

An Ode to Stuart Hall's "The Supply of Demand:" The Case of Post-Secondary Education in Ontario Fifty Years Later

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Abstract

Despite the fact that over fifty years have passed since its publication, Stuart Hall's article "The Supply of Demand" (1960), is remarkably relevant today. The central message that society must not be blinded by 'prosperity' such that it no longer envisions and demands a better world is especially pertinent in light of the continual commodification of post-secondary education in Ontario. Exploring this more fully is the purpose of this paper. Following Hall's general argument in "The Supply of Demand," and using examples from a variety of universities in Ontario, Canada, this paper discusses how rhetoric of prosperity coexists with a discourse of impoverishment in the Ontario post-secondary education system. I argue that this paradoxical discourse is tied to neoliberal reforms and the commodification of education by capital. To support this claim, the 'double speak' of university administrations, involving a discourse of human development, related to the qualitative use value of education, on the one hand, and a discourse of capitalist accumulation, related to 'investment' in capital and exchange value, on the other hand, is discussed; this double speak helps to explain why and how there appears to be, at times, funding for some (prosperity), and yet financial cuts for others (impoverishment). Finally, based upon the analysis, and once again following Hall, it is suggested that in order to change meaningfully our post-secondary education system, we must be critical of 'prosperity,' strive to look beyond it, imagine what could exist, and demand the best of each other and ourselves.

Keywords: Commodification, Stuart Hall, Post-secondary Education, Ontario

While reading Stuart Hall's (1960) "The Supply of Demand," I was deeply struck by how relevant it is, despite the fact that over fifty years have passed since its publication, and despite the fact that we have since transitioned to the intensified form of capital accumulation known as neoliberalism. The central message, that society must not be blinded by 'prosperity' such that it no longer envisions and demands a better world, especially spoke to me in light of the continual commodification of post-secondary education in the province of Ontario, Canada. Exploring this more fully is the purpose of this paper.

In order to honour the original work which so impressed me, I have attempted to follow much of Hall's general argument in "The Supply of Demand," as well as incorporate the essence of the original by borrowing some of the piece's stylistic tendencies, such as Hall's use of wit. My hope is that this reinforces the analysis; if it does so, all credit must be given to Hall.

A final caveat must also be made. I wish to express my positionality, or at least my understanding of my positionality, as it is relevant to the content of this paper. I am a white, female, graduate student at Carleton University, an institution which is central in much of this analysis. I am privileged to be a part of this community, and in no way can it be said that I feel my experience here has been 'bad,' however so defined. In fact, I feel quite the opposite. Thus, when I offer what may be a critical assessment of Carleton University, and of post-secondary education more generally, I want to be clear about my motivation for doing so.

In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman writes, "The problem with most childhoods lived out in households maintained by social class III (manual), IV, and V parents is that they are simply not bad enough to be worthy of attention" (1986, p. 9). Yet, even though Steedman identifies as having grown up in one of these social classes, [1] and therefore as not having a childhood 'bad enough to be worthy of attention,' this is, in fact, the topic of her book. It is in the same vein that I write this. Though my post-secondary education experience, and perhaps the post-secondary education experience of others as well, has not been 'bad,' it does not mean that there is not space to learn from such experiences, and to work towards the creation of a better post-secondary education system in Canada. It is this insight that is the central message in Hall's "The Supply of Demand," and it is in this spirit that I write this piece.

In the past, the policy focus has been on ensuring that those who wanted to go to PSE [post-secondary education] (and had the marks to do so) were able to afford it. Hence the concern with tuition fees, student financial aid and so on. The problem with this approach is that the empirical evidence increasingly shows that affordability is not the most important barrier to PSE. What matters most is that not enough young people want to go – they need to get the idea of PSE in their heads, and early enough so they can prepare, and thus gain the qualifications to be admitted to a program of their choice and the skills required to succeed when they get there.

