

## Chapter 2

# Education as Critique—‘Un-thinking’ Education

**Abstract** This chapter asks—what can we learn from Foucault the teacher, the intellectual? How can we use Foucault to uneducate ourselves? It answers that we are invited to learn an attitude, a method, a relation to our own historicity, and our existence within and in relation to power. We are invited to learn the possibility of modifying our relation to our self and to our mode of existence. It is also made clear that this is an ‘ethics of discomfort’ or a form of ‘ethical violence’.

**Keywords** Limit-attitude • Ethics • Self-formation • Genealogy • Critique

I am not a writer, a philosopher, a great figure of intellectual life: I am a teacher (Foucault 1988c, p. 9)

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. To change something in the minds of people – that’s the role of an intellectual. (Foucault 1988c, p. 9)

So I ask in this chapter—what can we learn from Foucault the teacher, the intellectual? How can we use Foucault to uneducate ourselves? What I answer is that we are invited to learn an attitude, a method, a relation to our own historicity, and our existence within and in relation to power. We are invited to learn the possibility of modifying our relation to our self and to our mode of existence. That is, to understand our constitution within power/knowledge, our fabrication; and thus we learn the limits of ourselves, and thus our revocability—the historical ontology of ourselves. This is an ‘ethics of discomfort’ or as Butler (2005) calls it a form of ‘ethical violence’.

To rebel against our educational present we must explore its perversions, its cynicisms. We should disabuse ourselves of our well-meaning but shallow commitments. To resist, we must become uncomfortable. This resistance will be an excoriating experience, where those who rebel feel ill at ease in their skin. (Allen 2014, p. 250)

What this rebellion involves is a destabilization, a challenge to everything that makes us what we are, without any of the comforts of another way of being—that ‘other’ remains ‘undefined’. The point is that ‘we must recognize that there is an outside, that we have limits, that we are finite’ (Falzon 1998 p. 34). This is what Hook (2007, p. 3) calls a ‘de-theorising project’ aimed not at the construction of a grand theory of power but an analysis of its ‘experiential force and logic’ (ibid.). Nonetheless, in relation to this, we also learn the possibility of freedom, or perhaps the possibility of constructing a space to think about ways we might be free; we can also learn to struggle, we can learn how not to be governed that way, using the arts of ‘voluntary insubordination’ (see Chap. 3). This is modest yet momentous, in the sense that it requires us to question our own validity, to give up on essentialism and fixity and ‘restore to things their mobility, their possibility of being modified’ (Foucault 2016, p. 129).

This chapter will change emphasis from analytics to critique, from the apparent inevitability of domination, to the possibilities of deconstruction and troubling, and the next chapter takes this further by considering the practicalities of *self-formation*. Specifically in this chapter I will try to find my way among a set of relationships which animate and underpin some of Foucault’s key intellectual tools: *critique*, *genealogy*, *the limit attitude*, *refusal*, *transgression and freedom*. In an interview given in the USA in 1980 Foucault outlines the three elements of what he calls his morals, which are a form of critical practice and an orientation to refusal and the possibility of being different.

In a sense, I am a moralist, insofar as I believe that one of the tasks, one of the meanings of human existence—the source of human freedom—is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile. No aspect of reality should be allowed to become a definitive and inhuman law for us. (Foucault 1988b)

Fundamental to this task and the attitude in which it is grounded is an attempt to forge a different relation to power and to ourselves. The elements are ‘(1) the refusal to accept as self-evident the things that are proposed to us; (2) the need to analyse and to know, since we can accomplish nothing without reflection and understanding—thus, the principle of curiosity; and (3) the principle of innovation; to seek out in our reflection those things that have never been thought or imagined’ (Ibid.). This highlights Hook’s point that ‘Foucault’s most vital contribution ... is less that of a theorist than that of a methodologist’ (2007, p. 3)—methods of critique and methods of self-formation. Foucault offers not solutions, not transcendental or analytic verities, but practices.

The chapter will also consider genealogy and critique as an educational form, as a way of learning about how the world is made up, of understanding that things we take for granted have histories, of developing a sense that we might be other than who and what we seem. This is education as a form of politics. Following Butler (2006, p. 114), Youdell (2011, p. 28) points out that ‘we might conceptualise the “cross cutting modalities of life” (Butler 1997), through which we are made meaningful to ourselves and to others and across which political struggles might be pursued’. Genealogy and critique also offer the potential for a re-politicisation of

everyday life (Clarke 2012, p. 298), the re-opening to question of taken for granted and naturalised concepts, practices, relations and social arrangements. In education this might mean recognising the political force of issues like standards and accountability, ability, special educational needs, that are presented by pedagogues and policymakers in relation to practice, as matters of common sense or technical efficiency, foregrounding their disparity and power-effects, denaturalising the categories that organise and define our experience and make us what we are. Teaching and learning, the teacher and student, what it means to be educated are set into history, placed under doubt, subjected to sabotage and disruption. This takes us into a worrying, indeed frightening space in which we must ‘un-think’ education and recognise as fragile and contingent many of our modernist certainties—a space where knowledge is uncertain, truth is unstably linked to power, and our intelligibility is constantly in question.

Education and truth become de-coupled, indeed they become agonistic. We must accept that: ‘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’ (Foucault 1980b, p. 131). In one of the many re-renderings of his intellectual project, in the Preface to *The Use of Pleasure (The History of Sexuality Vol. 2)*, Foucault describes his primary concern has having been focused on developing a ‘history of truth’; with three main aspects. (1) An analysis of ‘games of truth’—those systems of discourse that developed to produce truth. (2) The relation of these to power. (3) The relation of these to the self. This is another version of the three vectors (truth, power and subjectivity) discussed in Chap. 1. Gutting nicely contrasts Foucault’s concern to put truth to the test with the ‘unconditional love of truth’ that is embedded in traditional philosophy (2005, p. 109) and we might add, traditional education. Foucault’s orientation to truth is however developed somewhat different in his final body of work (see Chap. 3).

## Critique

For Foucault then critique is an attitude or philosophical ethos and a form of engagement that combines outrage with limit-testing and careful scholarship. The point is to:

criticise the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them. (Foucault 1974, p. 171)

In other words, to criticise is to think about the ways in which current structures construct and constrain our possible modes of action and being. At its heart this is a curiosity towards the arts of being governed and thus the possibilities of refusal and innovation. However, the project of critique is not a particular and specific set of actions it is a permanent orientation of scepticism, it is ‘a mode of relating to

contemporary reality’ (in Rabinow 1987, p. 39). In relation to this, Foucault studiously avoids the prescription of particular actions that should be employed in order to escape or oppose the phenomena of being governed. Instead, he asserts that criticism is comprised of ‘analyzing and reflecting upon limits’ (ibid., p. 45). It is ‘the art of voluntary insubordination, and a practice of reflective intractability’ (ibid., p. 32).

