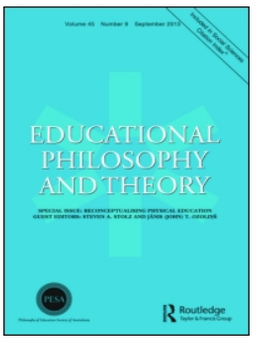

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Experience and the Limits of Governmentality[1]

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Abstract

Following Foucault, 'critique' could be regarded as being the art not to be governed in this way or as a project of desubjectivation. In this paper it is shown how such a project could be described as an e-ducative practice. It explores this idea through an example which Foucault himself gave of such a critical practice: the writing (and reading) of 'experience books'. Thus it appears that such an e-ducative practice is a 'dangerous', public and uncomfortable practice that is not in need of pastoral care but requires generosity, presence and attention. As such it demands a pedagogy of experience which is to be invented in order to 'make' oneself into a question, to transgress the limits of a governmental regime.

Keywords: de-subjectivation, experience, e-ducation, critique, Foucault

L'expérience est la mise en question (à l'épreuve),

dans la fièvre et l'angoisse, de ce qu'un homme sait du fait d'être.

Georges Bataille

As we know, Michel Foucault refused to understand critique in terms of an act of judging on the legitimacy or of a putting to the test by subjugation to the demands of reason. In his later work critique appears to be a practical refusal of a particular form of subjectivity, a kind of 'virtue' (Butler, 2002) being the *art* not to be governed in this way, '*l'art de n'être pas gouverné comme ça et à ce prix*' (Foucault, 1978, p. 38). Briefly stated, critique is about backing out of the call to relate to our selves and to others in a particular way. It is to free ourselves of certain conceptions about ourselves and our conduct. Critique is a 'project of desubjectivation' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 241) that is to be conceived of as a labour on and with oneself which aims at establishing 'new relationships with the subject at issue' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 242). This is what philosophy as critical activity and as ethos is about for Foucault: not so much to discover who we are, but to refuse what we are (Foucault, 2000b, p. 336).[2]

We can read this motive in the often-quoted passages with which Foucault, after a long silence, introduces the continuation and displacement of his *History of Sexuality*:

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> As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; … It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. (Foucault, 1985, p. 8)

The following elucidation by Foucault is particularly telling regarding the displacement he has in mind:

> There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would be better left backstage; or at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naïve positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The 'essay'—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e. an '*ascesis*', askêsis, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought'. (ibid., pp. 8–9)

And with regard to his own work Foucault continues: 'It was a philosophical exercise. The object 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' (ibid., p. 9).

If we now connect both elements we could say that the work of 'critique' is: to pull oneself free of oneself and to dissolve or free thought from what it thinks in silence. This double dissolution takes place through the 'practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it', through an 'assay or test' in which—as Foucault explains at another occasion—'the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]' (Foucault, 1997a, p. 319), so that—as Ricken states—critique is always a work at and on the limits (Ricken, 2000, p. 28). However, if philosophical activity as a 'work on the self', as self transformation is always experimental, then philosophical activity is also always related to an experience in which our subjectivity is at stake: a limit experience,

which pulls the subject free of itself, which wrenches it from itself and prevents it from being the same (Foucault, 2000a, p. 242).

In this paper I will try to show how this activity could be described as an e-ducative practice. I use 'e-ducative' in the sense that Foucault himself indicated in one of his courses at the Collége de France, i.e. not in the sense of '*educare*' but of '*educere*': '*tendre la main, sortir de là, conduire hors de là*' (Foucault, 2001, p. 129). In this line an e-ducative practice is not (or not in the first place) about gaining knowledge or competence which resolves ignorance and incompetence but about '*une certaine action qui va être opérée sur l'individu,* [...] *une sorte d'opération qui porte sur le mode être du sujet lui-même*' (ibid., p. 130). An e-ducative practice is a practice in which in a certain sense the subject is ruined or dies, a practice that involves acceptance of life up to death, up to annihilation. I explore this idea of 'de-subjectivation' as e-ducative practice starting from an example which Foucault himself gives of such a negative or critical practice: the writing (and reading) of experience books. Through this example I try to indicate that and how a certain subjectivity can be refused, that such a refusal is dangerous (and irreversible), that it is a public and uncomfortable undertaking and finally that this practice is not in need of pastoral care.