"Postsecondary Education is a Matter of Mindset, Not Just Money"
Dr. Ross Finnie, *The Globe and Mail*, May 2, 2011

"I think we are vastly over-invested in universities..."
Prime Minister Stephen Harper, September 15, 2000

These passages plunge us deep into the conservative logic regarding post-secondary education in Canada. For, despite the intuitive notion that the rising cost of tuition is a barrier for many students attempting to attain a post-secondary education (not to mention the fact that this rising cost burdens the average Ontario student with an average debt of \$37 000 after a four year bachelor's degree (Canadian Federation of Students Ontario, 2010) – a burden which immediately shackles these same students to often low-paid jobs in order to make interest payments), Dr. Finnie in *The Globe and Mail* challenges this 'nonsense' with empirical data which (apparently) disputes such notions. And although Dr. Finnie feels no need to provide a citation to support such a claim, I can surely rest easy now that I know that socioeconomic (class) barriers are declining. In fact, in light of this 'evidence,' Prime Minister Harper's statement seems especially insightful: perhaps we are 'vastly over-invested in universities' given the fact that finances are no longer the main barrier to entry for students, and worse still, that "not enough young people want to go" to university. To waste such resources on a good, a commodity, that is not desired, is nothing short of ridiculous. The demand is not there, and if it is, apparently class distinctions, historically such a factor in determining who can and cannot realize post-secondary education, are breaking down as socioeconomic barriers dissipate. What miraculous thing could be the cause of this movement away from distinct classes? In a word: 'prosperity.'

The Myth of Prosperity

Over fifty years ago, Hall asked, "In what sense are we prosperous?" He went on to provide numerous examples, such as the ratio of money spent on advertisements versus education, which illustrated 'prosperity' (1960, p. 59). If I pose the same question now, in the context of post-secondary education in Canada, the answers are surprisingly similar.

In what sense is the post-secondary education community prosperous? Certainly if measured in terms of spending/funding, prosperity is undeniable. For instance, the 2013 Federal Government Budget continued the promised 3% increase in transfers to provinces for post-secondary education (Government of Canada, 2013). Ignoring the fact that this does not cover the increased costs due to inflation and higher enrolment (Higher enrolment? Dr. Finnie, you told us that students did not want to pursue post-secondary education!), and that "the principal additional allocation for post-secondary education is specifically \$19 million over two years for marketing certain fields the government deems important, \$10 million for international marketing to attract foreign students, and \$13 million for summer university-industry internships" (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2013), funding is increasing– this is prosperity. Furthermore, while there was a momentary bump in the road when the post-secondary education community saw the slashing of funds for the leading Canadian research granting councils, no need to fear– prosperity reigns! For, in 2013, \$37 million was restored to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, with only the small stipulation that 80% of this money be

used to fund research focused on the needs of private industry (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2013). If these numbers do not impress you enough, prepare to be awed with a particular example of prosperity from my own academic community, Carleton University. In 2013, a \$22.5 million parking garage construction project began at Carleton University (Singh, 2013). Nevermind the fact that there was simultaneously a 3% increase in tuition costs at Carleton for students; as Carleton President Roseann O'Reilly Runte noted, "Everybody says tuition is high, things cost money... Well, and I can't do anything about things costing money. When the prices go up, I have to pay for it... [and I cannot expect governments] to turn around and give us a lot more money" (Singh, 2013). Obviously, as construction of the monstrous concrete garage marches on, certain things must take priority 'when prices go up.'

This last example is of particular importance, and corresponds to a point that Hall made in 1960. Amidst rhetoric of prosperity and times of plenty, Hall noted that "the government has convinced us that 'we simply cannot afford' many... things" (p. 61). Change 'government' to 'Carleton administration,' and the parallel is undeniable.

