ‘proper’ academic work and what is not, space is made for academics to participate in the construction of new understandings of employability that are grounded in concepts other than economic outcomes. Thus, it is not inevitable that an emphasis on employability means the reduction of higher education to a ‘skilling factory’ (Parker, 2003, p.529); rather, academics must assert their agentive potential. Indeed, by working from the basis that higher education institutions and professionals are inevitably agentive within a set of power relations out of which any number of configurations of graduate employability might emerge is to recognise that ‘new, even more challenging roles are opening up [for higher education]... that still enable us to see continuities with its earlier self-understandings built around personal growth, societal enlightenment and the promotion of critical forms of understanding’ (Barnett, 2000, p.411). A genealogy of graduate employability is thus a call to engage with and shape the new possibilities that emerge in an *age of supercomplexity* (Barnett, 2000).

With this in mind, this thesis has demonstrated both the potential and the necessity to challenge foundational understandings of graduate employability. The opportunity exists for a robust and courageous critique of graduate employability to enable an escape from a reliance on ‘models’ that reduce the concept to a technical problem to be solved. Instead, a genealogy of graduate employability offers the opportunity, drawing on Dewey, to ‘react upon intelligence and interest so as to modify, in connection with legislation and administration, the socially obnoxious features of the present industrial and commercial order’ (Dewey 2001, n.p.). A genealogy of graduate employability is therefore possessed of a substantial transformational potential.

Fundamentally, this genealogy of graduate employability has revealed it to be the location of a fierce and repeated contest for the soul of the university. By rejecting the suggestion that employability is a timeless, technical concept, the importance of context in the emergence of different configurations of the concept becomes clear. These configurations act as windows into deliberate strategies and techniques of power emerging through the specific relations between higher education, society and government. Employability, in its different guises, is thus a product of power relations and is deployed as a technology of power in the governance of higher education. That universities themselves are implicated in its emergence in different forms points both to their agency and to the futility of its demonization as an imposition from without. Rather, universities must embrace the opportunity that graduate employability offers to advance a vision for higher education that speaks to the complexity of plural ends pursued within a shared world. To fail to do so would be to submit to a normalisation masked as a natural inevitability. It is appropriate, then, to invoke the mission that Foucault ascribes to himself:

My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. (Foucault, in Martin, 1988, p.10)

The study of the emergence of differing discourses of graduate employability has brought into view a variety of technologies of governance. These are directed not at the ‘body’ of the university (at the specific actions of institutions, academics or students), but at its *soul*, or ‘the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge’ (Foucault, 1995, p.29). If the soul of the university, which is the ‘effect and instrument of a political anatomy’ (Foucault, 1995, p.30) is to be anything other than a mere means of externally-driven modification of its behaviour, then what is needed is a critical engagement with the emergent regimes of truth that concepts such as graduate employability represent. Engagement with graduate employability thus offers the potential for higher education to dissociate such assumed unities and foster a more agentive engagement with the conditions of its own existence. The rejection both of acquiescence and obstinacy that is implied thus fulfils the promise of a creative resistance (Foucault, 1997) that opens new possibilities. In a world of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000) it is an opportunity that higher education can ill afford to neglect.

Afterword

Graduate employability has in many ways characterised my engagement with education. It represents a debate that speaks to the core of the relevance and value of higher education, and offers a window into the tensions and conflicts that make the relation between higher education and society one of complexity and reciprocity. Yet, in the urge to avoid the descent into a ‘muddy pond of abstract nouns in which all distinctiveness gets lost’ (Collini, 2013, p.xx), to engage seriously with the question of graduate employability has challenged me to reframe my own understandings of the mechanisms of power, policy and reform.

As a trainee schoolteacher in the early 2000s, and later as a researcher for the construction and manufacturing sectors, I took to heart the reforming zeal of the age. This was the era of Tony Blair’s mantra ‘education, education, education’; it was a time when educational reform was positioned as vital to the economy, to social justice, and to ‘each and every young person, whatever their needs and whatever their aspirations’ (Kelly, in Department for Education and Skills, 2005, p.3). I had bought into the promise of educational reform. It seemed that the problems of education were matters of ways and means, practical problems that could be resolved with the right formulations, the right sort of re-engineering, and the right sorts of policy to make things happen.