This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a limit-attitude. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative; we have to be at the frontiers. (ibid., p. 45)

This is a form of liminal analysis, a stance of liminality that eshews modernist binaries and grand utopian gestures, and abstract formulations of freedom. Rather, Foucault writes of specific transformations in ‘our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity or illness’ (Foucault 1997c, p. 316). This requires ‘the correlation of historical analysis and the practical attitude, to the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century’. This is not ‘a theory, a doctrine’ or the articulation of a body of knowledge, but ‘the critique of what we are’ and ‘the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them’ (Foucault 1997c, p. 306).

There is a duality here, as is often the case, Foucault took up a double, or paradoxical position in relation to the Enlightenment. On the one hand, drawing positively from Kant, the critical attitude, as a form of ethical practice is about our relation to ourselves, and what we have become, as much as it is to something that is outside of ourselves. It is a form of disentanglement, a leverage of critique to open up opportunities for limit-testing. It is an attitude to the present which he termed a *philosophical ethos*. On the other hand, Foucault understands the Enlightenment as the age that paved the way for *the sciences of man* and the oppressions of rationality. That is, as discussed in the previous chapter, the sciences of discipline and normalization, of surveillance and control of bodies and souls, of marginalization and exclusion of the deviant, the abnormal, the insane. Here reason is not a neutral stance but rather ‘a history of dogmatism and despotism a reason, consequently, which can only have an effect of emancipation on condition that it manages to liberate itself from itself [...] Reason as despotic enlightenment’ (Rabinow 1987). In other words, he sought to radicalize Kant (Olssen 2003), to replace Kant’s universalism with a principle of permanent contingency, to recognise the historically contingent character of all truth claims and thus make critique the ‘historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying’ (Rabinow 1987, p. 46). Clearly, education is entangled in all of this, as a vehicle for reason and for its despotism; as a site of truth and its violence.

But let us back up a little here. How did we get here? We need to understand all of this as a new form of politics in relation to Foucault’s conceptualization of truth, founded on his outline of a genealogy of power and articulated within some significant shifts over time in his thinking in relation to power. In introducing the

College de France lecture series of 1976—(Foucault 2004), he spoke, in his rather disarming and disingenuous way, about changing direction and moving on from what he described as ‘making no progress’ in his previous work, indeed he described his work to that date as ‘all leading nowhere. It’s all repetitive, and it doesn’t add up ... Its all getting into something of an inextricable tangle’. From this ‘inextricable tangle’ he begins to outline a major move away from an emphasis on power as domination to power as constitution. After *Discipline and Punish* there appears to be a dual focus to his work with one aspect concerned with the genealogy of the state and political rationalities (e.g. *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2010) and the other with the genealogy of the subject and concomitantly the problem of ethics (e.g. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 2005). These are connected up both analytically and in a very practical way within the arts of government and specifically those ‘points of contact’ between technologies of domination and technologies of the self, forms of power and processes of *subjectification*. In general terms, the state and the subject (in all the senses of the word) codetermine each other’s emergence (Lecture 8 February 1978).

My general project over the past few years has been, to reverse the mode of analysis followed by the discourse of right from the time of the Middle Ages. With the aim, therefore to invert it, to give due weight, that is, to the fact of domination, to expose both its latent nature and its brutality. (Foucault 1980c)

There is, for Foucault, a concomitant refocusing of politics in relation to the genealogy of power.

Let us how things work at the level of on-going at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. In other words, rather than ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that are gradually, really and materially through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, desires, etc. (1980, p. 97)

What he argues in effect is that the politics of power has been focused in the wrong place, on the wrong target, that is on the abstract state, rather than on the flows of power invested in our everyday lives and immediate and intimate relations. That is, rather than focus on power as having ‘a single center’ and ‘general mechanisms’ or ‘overall effects’, if we want to understand power we should be ‘looking at its extremities, at its outer limits at the point where it becomes capillary’ (Foucault 1982b, p. 27). This shift leads to a different materiality of power, to a preoccupation with ‘the bodies that are constituted as subjects by power-effects’ (Ibid., p. 29). Foucault’s philosophical endeavour becomes reoriented to the investigation of the modalities in which discourse and practices have turned human beings into subjects of particular kinds (Marshall 1990).

Here then the individual is the site of power, the point at which it is enacted or resisted/refused (Mills 2003) but never confronted in an absolute sense as some external force, rather engaged within multiple ‘strategic skirmishes’ aimed at its multiple points of application. The issue is one of recognising and unpicking the multi-faceted and multifarious relations of power. Again, in respect to all of this, Foucault uses key words with a dual meaning, the term *subject* has a two-fold

meaning, it is systematically ambiguous, both implying being tied ‘to someone else by control or dependence’, and to ‘one’s own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge’ (1982, p. 212). The ‘equivocal nature’ of such terms, Foucault says, ‘is one of the best aides in coming to terms with the specificity of power’ (Foucault 1982a). The crucial point arising from all of it is that subjectivity is the *point of contact*, a site of articulation, between self and power.

In this move in the conceptualization and history of power, Foucault sought to ‘cut off the head of the king’ (1979, p. 89) and following from this, as (Dean 1994b, p. 156) puts it, he asks ‘How is it possible that this headless body behaves *as if* it indeed had a head’. The politics of all of this is that the conception of power is the basis for the struggle against it. This opens up a move beyond ‘docile bodies’. Power is a generative mechanism but no particular manifestation of power is inevitable. Freedom concerns the will to exercise power differently. That is, the individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. To confront power we must address our relation to ourselves, and our immediate social relations. ‘Everyone has their own Gulag, the Gulag is here at our door, in our cities, our hospitals, our prisons, its here in our heads’ (Foucault 1977b). Walzer (1988, p. 199) captures this succinctly ‘We must study the sites where power is physically administered and physically endured or resisted’. Foucault seeks to bring power closer to hand, close to home—which also makes it accessible, makes its limits visible, makes its refusal possible.

Thus, Foucault’s critique is not simply of forms of power, but the politics of power, the conceptions, methods and practices of its contestation. In an interview in 1971, talking about his work with GIP (Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons),<sup>1</sup> he explained:

the ultimate goal of [our] interventions was not to extend the visiting rights of prisoners to 30 min or to procure flush toilets for cells, but to question the social and moral distinction between the innocent and the guilty.

It is the code, the system, the knowleges and truth, the classifications on which the exercise of power is based that Foucault sets out to attack. Concomitantly, there is no independent position, no critical distance that enables us to develop abstract critical principles for this attack. This is not a matter of asserting a better alternative. And there is no natural or free subject to be liberated in this struggle. We are always the product of power relations, of codes and disciplines of some sort. There is no escape from power only the struggle against particular forms and manifestations of power. Again, as Walzer (1988, p. 202) says, ‘he attacks the panoptic regime only because it is the regime under which he happens to live’ and goes on to say: ‘For him morality and politics go together’ (p. 202). This is difficult to understand and easy to misunderstand. I will return to this later and in the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup>David Macey (1993, p. 262) referring to an interview Foucault gave in July 1971 says that he ‘wanted to move away from abstraction. Particular circumstances and events had displaced his attention on to the prison problem. They also offered an escape from his boredom with “literary matters” (“la chose littéraire”)’.