A peruse around the Carleton website highlights the pervasiveness of this contradictory message. On the page 'A Message from the President,' President Runte talks about how "students are truly VIPs on the Carleton campus, "and highlights many positive aspects of the student experience at Carleton (Carleton University, 2014). President Runte's statement insinuates that the university provides a plenitude of wealth, both academically and socially, for the student body. Yet a few clicks of the mouse later and I find myself on the Blog of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Dr. John Osborne, who writes:

One of the worst things about being the dean of a vibrant Faculty is that th[e] wonderful ideas invariably require considerable amounts of money and/or space to implement, and the expectation is that you will magically conjure up the necessary resources, somewhere, somehow. And if what is required is a few hundred or a few thousand dollars on a "one time only" basis, then that may indeed be possible ... even after four consecutive years of cuts to the Faculty's base budget. But if we are talking faculty or staff positions, each representing a long-term multi-million dollar commitment by the institution, then the odds of success are slim to none. (Carleton University, 2013)

This is a vastly different message than the previous one: it appears that Carleton cannot afford to pay for faculty and staff positions. Yet, faculty and staff directly enhance the student experience in a myriad of ways. For instance, dynamic professors often serve as role models to students, staff members are crucial academic advisors in terms of career counselling and in helping students navigate the murky waters of administrative issues, and supplementary services, including IT and library services, rely on a strong staff network to function smoothly. Thus, on the one hand, the Carleton administration asserts that the student experience is exceptional, while on the other hand, they argue that they cannot afford to pay for crucial components of said education experience (i.e. faculty). As Hall so aptly wrote years ago, "How can we say, on the

one hand, that there are so many good things ‘which we cannot afford,’ and yet assert that ‘we have never had it so good’? It does not make sense” (1960, p. 62).

Such paradoxical discourse is not unique to Carleton University, but is prevalent in universities across Ontario. For instance, the University of Toronto’s document, *A Long-term Planning Framework for the University of Toronto* (2008), states that the university administration plans to “focus on the experiences of students, inside and outside the institution’s classrooms” through a variety of methods, including the renovation of existing infrastructure, the creation of “additional opportunities for students to learn and undergo personal growth outside the classroom,” and the “enhance[ment of] student financial aid” (p. 4). Yet a mere two pages later, the same document states:

The University faces serious financial pressures in the short- and longer-term. These pressures could lead to further increases in student-faculty and student-staff ratios with adverse effects on the University’s educational and research capacity as well as the experience of its students. (University of Toronto, 2008, p. 6)

The promise to enhance the student experience is immediately diminished by the message that a shortage of financial resources will adversely affect students in the future. In other words, students can apparently look forward to upcoming positive changes at their institution, while at the same time, they should be prepared for a decrease in the quality of their educational experience because the university is struggling under financial strain. Perhaps most concerning of all, these contradictory messages have made their way into the same document, indicating how normalized such nonsensical discourse has become.

Similarly, the University of Waterloo identifies ‘the student experience’ as one of its eight themes, or areas of strength. Its website further states that over the next four years:

Waterloo will enrich the student experience with a student-focused approach to services. The university will expand the range of experiences, programs and supports designed to develop student potential, and build a stronger sense of community connection for students both on and off campus. (University of Waterloo, 2013c)

However, a brief look back over the past ten or so years shows a disturbing trend. In 2002-03, the student to faculty ratio was 24.3:1, and 42.3% (\$131.4 M) of the operating budget came from tuition fees (University of Waterloo, 2005). For 2013, that same ratio has increased to 31:1, and 49.8% (\$307.7 M) of the operating budget source is tuition fees (University of Waterloo, 2013a; 2013b). It appears that over time, students are contributing more to the overall operating budget, and are being rewarded with a poorer student to faculty ratio (a trend that the Ontario division of the Canadian Federation of Students (2010) notes is evident across all universities in Ontario, which boasts the worst student: faculty ratio in Canada, 15% higher than elsewhere in the

country). And unless this trend reverses drastically, Waterloo's commitment to better the student experience is far less meaningful than it appears to be.

How Did this Happen?

For one who qualifies, a university education is perhaps the best investment a young person can make in her future. Estimates of the private return to a university degree in Canada and elsewhere regularly top 10%. University graduates also benefit in non-financial ways. Apart from pure consumption value, which is difficult to quantify, they enjoy better health and spend less time in jail. This suggests that university students should be willing to pay the costs of this investment, if necessary by borrowing the money, just as they would pay to invest in any other asset.