I had, however, developed a curiosity as to why the volume of reform activity over time was still accompanied by what seemed like a persistent concern about the readiness of graduates for work. To my mind, the UK was equipped with one of the most advanced and well-supported education systems in the world; we were moving towards an age of mass higher education; opportunities seemed to be everywhere. The problem, I reasoned, must lie within the processes and practices of HE itself, of the persistence of a ‘fading academicism’ (Barnett, 1997, p.150) that posited graduate employability as an alien concept. Thus, I initially engaged with the idea of employability with the desire to create a new model. Graduate employability appeared to be just such a practical problem that would be solvable with the right technical responses. Graduate employability was imperilled, denigrated, marginalised; it was in need if not of redemption then of renovation.

Yet my early engagement with Foucault’s notion of power prompted a significant re-assessment. To escape from a juridical model of power and to conceive of power as being from everywhere (Foucault, 1978) enabled a fundamental re-evaluation of the role of policy in reform. No longer was it sufficient to think of education policy as offering an inexorable journey to a new realm of practices, in which the role of institutions and professionals was to

come along for the ride. Rather, it required serious attention to the roles played by institutions and professionals not only in enacting policy but in its formation; the possibility of resistance as something other than refusal (Foucault, 1978) seemed to indicate a generative capacity that is not reflected in a linear understanding of the journey from policy document to practice change.

Thus, to undertake genealogical research became, for me, an exercise in counter-memory (Walters, 2012). To re-engage with the debates of the past, to place back into the record those conflicts that had long been thought settled, was to put at risk my own perceptions both of graduate employability and of my faith in reformist policy. I began, for example, to consider the significance of the tension between individual and collective responsibility as expressed in *The Learning Age*; the necessity of considering questions of social justice on such a scale rendering impossible the advancement of a coherent, total understanding of social justice. I also saw the possibility of reading such reforms as grounded in a combination of decentralisation and accountability. Such readings put into doubt my reliance on policy as a top-down instrument of reform, but also opened up the possibilities of agency inherent within systems of power relations thus conceived.

Therefore, my memory of the New Labour reformist era as reframed through a Foucauldian lens of power relations enabled a new critical engagement with my own professional past. No longer was it possible to consider policy only as a means of redemption or reconstruction of graduate employability, or even only as a means of exploring political attitudes to higher education. Rather, my engagement with the generation of counter-memories had opened the possibility of what Foucault (in Martin, 1988) characterised as '[becoming] someone else that you were not in the beginning' (p.9). To engage in writing a genealogy, then, is a means to producing new knowledge that requires a re-assessment of what was previously thought to be settled – both within the archive and within oneself.

My own biographical location within the research also signals both the limit of its analytical potential and directions of travel that further work might explore. As noted, this thesis has centred on policy texts as the primary means of exploring the emergence of differing discourses of graduate employability. While a genealogical engagement with policy texts has indicated a range of possibilities for describing the 'discursive productions and [the] effects of power' (Foucault, 1978, p.11) that emerge in relation to graduate employability, along with 'the "will to knowledge" that serves as both their support and their instrument' (Foucault, 1978, p.12), such an analysis can only proceed so far. My own journey through the research

has offered such potential for understanding my own subjectivity; it seems inconceivable that there would not be yet more to say from the perspectives of others. Therefore, what will be needed to advance the analysis beyond this thesis is further attention to voices and practices. What follows is an exploration of the limits of working mainly at the level of text, and the possibilities that a more fulsome engagement with voice and practice might open.

It is useful to turn to Foucault's genealogy of sexuality in order to illustrate the centrality of voice to genealogical analysis. In engaging with the 'putting into discourse of sex' (Foucault, 1978, p.12), Foucault identified the necessity of '[immersing] the expanding production of discourses on sex in the field of multiple and mobile power relations' (Foucault, 1978, p.98). The fulfilment of such an ambition required, as Foucault (1990) realised, one 'to examine both the difference that keeps us at a remove from a way of thinking in which we recognize the origin of our own, and the proximity that remains in spite of that distance which we never cease to explore' (Foucault, 1990, p.7). Voice, conceived of as the central means of expressing such modes of thinking, therefore offers access to the territory encompassed in such conceptual distances. My twofold journey as a researcher – into the archive and into myself – illustrates the potential of genealogy to cross that territory less travelled. It is thus difficult to conceive of such an approach that does not involve the engagement with voices and practices contemporary to such economies of power that are held to be in operation.