1. Experience Books as a Project of Desubjectivation

In a well known and revealing interview with Trombadori Foucault points to his own books as 'experience books' which he opposes to 'truth books' or 'demonstration books' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 246). An experience book is of course not a book on or about experiences (and certainly not about personal '*Erlebnisse*'). It is rather a book whose writing and reading is itself an experience: 'So it's a book that functions as an experience, for its writer and reader alike, much more than as an establishment of a historical truth' (ibid., p. 243). Experience is meant here in the fullest sense possible: 'An experience is something that one comes out of transformed' (ibid., p. 239). In line with what we heard earlier, we could say that writing (or reading) an experience book is thus a critical philosophical activity. In such a book, says Foucault, I am not concerned about communicating what I already thought or what I am thinking before I begin to write. Rather I am concerned … that the book transforms me and transforms what I think … I am an experimenter and not a theorist … who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, … I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before (ibid., p. 240). This lines up with the writings of Georges Bataille, Friedrich Nietzsche, Maurice Blanchot and Pierre Klossowski, whose 'problem was not the construction of a system but the construction of a personal experience' (ibid., p. 241). This experience should, however, not be understood in the phenomenological sense.

> The phenomenologist's experience is basically a certain way of bringing a reflexive gaze to bear … on the everyday in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meanings. For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, on the other hand,

> experience is trying to reach a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the 'inlivable', which can't be lived through. What is required is the maximum of intensity and the maximum of impossibility at the same time ... experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of desubjectivation. The idea of a limit-experience ... is what was important to me ... and what explains ... my books ... , I've always conceived of them as direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same'. (ibid., pp. 241–242)

In this sense experience books are means to get to an experience 'that permits a change, a transformation of the relationship we have with ourselves and with the world where, up to then, we had seen ourselves as being without problems—in short, a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge' (ibid., p. 244). This particular perspective on experience is according to Foucault the very heart of all he did. In this context the truth of what he was saying has been one of his central concerns. However, telling the truth is for Foucault not an epistemological question of establishing truth, but an ethical one that has to do with the relationship with ourselves and with the world. On the one hand, so he states, he is using the classical academic methods, but on the other hand he is only dealing with fiction ('there's no question of it being anything else but fiction' ibid., p. 242) since his problem is not to satisfy professional historians, philosophers, sociologists or educationalists:

> ... my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed. Which means that at the end of the book we would establish new relationships with the subject at issue: the I who wrote the book and those who have read it. ... For one to be able to have that experience through the book, what it says does need to be true in terms of academic, historically verifiable truth. It can't exactly be a novel. ... Now, the fact is, this experience is neither true nor false. An experience is always a fiction: it's something that one fabricates oneself, that doesn't exist before and will exist afterwards. That is the difficult relationship with truth, the way in which the latter is bound up with an experience that is not bound to it and, in some degree, destroys it'. (ibid., pp. 242–243)

In fact 'fiction' is here to be understood as the articulation of the failure (or destruction) of the actual government through exposing its games of truth and power. An articulation which itself constitutes a truth beyond truth so to speak, a truth which is in the future. As Foucault explains elsewhere, even if what he was saying (about the past) was not true, his writing has a truth in reality today. His hope is that his writings receive their truth once they have been written and not before (as if the book would just articulate what was known before or what can be said within

a regime of truth): 'I hope that the truth of my books is in the future' ('*J'espère que la vérité de mes livres est dans l'avenir*') (Foucault, 1979b, p. 805, my translation).

Moreover, an experience book doesn't teach anything, it is not saving or delivering: 'I don't accept the word "teaching". A systematic book ... would convey lessons. My books don't exactly have that particular value. They are more like invitations or public gestures' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 245). But this characterization of his work is also based on the nature of the experience itself. 'An experience is something that one has completely alone but can fully have only to the extent that it escapes pure subjectivity and that others can also—I won't say repeat it exactly, but at least encounter it—and go through it themselves' (ibid., p. 245).