In some ways this is well-worked territory in terms of a radically different, and difficult, re-focusing of the analysis of power from will and might, the ‘great machineries of power’, to circulation and relations, from the sovereign and the state, to ‘the delicate mechanisms of power’ that are articulated in relation to apparatuses of knowledge and truth, from law to normalization, from the ‘cognition-truth axis’ to the ‘discourse-power axis’ (Foucault 2004, p. 178), from the Leviathan to ‘techniques and tactics’ of domination, the polymorphous mechanics of discipline—all of which is founded on a recognition that power itself has a history. But at the same time there is a clear sense of the heterogeneity of power, such that sovereignty and discipline can never be reduced ‘one to the other’ (ibid., p. 37). Indeed, Foucault suggests that discipline has colonized the procedures of the law, in such a way as to produce a ‘normalizing society’ (p. 39)—most specifically in the medicalisation or what other writers call the *biologisation* of society—biopolitics. Education plays a key role in the processes of biologisation, as Gulson and Webb (2016, p. xx) argue ‘education policy also assumed the responsibilities of a molecular biopolitics that is part of imagining, legitimating, and constituting different forms of life’.

Foucault believed that we are more able to recognise power and its oppressions in the immediacy of our social relations than in the abstract politics of labour and capital. Critique is thus aimed at specific points of power, immediate institutional settings, and resistance is a set of provocations, mundane rebellions, without reference to pre-established moral positions or commitments, or even clear goals and purposes—rather ‘an engagement with the numberless potential transgressions of those forces which war against our self-creation and solidarity’ (Brenauer 1987). Walzer among many other critics (e.g. Bernstein 1992; Taylor 1989; Rorty 1986) is unconvinced by and unhappy with this. Walzer says finally of Foucault ‘Angrily, he rattles the bars of the iron cage. But he has no plans or projects for turning the cage into something more like a human home’ (1988 p. 209). But perhaps Walzer misjudges and misunderstands Foucault. He certainly fails to grasp that humanity is the cage, or one of the cages that Foucault seeks to rattle. The point is that humanity itself is something that makes us up—as ‘man’. It is a productive limitation to what we might be. But also, over and against this, the possibilities of being freer than with think we are, the struggles that this opens up and their ethical substance are the basis for a creative and aesthetic politics, and not reliant on pre-given, tainted, moral principles that we take to define humanity. Thus, the erasure of ‘man’ that Foucault prophesises at the end of *The Order of Things* is not a ‘deficiency’ or a ‘lacuna’ but rather ‘nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think’ (1970, p. 342). Drawing on Nietzsche Foucault is seeking to displace the humanist/progressive traditions of western philosophy, with their promise of personal well being and collective progress, and which require us to search for and link our essential qualities to inherent abstract principles, and instead to set the challenge ‘of creatively and courageously authoring one’s ethical self’ (Pignatelli 2002, p. 158). The task is to avoid fixity in order to become a stylist, an ironist, a hero by ‘tak[ing] oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration’ (Foucault 1986, p. 166). Again, in a different way



from the previous chapter, education as the transmission of knowledge and values and principles is thus made impossible—at least in the ways we have come to conceive of it as a canonical curriculum and an institutional practice.

However, Foucault was adamant that there is no simple relationship between critique and action. The focus, the problem for Foucault is the struggle against what is, and not, at least initially, to rush to delineate what might be an alternative. ‘I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system’ (Foucault 1997b, p. 230). The primary task is as much one of refusal as it is resistance.

The necessity of reform mustn’t be allowed to become a form of blackmail serving to limit, reduce, or halt the exercise of criticism. Under no circumstances should one pay attention to those who tell one: “Don’t criticize, since you’re not capable of carrying out a reform.” That’s ministerial cabinet talk. Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, “this, then, is what needs to be done.” It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. (Rabinow and Rose 2003b, p. 84)

In other words, ‘Foucault has invented a past for some future present’ (Walzer 1988, p. 206) and rather than ‘offer anaemic fore-closed readings of a possible future’ (Pignatelli 2002, p. 158) we sift through the past ‘in order to provide different and *distinct* ways of coming at our own problems and yearnings as ethical subjects’ (p. 162). Rather than the enactment of a new (or old) set of principles or the creation of a systematic alternative social world, Foucault seems to be urging us to some kind of empirical experimentation (Foucault 1988a) within the space created by denunciation and the recognition that we might be different. This takes place not outside or beyond power but within some other kind of power relations, some kind of ‘socialist art of government’ (Defert and Ewald 2001, pp. 1155–1156), the absence of which Foucault thought had debilitated the political left in its failure to develop an ‘autonomous governmentality’ or as (Ferguson 2011, p. 67) suggests exercising power ‘in a way that would be provisional, reversible, and open to surprise’ an opportunistic polyvalence, a re-appropriation. For Foucault, as Miller (1993, p. 140) asserts, ‘the world appears as a city to be built, rather than a cosmos already given’.

Of course for Foucault power is intimately entwined with knowledge, with systems of truth. Truth holds us under its thrall. As he says, nothing is true that is not the product of power. The concern here is not with *what is true*, but for Foucault, as with his other concerns, the *how* of truth and ‘the system of truth and falsity’ itself (Foucault 2013a). That is, how some things come to count as true. The political question ... is not error, illusion ... it is truth itself (Foucault 1980a, p. 133). So that ‘instead of trying to find out what truth’ we would be better advised to try to understand why we accord traditionally conceived truth ultimate value. Truth is ‘a system of constraint which is exercised not only on other discourses, but on a whole series of other practices’ (Foucault 2013b, p. 2). These discourses and practices ‘present themselves to subjects as environments fully on a par with the physical environment’ (Prado 2006). As Youdell (2006, p. 35) explains such discourses are ‘located and real and constrained—make some things possible, or even



likely, and others all but impossible'. There is a silent coupling of knowledge and power as a means by which we assign people to positions/categories and assign them value/worth. For example 'the promise that categorization and comparison through standardised measurements will reveal and illuminate essential truths about students, teachers and schools' (Pignatelli 1993). Thus, Burchell (1996) argues that a genealogist, an historian of the present must always 'have a concern for truth' (p. 31) and 'must be meticulous in describing the shapes it assumes' (p. 32). This means that we must address the 'general politics of truth' within our neoliberal society and 'the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault 1980, p. 131). And, of course, the value and effectivity of truth rests on the status of those enabled and designated to produce and speak and apply it to others, those whom in the present Rose (1996, p. 54) calls the *grey scientists*. The point of critique and the work of genealogy is not to produce an account that is more truthful or closer to the truth but to sabotage and disrupt validity and meaning by exposing the conditions for the formation of truth and to undermine its incumbents; as Foucault asserts 'knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting' (Foucault 1977a, p. 154).

