

**Peter Scott. (1995). *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press/The SRHE. Pp. x, 198. Price: \$37.95**

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Peter Scott takes as his starting point the linear transitions between elite, mass and universal higher education systems as proposed by Martin Trow. The author reminds us that Trow defined these systems as having age participation index rates of up to 15 percent, between 15 and 40 percent, and, over 40 percent respectively. Scott sets himself the task of describing and explaining the very recent "massification" of British higher education. Between 1987 and 1995 the age participation index rose from 14.6 to 32 percent. Scott takes his account beyond Britain and compares this system with those of Europe, Australia and the United States. He is determined to place his account in the larger context of modernization and "posthistoire". Explanation is sought in socio-economic changes, shifts in intellectual culture and in science and technology. Three themes dominate the book: the transition from elite to mass; the erosion of British exceptionalism; and, the synergy between "massification" and post-industrial society.

Scott is fascinated by "massification". He describes these systems as being "among the most distinctive, and powerful secular institutions of modern society." (p. 1) The permanent characteristics of mass systems according to Scott are that they are "endlessly open and radically reflexive" (p. 10). Mass systems are characterized by "ambiguity" and "radical discontinuities". They are "heterogeneous in sociological terms and herodox in intellectual ones" and thereby resist classification. (p. 3) The classification task is made even more difficult in Britain because the changes are both current and dramatic. The major structural changes occurred in 1989 when university status was extended to polytechnics and other colleges, and in 1992 when State funding for universities was unified under three national funding councils (England, Scotland and Wales). Even though Scott admits the change is incomplete and is at the

level of structures rather than internal norms, he still claims that "A social revolution has been accomplished" (p. 2).

Scott divides his essay into three long chapters: Structure and Institutions; State and Society; and, Science and Culture. The most valuable parts are those descriptive historical sections in the first two chapters where he deals with the British system. As he attempts to explain the external influences, the author stresses the importance of context (time and place) in determining the character of mass higher education systems. This is particularly important when one considers that the expansion of the two systems with the highest participation rates in the OECD, namely the United States and Canada, became mass systems during the 1960s and 1970s. The expansion in Britain during the same period was, relatively speaking, small. As noted earlier, the transformation of the British system had to wait until the last decade against the background of an entirely different socio-political agenda.

The approach taken throughout the book is to provide the reader with lists of "shifts," "themes," "phases," "factors," "elements" or "senses." At times it is difficult for the reader to see how the lists are linked together or what priority they should give to the major and minor parts of these classifications. This is particularly the case in Chapter 2 "Structure and Institutions" even though this is probably the most informative section of the whole book. Scott describes three decisive shifts in the history of British universities which are all closely tied to the development of the modern State: the democratic revolution; the industrial revolution; and, the rise of professional society. By the early 1950s, British universities had effectively become public, national institutions. He goes on to link the decline in the autonomy of universities and the nationalization of the polytechnics and colleges. Five chronological phases trace the gradual demise of the University Grants Committee (UGC) from its status as an independent buffer between government and the universities to becoming part of government, and then eventually in 1989 its abolition. The "unified" university system created in 1992 included 56 universities that were chartered before 1989, 31 old polytechnics, 5 Scottish central institutions, and 2 colleges of higher education. As Scott points out, one cannot as yet talk of a culture change. The

internal life of the system consists of a number of cultural strands that serve to separate as much as they draw institutions together. He uses the Claudius Gellert typology of European university traditions (Knowledge, Professional, and Personality models) and Sheldon Rothblatt's contrasting ideal types of the "college" and the "university" to illustrate the tensions within. He argues that the "college," "personality" labels that are used to characterize Oxford and Cambridge are the least robust in the face of massification.

While the boundary separating polytechnics from universities has always been more permeable than people have assumed, Scott is well aware of the "fault lines" within the British system. He divides the system into 12 sub-sectors. Most are quite familiar and follow either historical periods or geographical and cultural divisions. The most important sectors for his purposes are the Old "new" universities by which he means those universities like Lancaster and York founded in the 1960s, and the New "new" universities which include the polytechnics and the colleges. The distinctive character of the former group he describes in three ways: physical locations near existing metropolitan centres usually in green fields; academic organization more open and flexible with more scope for interdisciplinarity; and, an academic culture which attempted to respond to the research and professional needs of a modern society. Yet the Old "new" universities did not revolutionize the system and enrolment increased slowly. For Scott, it is the New "new" universities that are the most powerful block within the system and it these institutions, particularly the polytechnics that have without doubt "reshaped the popular imagination of the possibilities of higher education." (p. 57) Within the system, the polytechnics, have experienced a higher growth rate than the universities. Further, the old polytechnics share a number of characteristics that clearly differentiate them from the rest of the university system. They are unambiguously urban, municipal institutions designed to serve vocational and economic functions. The polytechnics are heterogeneous and open rather than closed. They are the inheritors of the egalitarian traditions of both technical and further education.