Now, at first sight it seems rather strange or even odd to refer to experience when trying to elucidate critique as a project of desubjectivation—although Gutting writes that experience is the best expression of Foucault's comprehensive theme (Gutting, 2002, p. 73). Indeed, one could not only state, as Gadamer did in 1960, that the notion of experience is 'one of the most obscure that we have' (Gadamer, 1986, p. 310), one could add that meanwhile every reference to 'experience' arouses a profound suspicion. It was the so-called post-structuralists, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Louis Althusser who nourished this suspicion mainly with regard to the assumed self-evident character and value of experience and with regard to the claim of immediateness. And not only was Foucault himself labelled as a post-structuralist, but his work seemed to analyse precisely singular experiences (like that of madness or sexuality) as being part of or being produced by an apparatus or regime of knowledge and power. To rely, then, on the authority of what is called experience, and even vivid or pre-reflexive experience, seems to be not only naïve, but purely ideological and forgetful of either modern epistemology or critical history. In contrast, we find time and again the warning that 'experience' is constructed discursively, that it is always in itself an interpretation and that we therefore should avoid essentialising or objectifying this 'experience' (see Jay, 1998, p. 63; Scott, 1991, p. 777). Although most critics accept that it would be impossible to simply remove the word 'experience' from of our vocabulary, they still maintain that it is discourse, language and power structures that build a matrix that produces 'experience' (and not the other way round.). What is put under permanent critique is the experience that claims to be 'unified, holistic, coherent and present to itself'. Such claim appears in two forms. One which in the line of Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* relates experience to the immediacy of lived, prereflexive communication or meeting between the self and the world, and which Dilthey called: '*Erlebnis*'. And one which—connected to a certain German tradition of 'Bildung', like Buber and Benjamin—considered experience to refer to some cumulative wisdom, which is produced through time and through the interaction between self and world, so that it could only be projected at the end of a dialectical process. Both forms are rejected by the critics: the search for an authentic experience is but 'another version of a nostalgic yearning for a presence and an immediacy that never have existed and never will exist' (Jay, 1998, p. 64). In this context it is striking that Foucault, although he belongs to the circle of the critics we just mentioned, seems to value 'experience' in the passages cited earlier

also in a totally different way as an unappropriated, expropriating and non-appropriatable experience. However, if we want to elucidate this we should be aware that Foucault avoids using 'experience' here as a concept referring to something (see Larrosa, 2004). As so often he resists the question: 'what is it?', 'what is experience?'. He does not attempt to answer the question 'which concept of experience' he is using. A concept always is an act of defining and confining, which brings reassurance and comfort. He rather tries to maintain 'experience' as a word, not as a concept. Concepts mean what they say, words also mean what they say but they mean also more and 'other' and therefore they remain uncomfortable. Moreover Foucault avoids to put 'experience' in the position of the 'soul' or of 'desire' or of 'the (un)consciousness' as something which we (should) have, should recognize that we have, should start to elaborate and make transparent (See Larrosa, 2004). Experience delivers no substance and no foundation (See also Flynn, 2005, pp. 2008–228).

According to Jay, this other way of thinking about experience, largely inspired by Bataille, Nietzsche, Blanchot and Klossowski, seems to offer us a way out of the sterile debate between those who stick to a naïve concept of immediate experience and those who simply reject the notion of experience as such. And following this line, I suggest that we could perhaps recover (negative) experience as a word to be part of critical educational thought in the actual 'learning society'. To indicate in what direction this could go, I want to comment on some of the passages I quoted earlier.

2. Writing Experience Books

(a) I start with the distinction between truth books and demonstration books on the one hand and experience books on the other. Writing a truth book means to write a book that informs, that puts forward a truth, communicates a truth, 'convey lessons'. It is a book that attempts to inform about something, to explain something, to prove or justify something. In this sense, writing a truth book implies a particular attitude, a particular ethos. It prescribes and requires an attitude in which one subjects or subjugates oneself to the demands of truth i.e. to the Logos of a particular regime of truth. And one addresses the reader in the name of this Logos, to which one claims to have access. One addresses the reader in the horizon or in the name of a tribunal or court (the tribunal of reason, of truth, of science, of humanity ...).[3] This means that in writing a truth book one takes in a certain way the position of a teacher, of a knowing or learned teacher ('*un maître savant*') as I would call it with reference to Rancière (see Rancière, 1986). That what is written from this position and attitude becomes a teaching (an explanation, proof, information, etc.) so that those who are addressed find themselves in the position of a learner (one who does not yet know, but could get knowledge exactly from the book). Truth books are books which are written by learned people, those who know or claim to know, (or who are in a certain way experienced) and are in fact bound up to an attitude which we could call, with Foucault, a pastoral attitude. This attitude implies that one puts oneself in the service of a regime, subjugates to