Grants for Students: Equal Access to Post-Secondary Education Requires More Than a Student Loan Program (Dr. Lorne Carmichael and Dr. Ross Finnie, May 2008)

“The only thing that interferes with my learning is my education”

Dr. Albert Einstein, date unknown

To understand how the education system became stuck in such a paradoxical discourse, Hall's “The Supply of Demand” once again provides illumination. As our post-secondary education continues to be affected by neoliberal reform, the structure changes, so that the priorities of the education system morph into the priorities of capitalism. Thus, as Hall stated, “it is capitalism that sets the priorities: and the priorities accurately reflect the inner contradictions of capitalism itself: the contradiction between production for *profit* and production for *use*” (1960, p. 67).

To claim that the education system is now inherently motivated by the production of profit rather than production for use may seem somewhat problematic. For, despite the political-economic issues that may arise within post-secondary education administrations, an education can, and does, produce use value, in that students learn skills that they can use. But this is only half the picture. For, the production of these use values is increasingly directed toward a specific goal: the production of profit. This is demonstrated, first and foremost, by the fact that these use values, the skills and knowledge that students gain through a university education, and which inform our approach to social life and thereby shape our social relations, are almost inevitably exchanged in the labour market. Effectively, this transforms the use value of education into exchange value.

At the state level, more and more frequently, as mentioned above, funding is allocated to post-secondary institutions by the government with the explicit condition that said funding be used to conduct research that will benefit industry (and thereby capital) directly. Funding also tends to be available for those disciplines and departments that are seen as having the greater capacity to contribute to the production of capital. To illustrate, a quick look at the Carleton University budget for 2012-2013 shows that the allocation of funds for the Faculty of Arts and Social

Sciences was approximately \$1 836 000, while the allocation for the Sprott School of Business was \$346 000 (Carleton University, 2012). The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences offers 28 distinct programs, while the Sprott School of Business offers 4. If one divides the allocated resources in terms of programs within these two faculties, the average dollar amount of resources per program in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences is approximately \$65 571.43, while the same average for programs in the Sprott School of Business is approximately \$86 500.00. I realize that this brief calculation does not capture the complete picture, nor can it speak to how the funds are actually divided up within each Faculty. However, an average difference of more than \$20 000 in funding for business programs as compared to art and social science programs is suggestive, and coincides with the continual decrease in funding for research initiatives that monitor climate and environmental change, food and water quality, and environmental and public health issues under the Harper conservative government (Davison 2012). (In other words, any projects that may prove to be obstacles for the accumulation of capital: Beware the ‘Silence of the Labs!’) [2]

This focus on production for profit rather than use is further exemplified through certain university-industry partnerships, none of which are more concerning than McMaster Innovation Park at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. McMaster Innovation Park is an initiative to bring together researchers at the university level and businesses across Canada so as to establish and develop projects commercializing research. (Yes – the commercialization of research is, in fact, the primary task as stated in the McMaster Innovation Park Mission Statement.) The goal of this initiative is to open “channels of opportunity for business growth,” emphasized by the home page banner, which proudly displays the slogan “Co-locate. Connect. Commercialize.” (McMaster Innovation Park, 2011a). [3]

The ‘partnership’ between the university and the business world [4] that is facilitated by McMaster Innovation Park is even more concerning when the messages above are compared to McMaster University’s mission statement:

At McMaster, our purpose is the discovery, communication, and preservation of knowledge. In our teaching, research, and scholarship, we are committed to creativity, innovation, and excellence. We value integrity, quality, and teamwork in everything we do. We inspire critical thinking, personal growth, and a passion for learning. We serve the social, cultural, and economic needs of our community and our society. (McMaster University, 2014)

According to this statement, the expansion of capital (specifically through commercialization) is not a university priority, and while economic activity is mentioned, it is clear that the focus is on supporting the economic needs of the people. Ironically, the statement also celebrates critical thinking– of which very little seems to have been used when establishing McMaster Innovation Park. Yet, this illustrates my point well: while post-secondary education administrations assert that the production of use values (skills that students can use to benefit society as a whole) is

their main goal, the way in which the production of these values is organized, as demonstrated by partnerships between universities and industry like this one, is clearly meant to sculpt educational use values into marketable exchange values, and to contribute to the pursuit of capital expansion.