In the enactment of judgement and the practices of evaluation and comparison, truth<sup>2</sup> thus articulates our 'discursive currency' (Prado 2006, p. 80). That is, ways of thinking and talking about ourselves, to ourselves and to others—'a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible' (Butler 2005, p. 22). This is a form of violence that acts upon our relation to ourselves, our self-recognition and our subjectivity—one form of this, about which I have written, is performativity (Ball 2003).

The subject under the regime of performativity is made calculable rather than memorable, malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled, productive rather than ethical. Experience is nothing, productivity is everything, comparisons and judgments, and the multiple ways in which we *account* for ourselves makes us transparent and accountable—depthless. Social relations are replaced by informational structures. We are made responsible for our performance and for the performance of others. Within the contemporary technocratic market regime of neoliberalism the relationships of truth and power are articulated and operationalized more and more in terms of forms of performance, or outputs, and expressed in the reductive form of numbers. This is the 'numericisation of politics' as Legg (2005 p. 143) calls it. In the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* (2009), Foucault explores how the emerging European states began to deal with the disease of smallpox from the eighteenth century onwards. Rather than deploying techniques of exclusion or quarantine, as for leprosy and the plague, the focus for medical intervention rested on determining probabilities and establishing averages through the use of statistics. That is, 'knowing how many people were infected with smallpox, at what age, with what effects, with what mortality rate, lesions or

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<sup>2</sup>Foucault does not offer a definition of truth; rather he provides a multi-faceted characterization (Prado 2006, p. 81).

after-effects, the risks of inoculation, the probability of an individual dying or being infected by smallpox despite inoculation, and the statistical effects on the population in general’ (2009, p. 10). In this way, ‘the technology of statistics creates the capacity to relate to reality as a field of government’ (Hunter 1996, p. 154) both in the management of individuals and of the population. Indeed, ‘Population is a concept that can be elaborated only through statistical, therefore informational techniques’ (Koopman 2014, p. 102) or as Foucault (2009, p. 79) suggests, there is ‘a constant interplay between techniques of power and their object gradually carves out in reality, as a field of reality, population and its specific phenomena. A whole series of objects were made visible for possible forms of knowledge...’.

This interplay, this making visible, and the concomitant possibilities for government are all very evident now both, on the one hand, in the generation of big-data (see Chideya 2015) and, on the other, in local applications of measurement, for example in what Bradbury (2013) calls the *datafication* of the pre-school classroom. An extract from one of my MA student essays illustrates this very nicely.

Schools are littered with data; at times it seems that everything I do as a practitioner is valued only in as far as it impacts positively on the data. Schools are fashioned by external forces acting upon the practitioners desire to do the right thing. What is achieved is summed up in a series of charts, graphs, tables and detailed statistical analysis. The value we place on everything we do is formed by its relationship to the measure.

## Cracking the Grid

To illustrate further the operation and effectivity and interplay of truth, power and subjectivity as performativity, and the struggle against these truths, I want to draw upon the experiences and voices of a group of teachers with whom I have been in email contact over a number of years. These are teachers who found aspects of their experience of school ‘cracked’ and grating, discomforting and untenable. They have been seeking ways of understanding and challenging the contemporary, over-bearing truths of measurement and comparison, and ways of representing themselves and their practice differently. Raymond, one teacher correspondent wrote:

My first introduction to ‘accountability’ was a talk with a head teacher which kind of finally burst the bubble and destroyed any romantic ideal I had that teaching was an art and honorable profession. It became very much the numbers game and I had to sail close to my moral and ethical boundaries to do well.

The regime of numbers hails us in its terms, and to the extent we turn, acknowledge and engage, we are made recognizable and subject. Once in its thrall we are reduced by it to a category or quotient—our worth, our humanity and

complexity are abridged. However, as Butler suggests, when we ‘question the regime of truth’, we also question also our ‘own ontological status’ (Butler 2005), an issue I return to later. The question is what kind of self, what kind of subject have we become, and how might we be otherwise? Or more succinctly: ‘Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are.’ (Foucault 1982a, p. 785) and perhaps ‘refusing, changing and ridding ourselves are only the ethical conditions, made possible by genealogical work, of creation, innovation and invention’ (Cremonesi 2013, p. 14). This is one form of what Foucault called in his Dartmouth Lectures (2013, p. 15) a ‘politics of ourselves’. That is to say, ‘All those on whom power is exercised to their detriment, all who find it intolerable, can begin the struggle on their own terrain and on the basis of their proper activity (or passivity)’ (Deleuze and Foucault 1977, p. 216). Let me quote from another of the teachers with whom I have been exchanging emails. Nigel, a Primary school headteacher:

I am a victim of the ‘terrors of performativity’. The notion of calibrating performance sets in stone what is to be measured and how, and also gives power to a cadre, who are handed the status of determinators. Hubris takes over, just as so too interpretative awareness and social insight implode. We also have associate assessors, but because our inspections system is about matching to a grade I wouldn’t touch it with a barge pole (...) That is the space I operated in. It was never about imposing a judgement. My thinking has slowly shifted, through reading and contacts such as with you. Also by developments of practice, and making links with those developing techniques or materials. I have found others immensely influencing of my own professional growth: Pasi Sahlberg, John Macbeath, Andy Hargreaves, Dennis Shirley, Joe Bower, Maurice Holt, Carol Fitz-gibbon. But that is a character set who don’t fit the performativity mould. (Nigel).

What this illustrates I think is the will to struggle against the anonymity of power and its ‘dispersed and discontinuous offensives’ (Foucault 1988c)—its practices and its truths and their effects and outcomes. In this instance Nigel has other discursive resources through which he can strive to articulate himself differently over and against the ‘determinations’ and celebrations of measurement. Nonetheless, the prevailing ‘discursive currency’ of neoliberal education is also made clear by Martin, another correspondent, a US school Principal.

I find that one of the most fundamental challenges of my job is trying to avoid becoming incorporated into market modes of thinking. Of course, the more time you spend at work trying to please your superiors, the more you use the language of performativity and begin to believe in it yourself. And then, when I go back to my dissertation, it is difficult to be surprised by the data.

Martin is also here, I think, articulating a sense that he might be recognisable differently, might think about himself differently, and those possibilities rest on a realisation of what he has become what he does not want to be—that is enabled in part by his dissertation work, a form of critique and work on himself, which I will come back to.

## Genealogy

As indicated above, one technique and form of struggle against the violence of representation for those who seek to challenge the limits of our possibility, the necessity of things, the inevitability of experience, is genealogy.

Hard and patient labour of detailed historical and empirical work, as necessary to question and reformulate presumed continuities and discontinuities, so that it is possible to offer diagnoses of the limits and possibilities of the present. (Dean 2010, pp. 57–58)

Genealogy is a form of historical practice that Foucault borrowed from Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, but made his own.