its logos (for example 'communicative reason') and takes up demands and care in its name: without explanation no understanding, without proof and argument no truth. In this attitude one orients oneself in writing to a regime and a tribunal and addresses a reader who is known or familiar in the sense that this reader is supposed to subject herself to the same regime and the same tribunal. It is this subjection (or subjectivation) under a tribunal that allows the writer and the reader to be 'somebody', so that both get their position and subjectivity precisely in the horizon of this tribunal. And in the same time, as was indicated above, both find themselves also in a situation of teaching, where they obtain or take the position of learner or of teacher. These positions are positions in a pastoral-pedagogical regime of government that follows a certain logos and governs accordingly by installing an inequality between both, which can be defined and justified only with regard to the logos of that tribunal. The regime organises itself along distinctions as: knowing/not-knowing, adult/not-adult, enlightened/not-enlightened, human/inhuman, mature/immature, etc. (see: Masschelein, 2004; Simons, 2004). To write a truth or demonstration book—to write as teacher—is to write from a particular position in a regime of truth and implies to define and justify the position of the reader as one who is in need of care, explanation, proof or emancipation, one who is in need of guidance of his or her conduct in the light of this regime. Such a writing is a comfortable writing, because it obtains (or loses) its authority from a code (or Law/Logos of the tribunal and the regime) and from subjecting to this code. Of course, one can write better or worse, one can have less or more knowledge, a worse or better argument but that doesn't affect or change fundamentally the pastoral position, i.e. to be a subject as and in subjecting to a regime.

As stated above, this applies also to the reader of a truth or demonstration book. This reader is not only taking up a certain position in a pastoral regime, she is equally taking up a particular attitude in which she considers what she reads as an expression of truth (of reason, science, humanity, ...), relates it to a certain tribunal and judges it accordingly (for example as more or less true, etc.). Just like the author herself such a reader does not put herself at stake. Following Blanchot such a reader could be characterized by 'her lack of modesty, her persistence to remain the same in front of what she reads, to be a (wo)man who can read in general' ('*son manque de modestie, son acharnement à vouloir continuer à être le même face à ce qu'il lit, à vouloir être un homme qui sait lire en général*') (Blanchot, 1955, p. 263).

So Foucault rejects very clearly this interpretation of his books. 'I don't accept the word "teaching". ... My books don't exactly have that particular value' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 245). His books are not truth books, but experience books. But what does that mean?

(b) First of all we should acknowledge that there are experience books which are in fact a kind of truth book or demonstration book (see Simons, 2004). These are books in which a personal experience is reported and/or the depth of one's soul is revealed. Such books are often demonstration books because they intend to justify one's own position by referring to (an) experience as well as wanting to introduce the other into a certain truth (and even bind them to that truth). Truth-readers

consider such books as reports of the personal experiences of the author, which say something about the author and which therefore can only be understood and valued with regard to this author. Even when Foucault concedes that all the books he wrote were written directly out of a personal experience ('I haven't written a book that was not inspired, at least in part, by a direct personal experience' Foucault, 2000a, p. 244), this does not mean that they represent these experiences or transpose them into knowledge ('it's not at all a matter of transporting personal experiences into knowledge', ibid., p. 244). The experience books he wrote are not teachings but are written out from a totally different attitude, which is not the comfortable attitude of the teacher or the pastor. It is an attitude of ex-position, which allows to hear and see (i.e. to experience) something other and in this way enables us to liberate the gaze and the thoughts, so that the author (and the reader of these books) can see not only something other, but also can see and think differently and transform herself. Such writing is for Foucault a philosophical exercise, a form of 'askêsis' as we indicated in the beginning of this paper. It is a writing that is also a way of writing-one/the-self, of self writing (Foucault, 1997b). It is an operation that is performed on the way of being of the subject herself, an exercise in which the limits of subjectivity (and objectivity) are at stake. Writing means to expose oneself in order to allow for the possibility for 'seeing further', 'thinking further' or 'thinking otherwise' to occur.[4] To write (or read) an experience book means to put oneself to a test in confrontation with a knowledge that is foreign; it is an unprotected, exposed writing (or reading) insofar as it implies to abandon or renounce direction by religion, law or science, as also the dedication to realize one's deepest truth (see Dreyfus, 1990, p. 58). In this writing (and reading) one is not so much asking oneself whether it is false or true, but one exposes oneself to a foreign knowledge. One writes an experience book because one does not know what one is thinking or should think.