A final case further supports my claim that in Ontario universities, the current focus is on production for profit rather than production for use. Responding to the Government of Ontario's 2005 *Reaching Higher* initiative and its 2011 *Putting Students First* plan, both of which commit to expanding graduate education, a 2012 report by the Council of Ontario Universities proposes a set of principles to help guide and facilitate these government plans. Upon first glance, these principles appear neutral with respect to supporting capital expansion. For instance, the report calls for a transparent process whereby financial allocations are made to all Ontario universities, and it advocates for flexibility and fungibility between and across all graduate programs (Council of Ontario Universities, 2012, p. 2). However, upon closer inspection, it is evident that the central theme of this document is ensuring that the government's financial resources benefit capital.

Claiming that the “quality of graduate education is crucial to maintaining and improving Ontario's position in the global education market, and to support[ing] Ontario's economy,” the report suggests that fungibility and maximum flexibility be allowed between programs so that universities can offer and deliver graduate programs that “reflect demand” (p. 5). This demand, it is important to note, is based first and foremost on market demand (p. 6). Stating that “graduates of advanced research and professional programs in the province develop skills that are not only required in the current marketplace, but are also necessary to innovate and create future enterprises” (p. 3), the report further argues that graduate programs are necessary to “create the jobs of tomorrow and propel Ontario's economy into the future” (p. 4). The report also happily explains that “as newly graduated graduate students join the workforce, they are not only able to contribute higher taxes to the province, but also to develop businesses that provide employment and economic benefits” (p. 4). Thus, hidden behind the principle of flexibility and fungibility is a call for investment in programs that facilitate capital flow and expansion. Flexibility is not valued because a variety of academic disciplines and types of scholarship contribute to a diverse, robust, and critical development of knowledge as a whole, but rather, flexibility is beneficial as it acts as a disguise for channeling resources to programs that correspond to market demand and that benefit capital. Apparently, this is the main and most useful result of graduate education to society at large. [5]

Finally, the report also argues for an increase in funding to attract international students to Ontario graduate programs. The reason? International students “contribute to Ontario's economy while they study here and after completing their studies” (p. 4). All in all, the message is clear:

investing in higher education is great, as long as it is invested in a way which benefits markets, industry, and capital.

With this focus on capital expansion and profit, rather than use value, the ‘investment’ discourse that Dr. Carmichael and Dr. Finnie demonstrate above is becoming more prevalent. Education is no longer directly about the use value that you obtain through learning, critical thinking, and problem solving. It is an investment, with a private return, just like any other financial capital, [6] and students are no longer students; they are the investors, the customers, the consumers. As Dr. Einstein’s quote suggests, in today’s post-secondary education system, the use value that is obtained through learning must first overcome the obstacles presented by education the commodity.

The Process at Work

In order for this transformation from student to consumer to be widespread, people “have to be massed in some way to become ‘available’” (Hall, 1960, p. 84). Hall wrote that “audiences are ‘won,’ readers ‘captured,’ the electorate ‘convinced’” (p. 84) and certainly, one could add, the potential student secured. Advertisements and marketing are crucial components of the post-secondary industry now. Between school fairs, television commercials, websites, and more, students are bombarded with an ‘image’ of a university. With catch phrases like ‘the capital advantage,’ (Carleton University, Ottawa, ON) ‘this is my time,’ (York University, Toronto, ON) ‘Canada’s University’ (University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON) and ‘this is the moment’ (Brock University, Toronto, ON) (what do they even mean?), students are *persuaded to shop* for a university, in the same vein that consumers shop for detergents on a shelf.