The only valid tribute to a thought such as Nietzsche’s is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no importance. (Foucault 1980a, pp. 53–54)

Foucault’s genealogies always begin from his perception that something is terribly wrong in the present. That something is ‘intolerable’. Genealogy seeks to trace and challenge the origins of practices and institutions from congeries of contingent ‘petty causes’ through the elaboration of professional expertise and erudite knowledge—the knowledge of types, classes, categories and cases—the tyranny of the intellect, rationales of subjection. It is a strategy for mapping out the topology of local situations. Such histories replace inevitability with contingency, and hence construct the suppressibility of what history has given us. It does this in part by revalidating excluded or marginalized voices, like those of the teachers quoted above, and re-articulating different forms of self-recognition and veridiction that are otherwise ‘buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematisations’ (Foucault 2004, p. 7). This is both an ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ (p. 7) and a local and ‘theoretically modest’ practice (Blackler 1998, p. 357).

It is the relation of the genealogist to her own contemporaneity; the realisation of the genealogist’s position as a trace within her own analysis and the further realisation that this trace has an effect on the present, that is, on the local struggles of the genealogist’s situation. (Mackenzie 1994)

Genealogies produce a form of *ethopoietic knowledge*, knowledge that works to modify our way of being our mode of existence (Foucault 2005, p. 237). The point ‘is not to discover a ... positive foundation of the self ... [but] that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history’—that is the ‘link between political work and historical inquiry’ (Foucault 2016, p. 91), the work of making things more fragile, without recourse to what Foucault called *anthropologism*, to an essential human and an essential humanism.

genealogy is, then, a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse. The project of these disorderly and tattered genealogies is to reactivate local knowledges.... (2004, p. 10).

Genealogy is neither systematic nor precise, and Foucault's accounts of the method are not consistent to say the least. It is rather an orientation to history and its specific address is to the claims to cognitive authority made by specific disciplines—like penality and psychiatry and as I have suggested in the previous chapter, pedagogy, and in a different way performativity.<sup>3</sup> A genealogy is an attempt to consider the origins of systems of knowledge, and to analyze the centralising power-effects of discourses. 'Genealogy has to fight the power-effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific' (Foucault 2004, p. 9). In effect, genealogies are 'anti-sciences' (ibid., p. 9). They attempt to reveal the discontinuities and breaks in a discourse, to focus on the specific rather than on the general. In doing so, they aim to show that there have been other ways of thinking and acting, and that modern discourses are not any truer than those in the past. They are about 'how to make the unfamiliar familiar, to show that the past is not so different from today in certain respects' (Dean 2010, p. 57). As Dreyfus and Rabinow explain it:

Genealogy accepts the fact that we are nothing but our history, and that therefore we will never get a total and detached picture either of who we are or of our history...we must inevitably read our history in terms of our current practices. (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983)

Things 'can be unmade as long as we know how it was they were made' (Foucault quoted in Ransom (1997, p. 89). Foucault's point is that we must not take for granted the relations entwining power and knowledge but rather that those relations need to be explored in every case. Furthermore, as suggested above, to grasp the reach and force of Foucault's project the *subject* needs to be inserted between power/knowledge. That is to say, power relations are always instantiated in certain 'fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity' (Foucault 1992, p. 4). Experts, grey scientists, and their knowledges, their truths, play a key role in determining how we should act and who we are, operationalized within material practices—the confession, the annual review, inspections, 360° evaluations etc.

Genealogy is the method for addressing 'cases'. Doing genealogies means avoiding the search for depth, and rather having a focus on the superficial, that is on details, on the nitty-gritty, but certainly not the trivial. This is a primary focus on practices rather than laws, on discourses rather than rhetorics, on techniques and procedures and architectures rather than social structures. By exposing these to scrutiny, the intention is to make things not as necessary as all that, to make them 'human, all too human'. It is 'from the contingency that has made us what we are' that comes 'the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are to do, or think' (Foucault 1997c, p. 316). This is Foucault's 'epistemology of suspicion' (Scott-Baumann 2009). Genealogies are histories that focus on the interplay of knowledge and power, and seek to destabilize nature and the self, and undermine claims to authority, making them problematic, difficult and dangerous. They address

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<sup>3</sup>In as much that the techniques of performativity are increasing formalized within a disciplinary framework, a scientific basis for the practice of measurement.

‘practical issues, necessities, and the limits of the present’ (Dean 1994a, p. 20) starting from ‘questions posed in the present’ (Foucault 1998, p. 262). ‘This has massive implications for education’ Youdell (2006, p. 36) argues ‘because it insists that nobody is necessarily anything and so what it means to be a teacher, a student, a learner might be opened up to radical rethinking’.

The prison, for Foucault, served as a paradigmatic site for an exploration of the relations between contemporary discourses and practices, as a symbolic form, an inverted image of society.<sup>4</sup> *Discipline and Punish* is intended ‘to recover the theme of the genealogy of morals’ and trace changes in the ‘moral technologies’ that constitute the mundane practices of punishment—that is ‘places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and taken for granted meet and interconnect’ (quoted in Mahon 1992, pp. 130–131). From his analysis of prisons Foucault discerns a specific ‘modern’ form of power—discipline—which functions to produce, transform or make modern individuals and to normalise behaviour; ‘it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy’ (Foucault 1980a, pp. 124–125) or as Osborne (2009, p. 133) asserts ‘what is described takes the form not of something elevated and transhistorical, but something lowly, worldly and tied to the exigencies of power’.

Given all of this, if we return to the question of what we can learn from Foucault, MacIntyre (1990) argues that he leaves us trapped in a damaging paradox. Indeed he suggests that genealogy is self-defeating and impossible—that it undermines and vitiates its own claims. He argues that the lecturer who espouses the genealogical method, eliminates at the same time their own authority, their own claims.

From the genealogical standpoint what is needed is some way of enabling the members of the audience to regard themselves from an ironic distance and, in so separating themselves from themselves, to open up the possibility of an awareness of these fissures within the self ... And among the purposes to be served by both theatre and genealogical commentary will be the undermining of all traditional forms of authority, including the authority of the lecturer. MacIntyre (1990) (quoted in Osborne 2009, p. 130).

A retort to this might be that this is an authority that Foucault has already abdicated, in part in his claims to write only fictions. The audience is not asked to regard the claims of the genealogist as superior to those claims made by other ‘scientists’ but to treat all and any claims to truth with irony and scepticism—to take on the critical attitude. The stance and response required from the audience is not one of affirmation but the cultivation of an ironic detachment towards the present and a recognition that their selfhood has a history (see Chap. 3). Osborne (2009, p. 130) argues that what is at stake here is not ‘research of an orthodox, positive or ‘scientific sort’, indeed in part at least these fictions are aesthetic<sup>5</sup>—they

<sup>4</sup>He made a visit to Attica prison in 1972.