What is at stake is not to express what one thought before, but what is at stake is 'to lose ones face' i.e. in a certain sense one's subjectivity. This longing for anonymity has been expressed many times by Foucault. There is for example the quote of Beckett at the beginning of his famous conference on the author (Foucault, 1979c). And there is the equally famous passage in *The Archeology of Knowledge*: 'I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write' (Foucault, 1972, p. 17). This pursuing of the theme of 'having no face' is not to say that the subject of writing is not important, on the contrary. It relates precisely to the demand to withdraw subjectivity from the individualising action of the regime of power and truth. This regime confines what the subject can 'be', she draws the limits beyond which the subject no longer 'exists'. Writing experience books is an act of transformation of the subject at these limits.

On the one hand, this writing to lose one's face is a desubjectivating writing, in which one both undergoes (endures or experiences) and goes under, is dying. It is a writing in which the writer or/as teacher and the writing/teaching as well as the reader or/as learner go under, in which 'we' are exposed and are confronting each

other as equals, not as an individual confronted with an individual, as the older generation confronted with the younger, but as a certain 'we' that shares this exposition, this out-of-position. On a different occasion and related to another scene of teaching Foucault describes in a wonderful way how it is when one is losing ones face, when a regime of truth is put out of order or suspended, when the subject goes under, but remains at stake:

> The baffled master lowers his extended pointer, turns his back to the board, regards the uproarious students, and does not realize that they laugh so loudly because above the blackboard and his stammered denials, a vapor has just risen, little by little taking shape and now creating, precisely and without doubt, a pipe. 'A pipe, a pipe', cry the students, stamping away while the teacher, his voice sinking even lower, murmurs always with the same obstinacy though no one is listening, 'And yet it is not a pipe'. He is not mistaken; because the pipe floating so obviously overhead (like the object the blackboard drawing refers to, and in whose name the text can justifiably say that the drawing is truly not a pipe) is itself merely a drawing. It is not a pipe. No more on the board than above it, the drawing of the pipe and the text presumed to name it find nowhere to meet and be superimposed, as the calligrapher so presumptuously had attempted to bring about.
>
> So, on its bevelled and clearly rickety mounts, the easel has but to tilt, the frame to loosen, the painting to tumble down, the words to be scattered. The 'pipe' can 'break': The common place—banal work of art or everyday lesson—has disappeared. (Foucault, 1983c, pp. 30–31)

On the other hand, one makes through this writing and in this writing, in which one undergoes and goes under, also a 'personal' experience, which goes together with the engagement of the whole person. She implies the possibility that something other can be seen and thought, that an objectivity beyond a regime of truth can manifest and impose or inscribe itself. Or more precisely: what this writing makes visible is not something beyond the visible, something hidden behind the visible. This writing does not offer us a liberating or emancipating gaze, but liberates our gaze (eye). It offers the possibility to see how and what we see and shows us in this way a truth beyond the truth in a regime. In a certain sense one could say that it offers us the possibility to have a gaze on the world, without being captured by a regime.

(c) To write an experience book is an e-ducative practice that opens up the possibility to breathe new life into the words and to liberate the gaze. In this way it allows a certain truth-telling: 'I come to see, I come to hear'. '*Je viens de voir, je viens d'entendre*' (Foucault, 1971, p. 1106, my translation). If one takes the 'coming' here one understands also the movement or displacement which is involved. However, two things have to be added here. Firstly, to expose oneself or being-exposed does not point to a (universal) structure, but to a possibility. Secondly, it is necessary to perform a certain work or labour (askêsis), in order to be exposed,

in order to be able to be attentive, in order to be able to experience something, to breathe new life in the words and to see differently or to see what is visible. Indeed, we should not forget that this practice involves a certain discipline, but not the (normalising) discipline related to the subjection under a tribunal, but related to certain exercises and actions that have to be performed. Experience books bring to the attention what is visible, but for what we had no eye. Even if this attention depends also on the way in which these books are written it is the attitude towards the book that is decisive. This attitude has to be worked at: she is a certain form of 'askêsis', although not a pastoral form. The 'askêsis' enables and produces a subject of experience, a subject that cares for the world and tries its assay. The liberating of the gaze makes demands for exercise and for acceptance of life up to death. E-ducative practices are practices of exposition. The subject of such practices, the subject of experience, with is not the subject of knowledge, can only be a paradoxical subject. It is not only paradoxical because it is active to become passive, or because it is subject and object (of experience) at the same time, so that de-subjectivivation and subjectivation (or forming of the subject) take place simultaneously. It is also paradoxical because it stays between two different logics: the logic of exposition (equality) and the logic of being subjected (inequality within a regime).