Everything in our world is changing—the way we communicate, the way we learn, the way we work. In today’s world, you need an education that is anything but textbook. Welcome to Carleton University, Canada’s Capital University. Carleton offers a world of educational opportunities... With access to co-operative education options in over eighty of our programs, streams, and concentrations, and student exchange opportunities in more than thirty countries, you can explore career options and explore the world. And finally, with a degree from Carleton, you’ll join a global network with over 100 000 graduates, and be prepared to take advantage of what the working world has to offer. Put yourself in the centre of today’s world of opportunity. Come join us at Carleton University. (*Discover Carleton University’ Video*)

If you consider the excerpt from a Carleton University advertisement presented above, you can see the process at work. This process, of selling education to students (consumers?) is central to the goal of profit production in the post-secondary education sector. ‘Everything is changing,’ the advertisement warns; you need to keep up! How can you do this? Only through education of course (and a unique education at that- unique how, you may ask? ‘Anything but textbook,’ the administration responds). Welcome to Carleton; you, the masses, are welcome here. A world of opportunity awaits, opportunities like co-ops (no additional information necessary). You too can

join the status of the 100 000 graduates, you too can ‘put yourself in the centre of today’s world of opportunity,’ but only if you come to Carleton. Carleton will guide you towards the life you always dreamed of. Prosperity is yours, if only you come to Carleton University.

Hall’s analysis, while written in response to another quotation, is also applicable to this Carleton advertisement (and others like it by universities across Canada). Hall argued that what this discourse does is:

Capture the natural aspirations of ordinary people to improve their material circumstances, and reduce it to a form of social envy and status seeking. The media of information are constantly using up the direct sentiments and emotions of people, projecting into our lives normative and desirable values, often with a commercial twist. (1960, p. 90)

The desires that people have to create a better life is taken advantage of here, as the advertisement implicitly suggests that Carleton can give this to you, by preparing you for work (and here’s the rub: will this work, really, give you a better life?). You can become a part of something, be someone (achieve a status), if you go to Carleton University. And the real thing that is in question, the use value of a quality education, is no longer a direct concern. Instead, prosperity and success is judged in relation to the exchange value of the education (labour skills) one receives. Now, you are capital, you must be invested in, and then you can go out into the working world and circulate, producing more capital. Let Carleton give you this life.

Successful students are balanced students. They know there is more to the university experience than marks and assignments. That, no matter how dedicated they are, they balance work and play, study time and extracurricular activities. Queen’s will help you find your balance. Looking for a way to get involved with others? Want to make a difference, locally or globally? Need to recharge your spiritual batteries or just blow off some steam? There’s a group to join, someone to talk to, or a team to play with. We also support your health and wellness. We create a welcoming living and learning environment and help you boost your school performance. All part of making sure you succeed. And Queen’s wants you to succeed. (*Queen’s University 2014 Viewbook*)

Queen’s University utilizes a slightly different tactic, but one that is no less problematic. Attempting to capitalize on the idea that students often wish to be engaged in extra-curricular activities, and develop themselves beyond their identities as students, the 2014 Viewbook affirms that a well-rounded or ‘balanced’ life is key to success. However, with some of the highest tuition fees in Ontario (Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada, 2014), such emphasis on extra-curricular activities is misleading. The reality for many students is that in order to attend university, they must work to pay for tuition, books, and living and travel expenses. Balancing work and school, then, is a challenge in and of itself (is this ‘the balance’ that Queen’s will help you find?). Balancing work, school, and extra-curricular activities is often impossible.

This type of advertising portrays the student as an individual with the time and resources to partake in social and political activities, spiritual development, and physical recreation. Conveniently, it leaves out the student-worker (or sadly, the worker-student). Yet, it is often only as a worker that people can become students (education-consumers) in the first place. In this way, these types of advertising obfuscate the fact that post-secondary education, with its immense and ever-increasing tuition fees, first and foremost is concerned with students as consumers (that is, only after tuition is paid can you ‘be’ a student). Advertisements like this create a façade of the ‘student experience,’ one that rarely reflects the reality, while simultaneously hiding the fact that monetary relations govern the world of post-secondary education.

Combatting Apathy and Hall’s Political Project: Towards a Better Education System/World

It is the mythology of prosperity which induces apathy; and we had better get to grips with this at once.