In trying to arrive at a broader explanation of the transition from elite to mass systems Scott posits four broad types of higher education

system and provides examples: dual (Holland, Germany); binary; unified (Sweden, Britain, Australia); and, stratified (California). Although he does not refer to the Canadian system, it is probably the best example of a binary system. Scott then suggests that higher education systems tend to evolve through this typology from dual to stratified (see Figure 2, p. 37). While the author makes various qualifications and draws attention to factors like the pattern of school education and the pace of industrialization that shape these systems, he still in my view underplays what must be the dominant characteristic of all these systems, namely, stratification by tradition and function. Surely much of the explanation for "massification" resides in what Burton Clark referred to as the "cooling out" function of institutions in higher education systems. The extension of access preserves the myth that education will increase the overall amount of social mobility while internally the structural stratification preserves the position of the elite universities and the attendant privileges for those students who gain access. Given that the majority of students who attend are from upper or middle class backgrounds one could argue that the major force for change is the protection of privilege. In my view, the lines of demarcation must include the distinction between public and private universities (United States) and the correlation between power, wealth and place in the system.

Chapter 3, "State and Society", explores the principles underlying change in the British system. The contradiction between a diminishing public sphere and the expansion and elaboration of the higher education system is explained by focusing on the pluralism of the modern welfare State. Scott distinguishes between primary and secondary "floors" of the State. Education is on the secondary level and along with other institutions is utilized to promote democratic culture and social mobility. The most interesting part of the chapter focuses on Post-Industrialism and Post Fordism. In this discussion, massification is placed within the larger transformation of the mode of production from manufacturing to service. Rising unemployment, the casualization of the workforce and dramatic changes in the opportunity structure of the labour market are the factors that should push the author toward credentialism as a primary factor. Instead, Scott skirts the issue by focusing on the changing inputs and

outputs of the system. The rise in the educational level of the population clearly contributes to the shift in attitude so that middle class participation in the system is seen as an entitlement rather than an opportunity. At the same time, the participation of women has risen sharply. Scott quite properly draws attention to the potential for social exclusion as the middle class tightens its monopoly on the best jobs. Yet, I think, Scott gets the argument wrong when he concludes that post-industrial change undermines credentialism because the link between graduate and occupational status is not as clear as in the past. Surely the decline in the rate of return, that is, the inflation of credentials, leads to more credentialism.

The last part of Scott's search for explanation focuses on modernity and post-modernity. It is, in my view, the least satisfactory part of the book because he uses less and less evidence as he becomes more abstract. In the last part of Chapter 3 Scott lists the key aspects of modernity that impact on higher education systems. These aspects include acceleration, a different concept of time, a growth in the risk society, more complexity and non-linearity, circularity, reflexivity and individualization. For Scott, "Higher education systems are no longer simply 'knowledge' institutions, reproducing the intellectual and human capital required by industrial society; they are becoming key instruments of the reflexivity which defines the post-industrial (and post-modern) condition" (p. 117). In Chapter 4 "Science and Culture", Scott describes five historical moments of "affinity" or congruence in the role universities have played in the evolution of British culture, the expansion of scientific and technical knowledge, and changing the socio-economic order. Britain is in the middle of the fifth "moment" as higher education settles into mass status and society leaves modernism behind and becomes post-modern. At this stage the reader expects a detailed historical sociology linking the three strands together. Instead little evidence is presented and the argument rests on the presumption that universities have moved from Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons, *et al.*, 1994). As distinct from traditional science, Mode 2 knowledge production has the following characteristics: synoptic not reductionist; in the market; trans-disciplinary; multivariant; open; accountable; and, reflexive. To support

this claim the author points to shifts from departments to frameworks, courses to credits, and subject based teaching to student centred learning.

At various points in the text Scott makes clear how tentative his conclusions must be, given the intensity and recency of change. A key criticism of the book is perhaps that the author asks questions that simply cannot be answered until the system has had time to settle. At another level one is concerned at the use of the Trow typology to refer to systems that fit superficially but not in detail. The spirit of Trow's paper (1973) is that the transition from elite to mass systems marked real progress toward an egalitarian society. To treat the British system as a mass system is surely a misnomer when it is unified in name only and incorporates solid lines of social stratification. What is most interesting, particularly as we can observe the same trends in Canada, is the simultaneous movement toward homogenization and convergence on the one hand, and increased differentiation on the other. It appears that universities in mass systems do become more alike as the least academic experience "academic drift" and the least vocational become more "vocational". At the same time, the number of strata and the status and function lines that separate these strata become clearer.

Scott approaches his task in a rational manner as he tries to explain the paradox of the massive increase in students and the more rapid increase in State funding for higher education as compared to the rest of the public sector during a time when "market ideology" and privatization have been the dominant themes in British politics. The most appealing explanation to this writer centres on the contradictions within the State and the necessary role that education plays in legitimating State policies that appear egalitarian but are, in fact, harbingers of increased inequality. Yet it is probably the case, as one colleague of mine used to say, that the real explanation depends on the truism that politicians when formulating educational policy "never look where they are going." When it comes to education, the short term political prize is usually preferred to planning for and taking into account the long term consequences of current policy.