The e-ducative practice of writing is not preceded by the subjection under a regime or tribunal; this subjection is rather what is at stake in writing and not its starting point. Such a writing moves outside or at the limits of a certain regime of truth or government with its defined positions. It is itself ex-posed and leads us outside i.e. in the world as a public space, which is appropriated by no one and does not know any appropriate positions. It is a space for everyone and no one: no-man's land. This land has no entrance gate, we can not find it on any map. However, it requires a certain effort to be reached: a certain care for the self.

(d) The writing of an experience book is therefore to be considered as a practice in which one is caring for oneself and in which one is relating to oneself and to others (and to the world) in a particular way. That care involves neither a subjugation (under a tribunal) nor an introspection or investigation of one's soul, but rather requires an investigation of the world. An investigation in which one is present in such a way that, on the one hand, one is exposed and can go under, can lose oneself, and, on the other hand one is attentive in such a way that one can tell truth, a truth which does not require the subjection under a prescription or a norm/code, but nevertheless can have an effect for or in the reader. Foucault quotes in approval Blanchot's remark '*que la critique commence par l'attention, la présence et la générosité* [that critique starts with attention, presence and generosity]' (Foucault, 1979a, p. 762, my translation).

Being attentive means to engage in exercises which help to neutralise or eliminate the will to subject under a regime of truth and the energy with which the subject (as subject of knowledge) projects itself in the objects. This particular kind of attention and attentiveness implies and enables a being-present that puts the subject at stake and defers the expectation of a benefit (see also note 2). It involves a

writing that relates to the reader in such a way that she is not put in a dependent, subjected position vis-à-vis of the writer. It involves writing a truth (a truth outside a regime of truth and therefore always only a fiction) as an exposition of one's own thinking and seeing, an exposition without name as a 'masked writing' of which Foucault says in a later interview: 'It's a way of addressing the potential reader, the only individual here who is of interest to me, more directly: "Since you don't know who I am, you will not be inclined to find out why I say what you read; just allow yourself to say, quite simply, it's true, it's false. I like it or I don't like it. Period"' (1997c, p. 323).[5] It is a writing which has effects—and Foucault recalls time and again that his writing had strange and particular effects (Foucault, 2000a, p. 243), but no effects benefiting the author. It is not so much writing in order to convince the reader, to direct her in a particular way, to make her accept a particular view or opinion; in this sense it is a generous writing, a writing without benefit for oneself. It is rather a writing which always puts 'me' and 'us' at stake simultaneously.

(e) When Foucault designates this writing and reading as a limit-experience, as a negative experience, then this has to do with it being a dangerous undertaking insofar as it is without warranty to come (at) home again. Or even stronger: an experience is something that transforms in an irreversible way. That is exactly why it is negative. But of course, we should prevent ourselves of dramatizing this limit-experiences[6]—it is no lyricism of transgression—while at the same time taking care that we do not render them harmless.

If one brings the different moments together, then it can probably be shown that writing (or reading) an experience book is an exercise of thought, which works in silence and consists in an attempt to hand over oneself with one's own hands, to make oneself into a question. Precisely because this writing implies an activity (and not just a passivity and surrendering) is Foucault able to call it a non-pastoral, non-Christian 'askêsis', an exercise and ethos which implies no obedience but acceptation (ac(t)-ceptation). Acceptation is not to accept the groundlessness or unfoundedness of our existence as structure of our being, but it is an acceptation that puts exactly the structure of our being (a subject) at stake. What can happen is not that we are enriched by an experience, that we have more experience and more knowledge, but that we are changed, that we have become someone else, that we relate differently to the world and that we can no longer value what was before. Experience therefore is not something that simply happens, but always something which happens to 'us'. We seem to live in a world in which an incredible number of things happen and also our lives seem to be full of all kinds of events, but very little seems to happen to 'us'. However, a limit-experience is precisely an experience that transforms us, which makes something in us to die. We can write dying and die writing, and cut every bond with the past. We can do something irreversible to ourselves, to our subjectivity. In this sense it is dangerous. Not because it would resist some concrete demands by the state (or by government in general), but because it questions the code in which such demands can be formulated and read;

Because it questions the limits of the field of validity, of good and bad and, thus, runs the risk of immorality and trouble.