<sup>5</sup>See Goldstein (1994). Introduction. In J. Goldstein (Ed.), *Foucault and the Writing of History*. Oxford: Blackwell. For discussion of Foucault’s fascination with writing and literary aesthetics.

do not attempt to submit themselves to the procedures of the human sciences'. Indeed (MacKenzie 1994) suggests that their role is one of catharsis. Foucault he says:

exposes the limits of his thought in order that these limits may be diffused. This is the reflexive moment, the moment where Foucault recognises his works as "fictions", the moment, the movement, of the fold of thought back on itself ... This is the cathartic function of self-critical thought.

## Transgression

Foucault offers genealogy as a diagnostic then, a historical method that enables history to 'become a curative science' by dismantling the teleological narratives that inscribe the subject as sovereign, and power as 'a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination' (2003, p. 29). The task of the genealogy here is to encourage the kind of: 'dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which he could extend his sovereignty to events of the past. To dismantle belief in eternal truth the immortality of the soul and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself' (Rabinow 1987, p. 87) and so facilitate another kind of history.

This is what Foucault calls effective history; that is, '...the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other"' (Foucault 1977a, p. 154). This is a history that works to deprive the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature. It is the means by which we are able to dismantle 'the comprehensive view of history as a patient and continuous development' (ibid., p. 160). It is an alternative to the enlightenment story of rational progress in which rationality is seen as constituting its opposite, as a form of tyranny that makes possible and necessary the confinement, medicalization and normalisation, the education or re-education, of those deemed abnormal or dangerous. However Foucault goes on to argue that critique is not 'a gesture of rejection [...] the critical question today has to be turned back into a Positive one [...] the point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression' (Rabinow 1987, p. 54).

This is a problematizing, transgressive style of thinking oriented toward challenging existing ways of being and doing, with a view to liberating new possibilities for advancing 'the undefined work of freedom'. A 'limit-attitude' is a particular orientation towards discursive categories and institutional formations. In tracing the edges or outer contours of systems of thought Foucault raises the possibility of transgressing these in order to expose and disrupt the underlying relations between knowledge and power and thus the formation of subjects. 'In this sense, critique aims to free us from the historically transitory constraints of contemporary consciousness as realised in and through discursive practices' (Olssen 2003, p. 1).



We are incited to transgress normal thinking and to abandon the conceptual structures upon which such thinking draws and look beyond them, to make rationality unreasonable, to think beyond or outside the common-sense of the present—‘to stand detached from it, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyse the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated’ (Foucault 1992, p. 3). This means taking limits very seriously, on the one hand realising their necessity and productivity, but on the other recognizing that this necessity is historical and hence can be transcended.

Critique is a form of ‘limit attitude’, ‘a means by which a subject can positively resist power through testing the limits of domination and subjection’ (Hartmann 2003, p. 11), through ‘counter-conducts’, creative strategies of resistance that ‘open up processes of ‘autonomous and independent’ subjectivation, that is, possibilities for the constitution of oneself’ (Lazzarato 2009, p. 114). Counter-conducts are ‘struggle[s] against processes implemented for conducting others’ and begin with an explicit acknowledgement that efforts at government are not always successful, inciting as they do instances of ‘resistance, refusal or revolt’ (Foucault 2009, p. 266). Davidson (2001, p. 37) characterises such resistance as ‘an active intervention... in the domain of the ethical’. That is, a refusal to be governed ‘this way’, a resistance to practices, a rejection of the discourses that animate the norms of political conduct, but it is not ‘outside’ or over and against power in any simple way. Power and resistance are mutually constitutive (see Davidson 2001).

Mackenzie (1994) argues that: ‘It is a commonplace among commentators on Foucault’s work that his thought is aimed at provoking a “limit-attitude” towards discursive categories and institutional formations’ and he cites O’Farrell (1989) and Lemert and Gillan (1982). He goes on to argue that ‘This interpretation of the Foucauldian project, however, is more useful as a starting point than as an end point; it is a place to begin critical discussion of his work not a way of summing it up’. The problem here is exactly a version of Foucault’s method and his critique. Many of his critics, as noted above, seek to import or search for some kind of normative basis for criticism, some kind of foundational thinking. So, Hartmann (2003) asks whether the ‘contestation of specific objects and impositions of power’—are entirely reactive? McCarthy (1994) suggests that it is difficult to identify ‘just what it is that resists’. Rather as suggested previously Foucault’s conception of transgression is at once a practice (of freedom) and a kind of liminality—creating the possibility of something different, of something unthought, rather than predicting it. But at the same time there must be an acceptance that what is important is the attempt, the struggle. Freedom is not an end point or a set of principles, it is a state of being, a mode of life.

I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry, and on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take. This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality...has led to the return of the most dangerous traditions. (Rabinow 1987)

Foucault is quite aware that this liberating criticism, this work done ‘at the limits of ourselves’, must be experimental, so that it may be able ‘both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take’ (Rabinow 1987, p. 46). At the same time criticism must also give up the hope of ever acceding ‘to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits’ (ibid., p. 47). Mackenzie (1994) puts this very bleakly: ‘The hope that there may be a residual humanism that binds human beings in some moral community is also a futile hope, the modern subject is a fabrication of the times and constituted through the operation of multiple applications of power’.

The identification and criticism of limits and the possibility of moving beyond them are always limited; but rather than being a drawback, we should acknowledge that this is what enables us to always begin again. Criticism, in other words, must be constantly reactivated: only in this way can it provide an impetus to our ‘undefined work of freedom’. Indeed, ‘In Foucault a theory of the liminal is “brash” in its silence’ (MacKenzie 1994). Criticism and limit-testing of this kind have an immediacy in their connection with people’s lives. They do not call-up and rely on prior principles produced elsewhere, but are formed and forged in relation to ‘concrete questions, difficult cases, revolutionary movements, reflections and evidence ... It is all a social enterprise’ (Foucault 1991). That is, a political enterprise as much as it is an epistemic one, an everyday politics of disruption and redefinition which speaks possibilities within silence. Foucault’s intention was to ‘learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently’ (1992, p. 9)—a series is articulated: that is, critique—intolerance—self formation. Genealogical knowledge here is not informative it is transformative. To enable us to escape the intimacy of our experience within which power is naturalised, and freedom subordinated to reason. However, Osborne (2009, p. 135) warns us to take care with the notion of critique in relation to Foucault’s practice and method of history, which consists not simply of ‘the pious un-masking of the critic but, ultimately, the humorous stare of genealogist’.

As Allen (2014, p. 30) suggests ‘transgression emerged in Foucault’s writing as a subversive tactic which could enable individuals to transform themselves’ and goes on to explain that transgression ‘works at the limits that have defined ways of being, doing, and thinking, seeking the ever present possibility of the ‘undefined work of freedom’ (Dean 1994a). That is ‘looking for what has not yet been thought, imagined or known’ (Foucault 1980/2013, p. 128). All of this rests on the effort of what Blacker (1998, p. 360) calls ‘attentiveness’ ‘to how one’s actions get absorbed by the power/knowledge regime’, or what Maxine Greene calls *wideawakeness*.