Stuart Hall, “The Supply of Demand,” 1960, p. 59

In so far, then, as the ‘ladders of success’ and the notion of ‘getting on’ in its bourgeois form do reach into working-class life, and we use education and other social processes to clamber over one another, so the ‘springs of action’ in the working-class communities, new or old, are weakened. If education is simply, as *The Sunday Times* puts it, a series of ‘Ladders of Opportunity,’ then we shall have yielded up one of our central values – the concept that education is to enlarge our capacities as people – and taken over a more meretricious attitude towards education, as a process for personal advancement, another form of status-striving.

Stuart Hall, “The Supply of Demand,” 1960, p. 94

Hall’s task of uncovering the myth of prosperity and how this myth is (re)produced, is, most importantly of all, a political project. This project seeks to shake apathy from the working class consciousness, and warns the working class of the dangerous pacification that occurs when lured by capital’s myth of prosperity. By exploring the ways in which use value is transformed into exchange value and how market logic tricks us into feeling that we, as consumers (“the folk-hero of corporate capitalism”), are ‘free’ to decide all aspects of our lives (for “before the bargain counter, we are all equal”), Hall’s analysis seeks to illuminate how “we have drifted into an acceptance of the disquieting mythologies of prosperity” (p. 71):

The society was forced, by the very driving pressure from the consumer industries themselves, as they began to be the providers of life and the givers of good things, to think of prosperity almost entirely in terms of the things which it could purchase, possess, and enjoy as private individuals. We had entered, as separate consumers, directly into the mythology of prosperity. “Prosperity” had become much more a question of how people could be made to see themselves (in terms of their generalised feelings about how things worked) and much less a solid affair of genuine wealth and well-being. (p. 73)

Hall's "The Supply of Demand" is thus a warning against this mythology of prosperity, and a call to (re)awaken the political imagination and (re)claim our critical awareness of the ways in which the capitalist mode of production encroaches on all aspects of our lives. This paper seeks to take up this task in the context of post-secondary education in Ontario, Canada, today.

The double speak of universities explored in the preceding sections involves two discourses: that of human development and that of capitalist accumulation. On the one hand, the advertisements and marketing techniques used by universities often discuss how post-secondary education can help the student develop as a human, as a fulfilled and flourishing member of society. Encouraging students to become involved in extra-curricular activities that allow them to 'give-back' to their communities and promoting how education can provide opportunities that will allow students to pursue the life of their dreams appeals to the human desire for personal development and growth. However, the simultaneous deployment of investment discourse, and the equation of the enhancement of life with work opportunities more generally, clearly deploys the logic of capitalist accumulation, in which a meaningful life revolves around the social relations of capitalism, the selling of labour power and the accumulation of capital. Most dangerously of all is the fact that the human development discourse can serve as a disguise for the capitalist discourse. By appealing to notions of human development, and the desire for a life of 'prosperity,' but simultaneously equating such development and prosperity with the entrenchment of capitalist social relations, the education industry does not, as Hall wrote, "to any significant extent, give us the goods: instead, it g[ives] us the definition of the Good Life" (p. 74), the life of capital. The fact that since 1995 (and despite the fact of growing tuition fees and dwindling possibilities for employment post-graduation) enrollment at Canadian universities has increased by over 57% (Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada, 2010) suggests that more students are buying into the obfuscation created by this double speak. It is my hope that this analysis helps demystify this dual discourse, and encourages both potential and current students to think critically about the purpose of post-secondary education, to consider what they hope to gain from such pursuits, and to interrogate how these discourses attempt to create neoliberal student/consumers so as to lure them into the folds of 'prosperity,' thereby producing the apathetic working class attitude that is necessary to prevent "the conscious movement towards socialism" (Hall 1960, 94).

At the same time, this analysis is not meant to negate totally post-secondary institutions, nor Carleton University (my academic home) specifically. In the wise words of Hall: "there have been gains as well as losses" (p. 93). Services such as Carleton University's Learning Support Services, the Centre for Aboriginal Culture and Education, and various equity services enhance the educational experience of the student body, and are becoming prominent features in universities across Canada. Even things such as improved infrastructure, like Carleton's parking garage project, contribute to student well-being. Most importantly of all, universities are home to many dedicated faculty who encourage their students (myself included) to think critically about

systems of domination, oppression, and exploitation. These same faculty expose us to the possibilities of alternative futures in which the whole of society is better, and encourage us to consider what we can do to contribute to the realization of such alternative worlds.