Closely related to this is Foucault's refusal to accept that there could be something which could count as a universal structure of human existence (which would be revealed by philosophy, anthropology, etc.) such as the 'groundlessness', the trauma of the other, the fate of the Daemon or even Experience as a substance to which we would be bound in an irreversible and essential way. It is exactly this view that fits or applies time and again to govern us and to justify the pastoral care of those who pretend to know about this presumed structure or substance and in this way can immunize themselves. Therefore, to state the possibility of limit experiences is to show that it is possible to detach oneself from being-governed, that liberation through de-subjectivation is possible. It is to maintain that experience is it owns authority while at the same time acknowledging that experience is no substance and not grounded on external criteria such as Reason, Science or even Theology. It is a paradoxical authority that always undermines her self (see Jay, 1998).

Or put differently: experience is meant by Foucault as a radical negative experience that is not to be rendered positive in an easy way. Therefore we can conceive of the experiment of transgression (in writing, reading, …) neither as a heroic search for Dionysian unity or for a reconciliation with one's inner Daemon nor as 'a singular exercise in aesthetic self-fashioning' (ibid., p. 74) or self stylisation. This would imply to emphasize experience as 'ex-post-facto-fiction' and as an element of a process of self formation and self realisation and to neglect the immediate experience which puts 'us' and thus the negative and the common at stake. It would make experience harmless. Like Bataille, Foucault recognizes that is impossible to *make* one's life into a 'work', into an aesthetically formed or built unity or identity. Life cannot be made. To make oneself into a question, or to put oneself in question means rather an exercise in exposing oneself, so that one can get lost. The care for the self is not a care for one's identity, but related to what Foucault meant by 'losing one's face'.

3. E-ducative Practice

So, an experience book does not offer teachings, does not convey lessons. It is a public gesture, an invitation to investigate one self. It is a gesture which attempts to introduce us into an experience (and not into the kingdom of truth or reason) and which tries to prevent us from remaining what we are. It is a book that does not aim at explaining or understanding how it really is and how we should read the present. To write and read an experience book means to expose ourselves as 'infants', as being without language, who receives language and has to be given a language, has to be given words. In e-ducative practices language is given and received (anew). But giving and receiving a language as words means that we don't know and cannot know what we give and what we receive: As the Argentinean poet Antonio Porchia so beautifully put this, 'What the words say does not remain. It is the words that remain, that endure, because the words remain the same, but what they say never remains the same' (Porchia, 1989, p. 111). This means also that these words, also the word experience itself, can lead us out, can lead us out of

ourselves. That we must find out what the words are asking from us, what we owe them, what they say to us. The author as e-ducator gives words, shows something and 'makes' attentive. E-cudative practices offer no truth or only a truth in the future, they offer words as pure means, a medium through which something can happen to 'us'. In this context the e-ducator does not appear as a pastoral figure, who is speaking in the name of … (reason, salvation, …), but as a masked figure, no-one, (without face) who is speaking and writing in her own name or better: without a name. Her speaking and writing is not a means to an end. The listener or reader takes the book into an exercise of thought to transform herself. This exercise of thought is not like us playing with thoughts, but an exercise, in which thoughts put 'us' at stake.