Human beings define themselves through the projects with which they become involved. By means of engagement with a project, the attitude of wide-awakeness develops and contributes to the choice of actions that lead to self-formation.

(<http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Greene.html>).

This then is a *negative* ethics—and ethics of avoidance, based upon renunciation, exile,<sup>6</sup> homelessness, disengagement, and a dispersion of the ‘serene unity of subjectivity’—not a search for positive values or for alternatives. Nonetheless, this can open up new horizons for experiments in democracy and human relationships (Foucault 1997a), explorations in collective refusal perhaps. Here discipline and self-government are turned back on themselves as a freedom of possibilities rather than abstract illusions. Although (Ross 2008) suggests the politics of ‘self stylisation’ perhaps has limited aspirational force, and she again relates this to Foucault’s ‘considered refusal of the tendency to overestimate possible counter-paths’.

All of this begs questions in relation to education and what it means to be educated to which I will return in the next chapter. In particular it raises questions about what lies beyond critique; what are the goals or end points of transgression?

Also all of this is highly unsettling and disconcerting, the coherence of the subject, or rather the ‘matrix of intelligibility’ (Ross 2008), which underwrites the subject, is threatened. For Butler, a genealogy is ‘an enquiry into the conditions of emergence of what is called history, a moment of emergence that is not finally distinguishable from fabrication’ (Butler 1990, p. 15). It is about the processes and discourses through which someone is subjectivised and the history of things—like sentiments, conscience, instinct—that do not have histories. We are ourselves at risk in this enterprise, we make our being and experience contingent.<sup>7</sup> Telling the truth about oneself comes at a price: ‘the price of that telling is the suspension of a critical relation to the truth regime in which one lives’ (ibid., p. 122). Butler explains how Foucault ‘would locate the practices of the subject as one site where those social conditions are worked and reworked’ (p. 133). In other words, the subject is engaged in an ongoing struggle between a critical relation to the truth regime within which one lives and giving a ‘truthful’ account of the self. For this reason, Butler urges us ‘to risk ourselves’ and to be willing ‘to become undone by another’ (ibid., p. 136). ‘If we speak and try to give an account from this place,’ she argues, ‘we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven’ (p. 136). This is an ‘ethic of discomfort,’ that is, an ethic which embraces discomfort as a point of departure for individual and social transformation (Butler 1999), indeed ‘some discomfort is not only unavoidable but may also be necessary’ (p. 164). Foucault defines an ethic of discomfort as:

never to consent to being completely comfortable with one’s own presuppositions. Never to let them fall peacefully asleep, but also never to believe that a new fact will suffice to overturn them; never to imagine that one can change them like arbitrary axioms, remembering that in order to give them the necessary mobility one must have a distant view, but also look at what is nearby and all around oneself. To be very mindful that everything one perceives is evident only against a familiar and little known horizon, that every certainty is sure only through the support of a ground that is always unexplored. The most fragile

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<sup>6</sup>See the risks of truth-telling in Chap. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Perhaps here we see some dim and hazy relations to Foucault’s interest in neoliberalism. But this is not the same thing as becoming a neoliberal.

instant has its roots. In that lesson, there is a whole ethic of sleepless evidence that does not rule out, far from it, a rigorous economy of the True and the False; but that is not the whole story. (Zembylas 2015, p. 166)

As Zembylas (2015, p. 166) goes on to explain, Foucault's intention is to problematize manifestations of discomfort 'without portraying them as acts of bad faith or cowardice, to open a space for movement without slipping into a prophetic posture'. There is no retreat here to either a unitary or *essential* subject—'... it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals...the individual is an effect of power' (Foucault 1980, p. 98). Indeed, this may instigate what De Lissovoy (2010) calls 'the crisis of the subject' which he sees as a stage 'in a dynamic process ... rather than a simple switch in point of view or affiliation'. Established and perhaps cherished professional skills and judgements are made unreliable<sup>8</sup> in this process. As Blacker (1998) cogently argues we should not expect the consistency of a tightly integrated social subject, for that is part of what must be given up. Neither does this analysis mean that the configuration of struggle is, nor are its starting points, always the same. In various sites we may need help, from our Unions, colleagues, political allies, friends and family etc. 'Alliances of shifting points of resistance around concentrations of power become a possibility' (Rabinow and Rose 2003a, p. xxvii). Tactics will vary between sites and issues and the conditions of possibility also vary. The 'question concerns ways to mobilize, focus or intensify practices of resistance, in so far as they are already all over the place' (Macleod and Durrheim 2002). Refusal is everywhere in the field of everyday life, but there is 'no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt' (Foucault 1981, p. 96) but rather shifting points of resistance that 'inflamm certain parts of the body, certain moments in life' (Foucault 1981, p. 96). Transgression may take different forms and there are 'numberless potential transgressions' (Nealon 2008, p. 105). Transgression is strategic, made up of small acts and short-lived incursions that make limits visible and breachable, that unsettle convention, that deploy irony, that sketch out new possibilities which may be over-written and re-drawn. As Bernauer (1987, p. 139) notes, 'parodic displacement ... depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered' At the same time we have to accept that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Butler 1990, p. 95). Resistance is not outside or over and against power but 'in' a relation to it, in a relation to practices. There is always the danger of incorporation and relations of power and resistance are unpredictable (ibid., p. 96).

In relation to all of this I have tried to argue (Foucault 1981) that in neoliberal economies, sites of government and *points of contact*, are also sites for the possibility of refusal. The starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity.

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<sup>8</sup>Perhaps this is something like Du Bois' (1905/1995) idea of *double consciousness*, a form of living between a damaged oppressed self and a sense of who you might want to be, beyond oppression.

It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become and what it is that we do not want to be. That is, a modern form of politics for a modern form of government. Struggle on this terrain is an engagement with and can involve *a refusal of neoliberal governmentality in its own terms*. ‘... there is no first or final point of resistance to political power than in the relation one has to oneself’ (Foucault 1981, p. 252). In effect what Foucault does, in refusing to pander to our modern enlightenment political sensibilities, is to leave us, as ethical subjects with the discomforts and task of finding a way forward that is beyond common sense, outside of the limits of our imagination and the impossibility of speaking ‘of anything which goes beyond its categories, and because there is no ‘outside’, we are unable to give any kind of explanation of the categories or terms through which we comprehend the world’ (Falzon 1998, p. 31). Falzon goes on to argue that what is needed here is not self-negation, but an ‘encounter between ourselves and the other’ (p. 39)—a dialogue. A dialogue founded on creative activity and on transgression as ‘the permanent possibility of the irruption of the other, the new and unexpected, at the margins of our existence’ (ibid., p. 56)

if power functions through the structuration of a field of possible actions, resistance to power should not only be understood in terms of agonistic power relations, but in terms of a creative traversing of the field of possible action. Resistance – positive resistance – is no longer merely reversal, but consists in a subject’s becoming-autonomous within a structured set of institutions and practices through immanent critique (Hartmann 2003 p. 10).