The significance of voice to the genealogical analysis is to effect the (re)construction of those networks and relations that give access to the channels through which discourse is permeated (Foucault, 1978). This is a matter of accounting for the fact of speaking and of the significance of the positions, viewpoints and institutional relations immanent in the production of discourse (Foucault, 1978). The genealogical analysis presented here has, to an extent, attempted to access a range of voices through recourse to debates represented in the contemporary news media. Yet the possibility remains of a deeper engagement with voice, one which explores the playing out of such economics of power within such spaces as individual institutions.

Foucault (1978) points to the necessity of distinguishing between the refinement of language and the proliferation of discourses. Control over what is said, when and where it is possible to speak and so forth comes to form a 'restrictive economy [that is] incorporated into that politics of language and speech' (Foucault, 1978, p.18). Yet such an economy of constraint of speech may also be accompanied by a multiplication of discourses through the exercise of power (Foucault, 1978). Thus, access to contemporary voices (also including when and where

voices are *not* heard or are otherwise restricted) is a means of reconstructing those relations that lead to the emergence of discourse. Speech is not synonymous with discourse, yet the economies of power surrounding the deployment of voice enable a more nuanced and complex reconstruction of the conditions of emergence of a given discourse. Some means of going beyond mere representations of others' voices is therefore required.

A similar situation arises when considering the importance of practices. Foucault (1984b), in considering the idea of the achievement of the Kantian notion of maturity, alighted on the significance Kant's approach as 'a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, 1984b, p.50). The inquiries arising from such an approach 'have their practical coherence in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices' (Foucault, 1984b, p.50). To escape from the realm of grand narratives and timeless constructions therefore requires an engagement with practices in their concrete, not abstract, forms. To focus mainly on government policy documents, therefore, can never completely fulfil the promise of Foucault's genealogical approach.

No doubt that such an approach would present certain practical challenges; to move beyond the confines of one form of representation in text would require 'gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary' (Foucault, 1984a, p.76) engagement with 'a vast accumulation of source material' (Foucault, 1984a, pp.76-77). That assumes, of course, that sufficient artefacts of relevance actually remain, or that those voices that are central to the conditions in question have not been lost to the historical record – or that such voices were ever captured in some form at all. The further back one goes, the greater the risk of remaining within the realm of readings of the past that are notable as much for what they omit as for what they contain.

A potential solution to such methodological and practical dilemmas is to regard a genealogical analysis at the level of discourse and text to be a signifier of greater possibilities. One of the key contributions of this thesis is to reveal as freighted with power relations a concept that is often spoken of as a mere empirical quality. This points to the opportunity to turn the analysis not to a deeper engagement with the historical archive, but with the voices and practices of our present. The aim was not to mine the archive for alternative or better conceptions of graduate employability to guide present practice, but to open up the possibilities of re-reading the ways in which graduate employability is spoken of and acted upon in order to effect a more critical engagement with the present. Narrative approaches, such as that advanced by

Mifsud (2016), present opportunities to access the translation of policy and thus to explore the significance of its ‘construction, presentation, reception and enactment/translation’ (Mifsud, 2016, p.444).

Thus, the genealogy presented here is incomplete. Yet its incompleteness becomes its key strength: an openness to possibilities of creative resistance (Foucault, 1997) and thus to a greater range of means of engagement with the conditions of our present. The great excitement of this thesis, and also its frustration, is the emergence of such a multitude of possibilities for inquiry; these represent the value of the ‘trident of scepticism, critique and problematization’ (Mifsud, 2016, p.444) in escaping from monolithic conceptions of graduate employability. Instead, we are presented with the possibility of refusing such ‘totalizing and essentialist systems of thought’ (Mifsud, 2016, p.452). A genealogical analysis must necessarily begin from somewhere, but still it must be alert to the possibilities of what may yet be said.

6. References

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