As we have heard, Foucault understands experience mainly as a limit-experience that transgresses the limits of a coherent subjectivity as it functions within an actual governmental regime. Even if Foucault claims that his books are written out of a direct personal experience (with madness, with psychiatric institution, etc.), they aim in the first place at making new experiences possible. And if this is an exercise of changing oneself, it is an exercise that is no end itself. 'An experience is something that one has completely alone but can fully have only to the extent that it escapes pure subjectivity and that others can also—I won't say repeat it exactly, but at least encounter it—and go through it themselves' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 245). It must be clear from this that Foucault's notion of experience is indeed a paradoxical one and one which is difficult to delineate. Of course many questions listed by Martin Jay remain (see Jay, 1998, p. 78); but they appear in a different light. Can we avoid the transformation of a negative experience into a positive value? Does this negative experience have a value anyway? Does getting lost appear as positive? And is it possible to build or conceive institutions that would rest on this experience that is without clear authority and coherence? And is it possible to avoid that experience books become themselves truth books? At least it seems clear that experience cannot be reduced to discourse or to power structures, but that it has to be seen in some sense as what allows us to transgress the limits of a governmental regime. Transgression, then, is possible not through an heroic action or through an alternative aesthetic self-fashioning, but through taking the risk of an exposition, through experience. 'The limits of limit-experience have thus in some sense become equivalent to the very limits of critical theory today' (Jay, 1998, p. 78). However, in this way critique becomes the central issue of a pedagogy to come, a pedagogy to be invented, because such limit-experiences demand a form of attention, generosity and presence which are at stake in e-ducative practices. Such practices are uncomfortable practices that lead us into the world as expropriated or non-appropriated land, as no-mans-land and keep us there to the extent that they illuminate and disrupt our immunizing relations to our selves and to others.

Notes

1. This paper is a strongly reworked and elaborated version of a paper which was published in German under the title: '*Je viens de voir, je viens d'entendre*. Erfahrungen im

Niemandsland' in: Ricken & Rieger-Ladich, 2004, pp. 95–115. Publication of translated parts of the paper was kindly authorised by the publisher: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

2. I cannot pursue the issue of this refusal here in detail. Ewald comments that it makes no sense to ask: 'why should we change or transform ourselves? This is the question of the slave who is looking for subjection under a benefit. We should not change for, but against something' (Ewald, 1990, p. 93, my translation). And Butler argues that 'the will not to be governed in such a way' arises out of a crisis in which one lives. This 'will' must not to be considered as an original aspiration or as the affirmation of an original freedom although it is 'something like an original freedom'. Something like it, but not quite the same. It cannot be founded, only be found. (Butler, 2002; Foucault, 1978). There is indeed an ambiguity regarding the will as on the one hand this will, as the will to quality or the will to learn (to learn) for example, is the modern moral substance which constitutes the heart of the (self) government of the self (conceiving oneself as an individual with a certain will and accordingly bringing one's freedom into practice), where on the other hand the will seems to indicate a kind of instance which allows for distancing oneself from this self government. This ambiguity regarding the will is not unrelated to the ambiguity of the word experience; See further.
3. See for example the very famous and telling first preface Kant wrote to his *Critique of Pure Reason* where this critique is called a tribunal and where the readers are addressed as judges of a court. Kant wants 'to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims … according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws' (Kant, 1997, p. 101) and writes: 'Here I expect from my reader the patience and impartiality of a judge …' (ibid., p. 105).
4. As a philosophical exercise it requires an attitude in which one confronts what maybe could be called one's own infancy: the fact to not coincide with oneself as a subject in a pedagogical regime of government and truth, the fact that learner and teacher do not coincide with themselves (see also: Masschelein, 2005; Simons, 2004). Infancy could thus be regarded as the name for a potentiality that can never be resumed in an actuality; it would point to the limits of an actual regime of truth and government. In infancy as potentiality there is no inequality as is the case in the pedagogical regime, but there is a certain equality, an equality in the exposition. This infancy could also be related to Foucault's 'will not to be governed'. See note 2.
5. I changed the English translation in Foucault, 1997c since it is obviously wrong. In French we read: '*Puisque tu ne sais pas qui je suis, tu n'auras pas la tentation de chercher les raisons pour lesquelles je dis ce que tu lis …*' (Foucault, 1980, p. 925) which means exactly the contrary of the translation given in Foucault, 1997c: 'you will be more inclined to find out why I say what you read'.
6. Although Foucault calls Nietzsche an author of experience books in his sense: books in which 'we' and (our relations to) the present are at stake, he nevertheless warns us about Nietzsche over dramatising that present moment: '*… il faut avoir la modestie* [...] *ne se donnant pas la facilité un peu dramatique et théatrale d'affirmer que ce moment où nous sommes est, au creux de la nuit, celui de la perdition la plus grande, ou, au point du jour, celui, où le soleil triomphe, etc. Non, c'est un jour comme les autres, ou plutôt c'est un jour qui n'est jamais tout à fait comme les autres*' (Foucault, 1983b, p. 1267).

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