This is what Falzon calls ‘the fundamental encounter with the other’ (1998, p. 36) not as a conceptual exercise but ‘also as a concrete, palpable experience’ (p. 33), within which ‘our narcissistic reveries are shattered, the circle of our solipsism is burst’ (p. 34).

Butler (2006, p. 114) is one writer/activist who follows this line of thought, she takes up Foucault and takes him in a different directions—appropriately deforming him, as he did Nietzsche—and with a particular concern with gender, which she addresses from Foucault’s anti-essentialist view of the body and sexuality and the ways in which deployments of power are directly connected to the body, historically and biologically—how the female is made feminine. According to Butler, material structures are sedimented through ritualised repetitions of conduct by embodied agents. In addressing refusal and resistance Butler writes of the need for *re-description* and of ‘the act and strategy of disavowal’ (1998, p. 530) that is not some kind of utopianism but ‘an imperative to acknowledge the existing complexity of gender which our vocabulary invariably disguises’ (Butler 1998). This is done perhaps in ways which mute some aspects of Foucault’s ‘politics of ourselves’, Butler writes of the need to oppose, refuse, to subvert the language that renders us subject, in creative and dis-arming ways. Butler also talks about this as *resignification*, a linguistic reformulation of the notion of genealogical reinterpretation. As she says elsewhere “the possibility of resignification [is that of] mobilising... what Nietzsche, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, called the ‘sign chain’” (Butler 1998, p. 530). The *resignification* of a term alters and redirects the meaning sedimented within that term through pre-existing relationships, and beyond this she writes of

‘subversive resignification’. These are embodied re-enactments of norms in ways that undermine the meanings traditionally entrenched within them. *Subversive resignifications* do this by *openly displaying* their status as re-enactments of norms. Butler (1997, p. 135) argues, qua Foucault, that the norms that constitute us are unstable and so constantly ‘open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within’. Thus, she suggests, the permanent instability of signs makes agency possible, in the form of the capacity to resignify norms that is ‘through radical acts of public misappropriation such that the conventional relation between [interpellation and meaning] might become tenuous and even broken over time’ (Butler 1997, p. 100). This brings together a form of critique with transgression and ‘voluntary insubordination’, founded on outrage and a ‘limit attitude’, testing and transgressing the limits of language and intelligibility, with an appropriate dose of irony and humour. Such a ‘performative politics’ Butler asserts offers ‘an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking’ (1997, p. 161) and are designed to expose hegemonic conceptions of identity as fictions.

Like Foucault, Butler has been subject to the criticism that her politics of resignification is irredeemably individualistic. For example, from a neo-Marxist perspective, (Boucher 1995, p. 114) argues that ‘Having located the basis for resistance in individual psychology, Butler conceptualises this resistance in phenomenological terms of personal narratives and subjective melancholy, in abstraction from structural determinants such as material interests or crisis tendencies of the social system’. However, as Youdell (2006, p. 35) explains, while ‘post-structural ideas have been charged with relativism, self-indulgence, an evacuation of politics’ such criticisms ‘miss the crucial point that the practice of deconstruction is itself a political practice’ that can ‘help us to understand and unsettle the relationship between the subject, the institution, power and meaning’ as is ‘critical to politically engaged scholarship and action in education’ (pp. 40–1).

At the heart of transgression is a practice of agonism, the attempt to wrest self-formation from the techniques of government and to make oneself intelligible in different but unanticipated terms. The attempt—local and immediate—to conduct oneself differently, to forge an aesthetics of being, and to loosen the connection between subjectification and subjection. That is, not a going back, not a search for something repressed, but a going beyond that involves experiments with limits and possibilities—thinking about what one is now and how one *might* be different. In other words, this is the *care of the self*, the work of the ‘politics of the self’, a continuous practice of introspection, which is at the same time attuned to a critique of the world outside: ‘critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility’ (Foucault 1997c, p. 388). As Foucault (1997b) puts it, very straightforwardly: ‘agency lies in the constant interplay between strategies of power and resistance’. (I shall return to this and to the role of subjugated knowledge in the next chapter).

What is at stake is how we are constituted and how we recognise ourselves through technologies—the intellectual, practical instruments and devices which shape and guide ‘being human’, or more specifically here, being a teacher or a researcher. That is, the activity of the subject within a field of constraints, crafting or re-crafting one’s relation to oneself and to others or ‘local problems, local solutions’ (Mayo 2007). This is, ‘ongoing, localised, contextually sensitive—but potentially generalised—practices about educational equity, practices that may well, indeed must, trouble our thinking about education’ (Youdell 2006, p. 39). It involves both critical work, destabilising accustomed ways of doing and being, and positive work, opening spaces in which it is possible to think and be otherwise. These are modifications in our relation to the present and the different ways in which we are able to recognise ourselves as subjects.

To be clear, and to reiterate, this is ‘not a struggle to emancipate some pristine truth from the distortions wreaked upon it by power or ideology, it is not a battle on behalf of truth’ (Blacker 1998, p. 358). It is certainly not a revelation of some interior depth. This is not merely a matter of ‘denying or resisting truth, power or wealth, but attempting to articulate and deploy them otherwise’ (Nealon 2008, p. 95). In arguing against truth an opportunity for the re-articulation of self is created. However, as noted above, by illuminating the limits of self-constitution we do make ourselves vulnerable in different ways. ‘We await the ineluctable link between ethical well being and loss of self’ (Pignatelli 2002, p. 171), that is we risk facelessness, making ourselves unrecognisable and irrelevant. Indeed, as we attempt self-formation we submit ourselves to ‘an experience, then, in which what one is oneself is, precisely, in doubt’ (Burchell 1996, p. 30). Over and against this, in Foucault’s words, ‘a person is nothing else but his relation to truth, and this relation to truth takes shape or is given form in his own life’ (Blacker 1998, p. 71).

What I have sought to do in this chapter is to outline Foucault’s *dispositif* of critique, the heretogeneous assembly of concepts, techniques, practices that form a programme for unsettling, for un-educating, for creating spaces in which we might be different. This begins with an attitude, a commitment to curiosity, and what Foucault (1983, p. 14) calls ‘a debunking impulse’, and ends with violation. But this is not negative and nihilistic, rather it is a positive enterprise and a social one. As Goldstein (1994, p. 15) says:

There is something in Foucault’s very unsettled nature – his famous changes of mind; his alternations between an icily cold, critical eye and shows of passion, between disdain for our old, self-deceptive humanism and attachment to it – that fits the unsettled world in which we write history today.

All of this opens a space of possibility within which we might think education differently. In the following chapter I will look beyond the limits of liberal education to glimpse something different, an experiment with Foucault’s tools—and with the help of other writers. This will be a provisional and tentative account of a form of government and of social relations within education built upon capabilities of and a disposition of critique.



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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-50300-4>

Foucault as Educator

Ball, S.J.

2017, XIX, 88 p., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-50300-4