So, in these ways, we are prospering. Yet, as Hall wrote, “we are often so mesmerised by [prosperity] that we cannot get far enough away to take an overall look” (p. 66), and as a result, “we rarely throw ourselves beyond the limits of what exists, and ask questions about what could exist” (p. 60). That is the point of this paper.

Perhaps it is not the most detrimental thing that education is ‘a series of ladders of opportunity’ in bourgeois form; perhaps not all of the changes that have been made to the post-secondary education system are negative. But everything is relative. It may not be the worst thing that our attitude towards education is that we view it ‘as a process for personal advancement,’ particularly in the economic sense, but is it possible that education is valuable beyond the market? Do we want a post-secondary education system that more directly reflects the car market than a network of institutions fostering critical thinking and learning? Do we want a post-secondary education system that uses terms like ‘investment’ and ‘private return,’ to describe the value of the learning process? Do we want a post-secondary education system which continues to see tuition increases, thereby reinforcing class divisions? Or do we want something better?

At the end of “The Supply of Demand,” Hall asserted that “the task for socialism is to take up, in a concrete way, and give political expression to the ‘best that is in us’” (p. 95). Whether you believe in socialism or not, is it not time for us to demand a better education system, to demand the best of each other, and to demand the best of ourselves? Is it not time that we convince students that they are not merely consumers, that, instead, they ought to be part of a learning society? I believe so, and I thank Stuart Hall for reminding me of this.

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Notes

[1] This is the British classification system. Social class III is defined as manual and non-manual skilled occupations, social class IV is partly skilled occupations, and social class V is unskilled occupations. These three social classes, therefore, refer broadly to the working class, as opposed to social class I, which is defined as professional occupations, and social class II, which includes both managerial and technical occupations (Rose 1995). Steedman specifically identifies herself as having growing up in a household defined by a social class III (manual) parent; her father was an untrained heating engineer (1986, 56).

[2] This trend has been coined the “Silence of the Labs” and/or the “Death of Evidence” by popular media. For an overview of the situation, please see *The Fifth Estate*, “Silence of the Labs,” episode 10, (originally aired January 10, 2014), available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/fifth/episodes/2013-2014/the-silence-of-the-labs>. This claw back in resources is in addition to the media policy, put in place in 2008, which ensures that an interview with a scientist who is funded by the Federal government can only occur if consent is first obtained from government officials. Furthermore, the long-form census database, a key source of data for many researchers and research institutions, including Statistics Canada, has been shut down under the Harper government (CBC 2014). In these ways, the government also censors (certain) scientific results and data from reaching the public (Canadian Science Writers Association 2011).

[3] McMaster Innovation Park is not the only project of this kind in Canada. For instance, The University of Manitoba has Smartpark, where industry can establish joint projects with university affiliated researchers, and which

is located just a stone's throw from campus. Some 'clients' of Smartpark include Monsanto Canada Inc., Emergent BioSolutions, ProfitMaster Canada, and Genome Prairie (University of Manitoba 2014).

[4] As a sample of the types of industry involved in this project, the Board of Directors includes individuals with either current or previous affiliations with companies like Bank of Montreal, O.R.E. Development Corporation (a part of Opus Group), Eli Lilly and Company (one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies), Xerox, and Lumira Capital.

[5] As an afterthought, the report does briefly acknowledge that "the benefits of graduate education extend beyond its impact on economy.... [by] producing education citizens who can promote and defend democratic values and ideals" (4). However, after this brief statement, this 'minor' benefit is not explored more fully.

[6] The Council of Ontario Universities provides an illuminating fact sheet on the return on investment of post-secondary education, including facts such as "Ontario university graduates earn approximately 32% more annually than those with a college certificate or diploma, and 53% more than those with no postsecondary education," which apparently demonstrate that education is "an investment worth making" (2011).

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